
JIHADIST TERRORISM

IN JIHADISM IN
GERMANY

EUROPE

Guido Steinberg





JIHADISM IN GERMANY



**Weak Beginnings, a Growing
Scene, New Dangers**

Guido Steinberg

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AT A GLANCE



In this study, Dr. Guido Steinberg analyses the jihadist scene in Germany. With a series of five terror attacks, 2016 marked a tragic highpoint of Islamist terrorism in Germany. But the scene remains dangerous until today and is continuing to evolve.

- › Up until 2012, jihadism was hardly present in Germany in comparison to other Western European countries. With its increasing spread especially among Turkish and Kurdish Muslims, the movement gained resonance in the country.
- › The group Millatu Ibrahim (Community of Abraham), which was founded in 2011, represents an important precursor from which many of the first German fighters in Syria were recruited. The “Read!” campaign, which began at the end of 2011, and pertinent jihadist mosques were further catalysts for radicalisation and recruitment.
- › The German fighters in Syria are not united by any clearly recognisable socio-economic profile. Even if there are some indications that social marginalisation and economic disadvantage play a role, some jihadists have high school degrees or academic training.
- › Of the approximately 1,070 German fighters in Syria, around 80 per cent joined Islamic State (IS). A German scene developed in Raqqa, the members of which were in close contact with each other. The German members were completely integrated into the organisation. Their presence in the IS secret police proves this.
- › A historical perspective reveals the great dependence of German security services on electronic intercepts by US security authorities. The highly fragmented security architecture in Germany is also problematic. In the long run, it is risky to “outsource” large portions of German counterterrorism to the USA.

This publication is part of the *Jihadist Terrorism in Europe* monograph series, in which renowned experts analyse the current state of the jihadist threat in various countries, as well as the related counterterrorism strategies and political debates.

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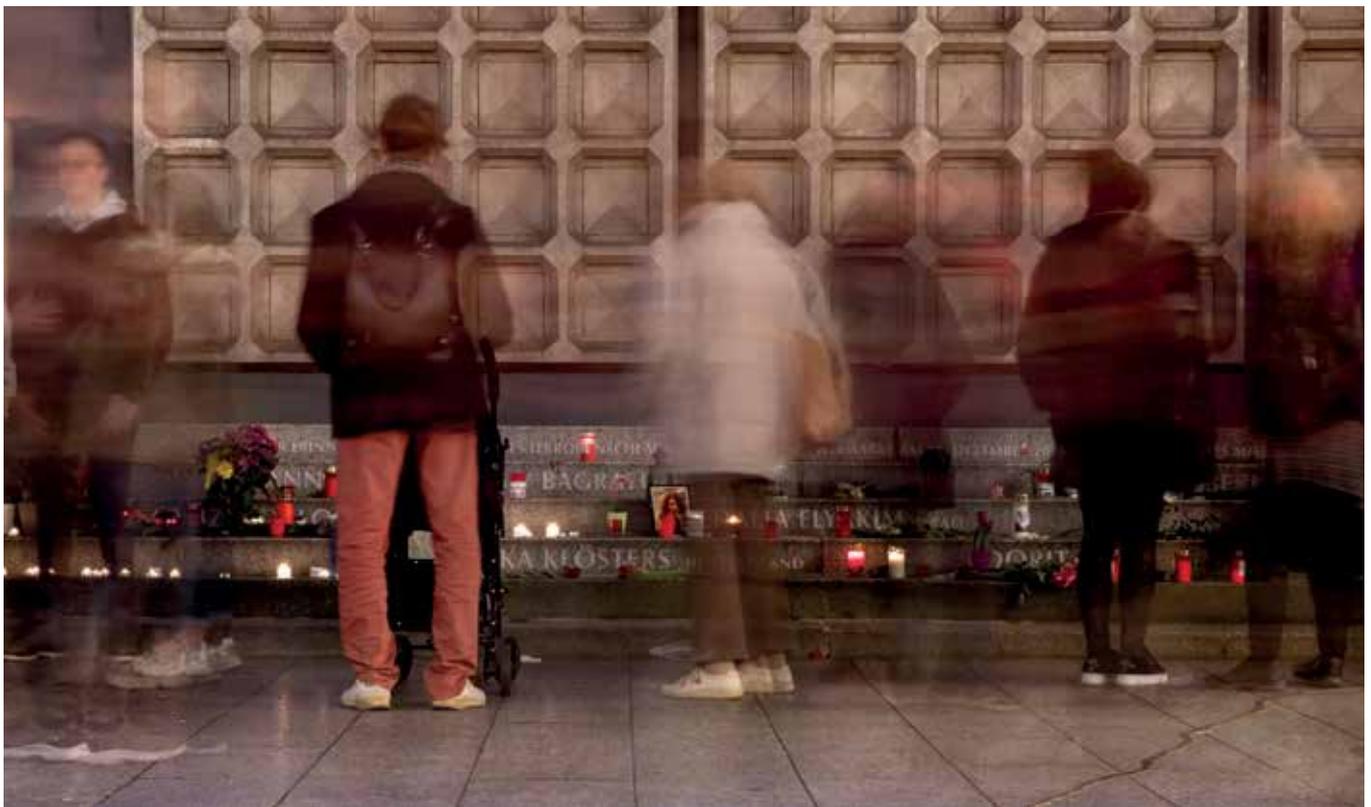
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On 4 October 2020, a Syrian in Dresden attacked two homosexual men with a knife, killing one of them and seriously injuring the other. The perpetrator had been released from prison only a few days before the crime. In November 2018, he had been sentenced to two years and nine months in prison for, among other things, recruiting members and supporters for Islamic State (IS). The incident seemed to point to a renewed strength of Islamist terrorism in Germany and Europe, since at around the same time attacks by individual terrorists occurred in Paris, Nice, and Vienna.

It was the first unequivocally Islamist crime in Germany since 2016 when the country was struck by a series of five attacks – culminating on 19 December 2016 in the tragic attack on the Christmas market at Berlin’s Breitscheidplatz in which 13 people were killed. The Tunisian Anis Amri and at least three other perpetrators of the attacks in 2016 were “directed” by IS. They appear, according to our current knowledge, to have acted alone, but, via the instant messaging service Telegram, they were in contact with IS propagandists and attack planners in Syria and Libya, who remotely “directed” and advised them up to the time of the attack.

The events of 2016 were the culmination of a trend that had been emerging since 2013, when a growing number of German jihadists travelled to Syria to take part in the fight against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. With the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – as IS was called from 2013 to 2014 – the number of departures for Syria increased rapidly, reaching a total of around 1,070 people from Germany who had joined the jihadists (as of 2020). This was the highest number in Europe after France and a new phenomenon, since up to 2012 the number of jihadists in Germany was low in comparison to other Western European countries. Perhaps the most important reason was that global Islamist terrorism had long been supported above all by people from Arab countries and Pakistan – so that Europe, France, and Great Britain were more affected. It was only when jihadist ideology spread to Muslims of other ethnicities and nationalities, especially Turks and Kurds, that the movement took hold in Germany.

The Christmas market at Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church was the target of the deadliest jihadist attack in Germany to date



1. THE EARLY YEARS OF GERMAN JIHADISM

Up until the mid-2000s, there was only a small jihadist movement in Germany. The majority of the pioneers of the scene were Arab students who had come to Germany from countries such as Egypt or Syria since the 1980s. Some of them, like, for example, the German-Egyptian Reda Seyam (a.k.a. Dhu al-Qarnain, born 1960), travelled to Bosnia at the beginning of the 1990s and supported the Bosnian Muslims in the 1992 to 1995 civil war. In the second half of the 1990s, jihadists from Germany went to Afghanistan to join al-Qaida or other Arab groups, but these were also isolated cases. The most prominent exception was a group of three Arab students from Hamburg who were recruited by older jihadists to undergo training with al-Qaida – although they would have rather fought in Chechnya. Mohammed Atta, Ziad Jarrah and Marwan al-Shehhi travelled to Afghanistan in 1999 and, together with 16 other terrorists, carried out the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C.

The *Multikulturhaus* or “Multicultural Centre” in Neu-Ulm became the nucleus of a genuinely German jihadist scene. It was there that the Egyptian physician and jihadist preacher Yahia Yusuf (a.k.a. Abu Umar, born 1958) conveyed his worldview to the first generation of German jihadists. Yusuf’s young followers developed a great passion for the struggle in Chechnya, where the Second Chechen War against Russia broke out in 1999. A large jihadist contingent, including many Turkish and Arab volunteers, took part in the conflict. Yusuf recruited volunteers in provincial Swabia. The first ethnic German “martyr” of the jihadist movement also came from there: Thomas Fischer (a.k.a. Hamza, born 1978) from the Blaubeuren suburb of Ulm, who set off for the Caucasus with three fellow Islamists and was killed in a skirmish with Russian units in November 2003.¹

It is telling that of the four people who left Germany in Thomas Fischer's group, none came back alive.² The armed struggle in Chechnya was particularly fierce and even just getting there was dangerous. Therefore, the Chechen jihadists only accepted volunteers with prior military training. In the 2000s, it also became more difficult to cross the Caucasus mountains from Georgia, since they were patrolled by Russian troops. Consequently, the next German volunteers did not get beyond Turkey. The case of the German convert Fritz Gelowicz (born 1979), whose passion for the Chechen struggle was likewise kindled in the *Multikulturhaus* in Neu-Ulm, would become well-known. Like many other jihadists around the world, in 2005/2006, Gelowicz, along with three other like-minded Germans and Turks, decided to go to the Pakistani tribal areas instead of Chechnya. This region had been developing into the epicentre of international terrorism since 2002, and al-Qaida would not be the only group to establish its headquarters there in the years to come. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the, likewise Uzbek, Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), and small groups from Turkey, Central Asia and Pakistan also took part in the Taliban's struggle in Afghanistan from bases in the tribal areas. Gelowicz and his comrades became pioneers of German jihadism, as they recruited other fighters for the jihad in Afghanistan from Pakistan and after their return to Germany. Starting in 2007, the number of Germans joining the IJU, the IMU and al-Qaida grew rapidly. For a few months in 2009 and 2010, there even existed an independent German group called the "German Taliban Mujahideen".

It first became apparent how dangerous the continued presence of German terrorists in Pakistan and Afghanistan was in September 2007, when Gelowicz and his cell were arrested after having returned to Germany. The IJU had sent them back home in 2006 with the mission of carrying out attacks on US and Uzbek targets, and the jihadists then decided to strike targets around US airbase in Ramstein. Three of the four cell members had holed up in the small town of Oberschledorn in the Sauerland region to make the explosives for an attack. US intelligence services had intercepted the communications of the Sauerland cell with the IJU leadership and informed their German colleagues.³

Timely tips from the NSA, the CIA, and the FBI prevented all the major terror plots of the next few years from being carried out. It quickly became apparent that there were other plots underway after that of the IJU and the Sauerland Group. Now, however, it was the larger and more powerful al-Qaida that was sending terrorists to Germany from North Waziristan. The most dangerous cell was that of the Moroccan Abdeladim El-Kebir a.k.a. Abu al-Bara', born 1981), who was sent to Germany in 2010 – he had previously studied in Bochum – to carry out an attack together with three of his friends. Once again, US authorities informed their German colleagues, who arrested the group.⁴ The plans of this "Düsseldorf cell" were part of a series of al-Qaida activities that are usually referred to as the "European terror plot". The organisation was in a transitional phase at the time. It had only succeeded in carrying out one major terror attack in the Western world since the 11 September 2001 attacks against the United States: namely, in London in July 2005. In order to overcome this period of weakness, in 2009 and 2010, it sent new recruits back

to Europe, who were supposed to carry out smaller attacks to show that al-Qaida was still capable of combating its enemies in the West.⁵

The fact that Germany became an important target of the “European terror plot” showed how much stronger the jihadist scene in Germany had gotten, despite the decline of the headquarters in Pakistan. It was also telling, however, that the al-Qaida and IJU attacks could be prevented, because US authorities had intercepted the communications between Pakistan and Europe. It was only when a cell in Germany plotted an attack without being in direct contact to a larger organisation that it was able to act unhindered. On 10 December 2012, the main perpetrator, the Muslim convert Marco G. (born 1987), left a bomb hidden in a bag at Bonn’s Hauptbahnhof railway station, which only failed to detonate due to a technical defect. He and his three accomplices were also planning to assassinate a right-wing populist politician, whose death Yassin and Monir Chouka – German IMU fighters in Pakistan and Germany’s most prominent jihadists from 2009 to 2012 – had called for in a video.⁶ The attack failed to transpire, however, since the four men were arrested in March 2013. But by this time, Pakistan and the organisations based there had already lost significance from the point of view of the German jihadists.

1 Dominik Cziesche: Der schwäbische Krieger. *Der Spiegel*, no. 41, 3.10.2004.

2 Mevlüt Polat and Tarek Boughdir were killed in October 2002, a third fighter disappeared without a trace.

3 Guido Steinberg: The German “Sauerland” Plot, Central Asia, and Turkey. In: Bruce Hoffman/Fernando Reinares (eds.): *The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat: From 9/11 to Osama Bin Laden’s Death*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 289–311.

4 On the case as a whole, cf. Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf: Urteil gegen Abdeladim El-Kebir u. a., Düsseldorf, 13.11.2014, passim.

5 Guido Steinberg: al-Qaidas deutsche Kämpfer: Die Globalisierung des islamistischen Terrorismus. Hamburg: edition Körber-Stiftung, 2014, pp. 336–339 and 392–393; Guido Steinberg: *German Jihad: On the Internationalization of Islamist Terrorism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 236–237.

6 Tod der Pro-NRW (video). *Die Islamische Bewegung Usbekistans (Studio Jundullah)*, May 2012. Yassin Chouka later died in a gun battle in Iran while on his way to Syria and his brother Monir was arrested. Hubert Gude/Fidelius Schmid: Iranische Behörden haben zwei Islamisten aus Bonn aufgegriffen, einer von ihnen ist nun tot. *Der Spiegel*, no. 16, 11.4.2015.

2. THE SYRIA PIONEERS: MILLATU IBRAHIM (2011-2013)

From spring 2013 on, German jihadists were especially passionate about Syria. The first German fighters in Syria included numerous members of the propaganda group Millatu Ibrahim (Community of Abraham). The latter had only been formed in September 2011 in Berlin, but within just a few months it had already sparked a great deal of attention. Its leader was the Austrian-Egyptian Mohamed Mahmoud (a.k.a. Abu Usama al-Gharib, born 1985), who is said to have travelled to Iraq already as a 17-year-old in 2003, where he joined the Kurdish-Iraqi group Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam) and took part in combat. Back in Austria, he built up the German-language branch of the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), a small Austrian-German propaganda group. In March 2007, the group produced a video in which a speaker with his face concealed called for the withdrawal of Austrian and German troops from Afghanistan and threatened attacks in both countries.⁷ Mahmoud was arrested in September 2007 and subsequently sentenced to four years in prison.

Shortly after his release in September 2011, Mahmoud travelled to Berlin, where he founded Millatu Ibrahim along with the former rapper Denis Cuspert (a.k.a. Abu Talha al-Almani, born 1975). The name comes from the title of one of the main works of the jihadist theoretician Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (originally Isam al-Barqawi, born 1959), whose teachings Mahmoud and his comrades had been familiarising a German-speaking public with since the mid-2000s.⁸ Up until 2005, the Jordanian Maqdisi was a kind of ideological mentor to his compatriot Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006), who, starting in 2003 in Iraq, would become one of the most wanted terrorists in the world and whose organisation gave rise to IS. Their interest in Maqdisi led Mahmoud and many of his fol-

lowers enthusiastically to embrace Zarqawi's struggle in Iraq already early on and turned Millatu Ibrahim into a German precursor organisation of IS.⁹

Shortly after the Austrian's arrival in Germany, Mahmoud, Cuspert, and their followers took over a mosque in Solingen in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), which they also named Millatu Ibrahim and which became a central gathering place for German jihadists over the following months. They disseminated their propaganda via a website and never missed an opportunity for provoking German authorities. They gained nationwide attention at the beginning of May 2012, when Salafist demonstrations in Solingen and Bonn escalated into violence. Mahmoud and Cuspert were not present on 1 May 2012 in Solingen, but the deputy head of Millatu Ibrahim, Hasan Keskin (a.k.a. Abu Ibrahim), led the protest and other members of the group participated in it. After attacking the police with metal bars and other objects, they were arrested and later sentenced to prison terms – though most of them were given probation. Four days later, violence erupted in Bonn. A demonstration by Pro-NRW, a right-wing populist and Islamophobic group, in front of the Saudi Arabian King Fahd Academy provided the occasion. Salafists organised a counterdemonstration that turned violent when the right-wing populists held up the Danish caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad from 2005. A few dozen of the approximately 200 Islamists attacked the police, injuring 29 officers, two of them seriously.¹⁰ This time, Cuspert was one of the ringleaders; he called for the Islamists to attack when the right-wing populists held up the caricatures.¹¹

Millatu Ibrahim was banned on 29 May 2012.¹² Fearing that he would be deported, Mahmoud had already left Germany for Egypt by that time. After the ban, most of the other members of the group fled Germany as well. They first met in Alexandria, where German jihadists and Salafists had already been gathering for several years to learn Arabic. But in the summer, Mahmoud, Cuspert, and other supporters already left for Libya, where they were trained for armed struggle by the local jihadist group Ansar al-Sharia (Supporters of the Sharia). At least two jihadists from the German contingent allegedly took part in the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi in which four Americans – including ambassador J. Christopher Stevens – were murdered on 11 September 2012.¹³ The Germans then briefly considered going to Mali to fight against the French troops there, but decided for Syria, where the uprising against the Assad regime was gaining momentum in 2012 and jihadist groups were taking in the first foreign fighters.

Mahmoud's plan is said to have been to join al-Nusra Front (*Jabhat al-Nusra* in Arabic), which up until April 2013 was the Syrian branch of Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) – as IS was called from 2006 to 2013 – and to bring the whole Millatu Ibrahim contingent with him. But this failed to happen, because al-Nusra had very restrictive admission criteria and insisted, at least for a time, on knowledge of Arabic and a recommendation from within the organisation.¹⁴ Hence most of the Germans switched to Junud al-Sham (Soldiers of Syria). This was a small group of jihadists from the Caucasus who had already come to Syria in 2012 and that became a magnet for foreign fighters in general from spring 2013 on. Junud al-Sham was one of several grouplets operating in the orbit of al-Nusra Front

that admitted foreigners. In 2013 and 2014, more than 35 Germans underwent training with Junud al-Sham. Most of them belonged to Millatu Ibrahim or had responded to the group's call to come to Syria. Cuspert was the most well-known German in the group's ranks, since Mahmoud had been arrested in Turkey in March 2013. Most of the Germans left Junud al-Sham in autumn 2013 and joined Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

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- 7 Eine Nachricht an die Regierungen von Deutschland und Österreich (video). *Globale Islamische Medienfront*, March 2007.
 - 8 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi: *Millat Ibrahim* (Arabic). s.l.: s.n., 1985. <http://ilmradio.com/maqdisi-library/> (last accessed: 31.5.2021). On al-Maqdisi and his work as a whole, cf. Joas Wagemakers: *A Quietist Jihadi. The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
 - 9 On Mahmoud's embrace of the Iraqi cause and his impact on the German scene, cf. Guido Steinberg: *Kalifat des Schreckens*. Munich: Knauer, 2015, pp. 157 f.
 - 10 Reiner Burger: Treffen sich zwei Splittergruppen. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3.5.2012; Florian Flade/Martin Lutz: Fanatismus-Tage in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Ein Großaufgebot der Polizei verhindert in Köln Zusammenstöße von Islamisten und Rechtsextremen. *Die Welt*, 9.5.2012; Dieter Brockschneider: Nach Gewalt-Demo gibt Polizeiführer Fehler zu; Salafisten-Attacke: Ermittlergruppe arbeitete Einsatz an der Fahd-Akademie vom 5. Mai auf. *Kölnische Rundschau*, 21.8.2012.
 - 11 Ulrich Krätzer: *Salafisten: Bedrohung für Deutschland?* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014, p. 202.
 - 12 Bundesministerium des Innern: *Verbotsverfügung des Bundesministeriums des Innern gegen die Vereinigung „Millatu Ibrahim“*, Berlin, 29.5.2012, passim.
 - 13 This is what one of the participants, Yunus Emre S. from Cologne, said in a video interview with the PKK-affiliated Firatnews Agency website in October 2019. At the time, he was being held prisoner by the Kurdish People's Defence Units (YPG), the military branch of the PKK in Syria. *Beritan Sarya: Attentäter auf US-Botschafter in die Türkei geflohen. ANF News* (Rimelan), 10.10.2019. <https://anfdeutsch.com/rojawa-syrien/attentaeter-auf-us-botschafter-in-tuerkei-geflohen-14475> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
 - 14 The requirement of knowledge of Arabic was often waived in practice; the recommendation (*tadhkiya* in Arabic) is still made by al-Nusra's successor organisation Hai'at Tahrir al-Sham (Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant) to this day.

3.

RADICALISATION AND RECRUITMENT IN GERMANY

The Millatu Ibrahim group was only the most prominent of several mostly small German groups in Syria at the time. The early prohibition of Millatu Ibrahim contributed to the fact that the jihadist milieu in Germany remained fragmented and without clear leadership. Numerous groups and individuals recruited for the armed struggle in Syria.

3.1 “The True Religion” and the “Read!” Campaign

After most of the members of Millatu Ibrahim had left, the leaders of “The True Religion” (*Die Wahre Religion*) remained behind in Germany, where their organisation became the most important refuge for young jihadists. The group was led by the Palestinian businessman and preacher Ibrahim Abou-Nagie (born 1964) from Bonn, who founded it in 2005. Apart from Abou-Nagie, the main purveyors of jihadist ideology were the German-Moroccan Said El Emrani (a.k.a. Abu Dujana, born 1982) and the German-Tunisian Ibrahim Belkaid (a.k.a. Abu Abdallah).¹⁵ The three preachers spoke all over Germany and occasionally also in Austria and held “Islam seminars”. Videos on their website (www.diewahrereligion.de) served to increase the visibility of the events. What above all distinguished them from Millatu Ibrahim was the fact that – although convinced jihadists – they were not fixated on Iraq and later IS and tried, mostly successfully, not to come into conflict with the law.¹⁶ It was not until the beginning of 2012 that they showed their jihadist sympathies more openly: for example, by appearing publicly with members of Millatu Ibrahim and by Abu Dujana and Abu Abdallah calling for their followers to take part in the demonstrations in Solingen and Bonn.¹⁷



The “Read!” campaign became the most important rallying point for Syria fighter

“The True Religion” became known to a wider public when it launched the “Read!” campaign at the end of 2011. Members and supporters distributed free translations of the Koran in the shopping districts of many German cities, with the goal – as Abou-Nagie boasted – of passing out 25 million copies. The action was a PR success, since the Palestinian and his organisation suddenly gained popularity among young Islamists that it had not previously reached. Although the authorities regarded “The True Religion” as a jihadist group, they did not intervene for the moment: distributing holy scripture was and is legal. But what worried observers already early on was the fact

that many later jihadists took part in the “Read!” actions, developed contacts to people with similar ideas and then travelled to Syria. Among the Syria departees for whom the relevant information was available, around one quarter had contact to or directly participated in the “Read!” campaign.¹⁸

3.2 Mosques and Charismatic Preachers

Whereas “The True Religion” and the “Read!” project served above all as a rallying point, recruitment for jihadist organisations mostly took place in mosques in the early years. From 2012 to 2014, perhaps the most important jihadist mosque was the Fussilet-33 mosque in Berlin-Moabit, where residents of the neighbouring Wedding district gathered. Turkish Salafists in the orbit of the preacher Ismet Dogan predominated here, but they developed close contacts to a group of Chechens who attended the mosque and for whom the Dagestani Gadzhimurad K. preached in Russian. Jihadists from the milieu of the mosque already travelled to Syria to join Junud al-Sham around New Year’s 2012/2013, and the Fussilet-33 mosque became the German recruitment centre for the Chechen group over the following year. But a reorientation took place by New Year’s 2013/2014 at the latest, and the preachers at the mosque called for joining ISIS – which is why it became known to Berlin-based Muslims as the “IS mosque”.¹⁹ The two preachers were arrested in January (Ismet Dogan) and October 2015 (Gadzhimurad K.) and later

sentenced to prison terms. But under the new leadership of Imam Emrah C., the mosque continued their activities, such that it remained an important gathering place for Berlin-based jihadists up until its sponsoring association was banned by the Berlin government on 8 February 2017.²⁰

In the early days of German jihadism, up to 2011, jihadist mosques were mainly located in large cities with Muslim populations like Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main, and Bonn. Other places, some of them smaller like Neu-Ulm or Bochum, only played a role when successful jihadist preachers and recruiters had settled in them. But starting in the mid-2000s, the number of jihadist mosques rose sharply. They now also attracted attention in Bremen, Wuppertal, Wolfsburg, Hildesheim, and other provincial cities. This is probably to be explained, first and foremost, by the fact that the number of preachers was rising and more and more of them had to turn to the provinces to obtain congregations and available premises to use. As a result, jihadist recruitment in Germany was a decentralised phenomenon in the years after 2012, with many different mosques and preachers playing a role. More or less charismatic figures like Ismet Dogan and Gadzhimurad K. in Berlin, Sven Lau (a.k.a. Abu Adam, born 1980) in Mönchengladbach and Wuppertal, and Izzuddin Jakupovic (a.k.a. Abu Sufian, born 1983) in Stuttgart became important recruiters for the armed struggle in Syria. Usually, they limited themselves to relatively uncontroversial topics concerning the Salafist way of life and general reflections on jihad when speaking publicly in the mosque; but in smaller study circles and in private meetings, they called on their followers to go to Syria.²¹

The case of the Iraqi-Kurdish preacher Abu Wala (originally known as Ahmad A.) sparked particularly great interest among the German public. Abu Wala preached in Hildesheim in Lower Saxony up until his arrest in November 2016, but also maintained close contacts to Salafists in Berlin, the Ruhr region, and other areas. Starting in 2014, many of those who attended his lectures travelled to Syria. In his subsequent trial, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office accused him of having served as a particularly influential recruiter for IS. The prosecution even spoke of a network that Abu Wala was supposed to have led and to which two other influential preachers in Gelsenkirchen and Dortmund allegedly belonged. In February 2021, he was sentenced to ten and a half years in prison by the Celle Higher Regional Court, but the verdict remains subject to appeal.²²

3.3 Motives and Profiles of German Jihadists

The great significance of mosques and preachers highlights the paramount role of jihadist ideology in radicalisation and recruitment. This is also shown by numerous statements made in court by IS returnees and supporters, who explained that the initial aim was to overthrow Assad and "implement Islamic principles". When IS emerged in 2013, the founding of an Islamic state based on the Sharia would become the most important motive for many German jihadists.²³ The fact that the number of departures for Syria rose sharply following the proclamation of the Caliphate in June 2014 supports



Figure 1: Jihadist hotspots: where Syria fighters came from

this hypothesis. Many Salafists around the world believed that there was an obligation to go to Syria from this moment on, since a genuine Islamic state had come into being again after nearly a century in which there was not any.

The important role played by the jihadist worldview for almost all departees was reflected in the fact that there was no clearly recognisable socio-economic profile that united them. It is indeed striking that a very high number of departees already had criminal records before they turned to Salafism.²⁴ This is also in line with the observation that most jihadists come from difficult neighbourhoods in German cities, which suggests that social marginalisation and economic disadvantage play a role. At the same time, however, a 2016 study by German security agencies spoke of numerous individuals with high school diplomas and many doing university studies.²⁵ There was thus not any common social profile.

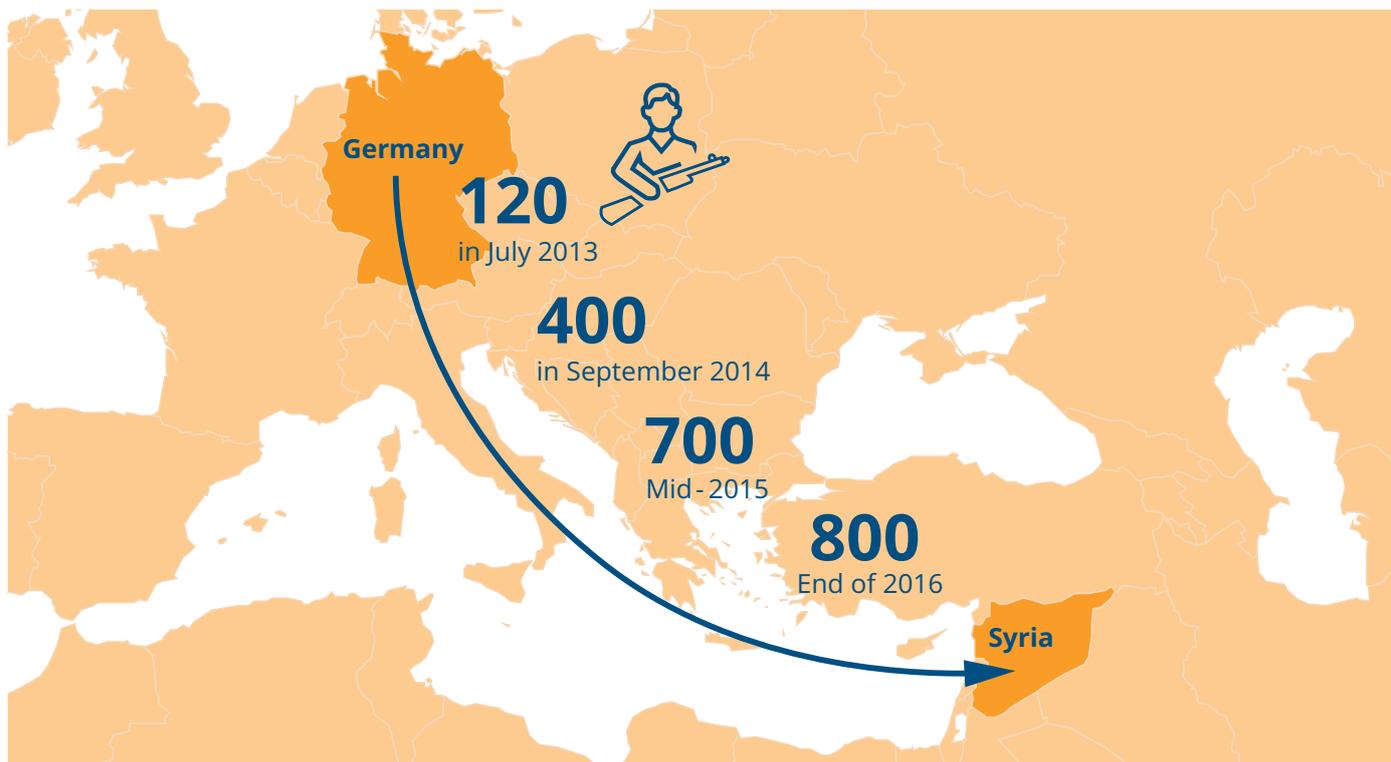
Particularly high numbers of German fighters in Syria came from North Rhine-Westphalia (Bonn, Cologne, and the Ruhr region), Hessen (Frankfurt am Main and the vicinity), Berlin, Hamburg, Lower Saxony (Hanover, Brunswick, and Wolfsburg), and Bremen. The numbers were considerably lower in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, on the other hand.²⁶

The reasons for this could be the particularly low unemployment and the better education systems in these two *Länder*, but also their traditionally more vigorous security policies. Slightly more than 80 per cent of the departees to Syria have a migrant background. There is a strong presence of Turks and people of Turkish origin among the German jihadists in absolute terms, but they are underrepresented in relation to their total number

in Germany.²⁷ North Africans of Moroccan and Tunisian descent are greatly overrepresented, although still considerably less than in France and Belgium. There is also a large number of Muslim converts (both with and without migrant background) among the German jihadists. The same applies for people of Syrian and Afghan origin and people from the Caucasus (mostly Chechens).

The total number of Germans who left for Syria is around 1,070, of whom about 80 per cent joined IS. According to a study by German security agencies, the total number of departees grew from a few isolated cases at the end of 2012 to more than 120 in July 2013, then to almost 400 in September 2014, more than 700 in mid-2015, and nearly 800 at the end of June 2016.²⁸ The number of departures already began to decline sharply at the beginning of 2015. It is possible that the potential for willing recruits in Germany – where the number of jihadists was already roughly estimated to be around 1,000 to 2,000 at the time – was largely exhausted. In addition, the falling numbers were likely a result of the imprisonment of important recruiters in Germany, the measures taken by the German security services to hinder departures, and the defeats that IS suffered starting in spring 2015.

Figure 2: German departees to Syria from 2013 to 2016



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- 15 Krätzer: Salafisten, p. 167.
 - 16 Ibid., p. 170.
 - 17 Klaus Hummel: Das informelle islamische Milieu: Blackbox der Radikalisierungsforschung. In: Klaus Hummel/ Michail Logvinov (eds.): Gefährliche Nähe. Salafismus und Dschihadismus in Deutschland. Stuttgart: ibid., 2014, pp. 219–259, in particular p. 228.
 - 18 Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV) and Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Islamismus (HKE): Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind, Fortschreibung 2016, as of: 4.10.2016, p. 20 and p. 22. <https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Publikationen/Publikationsreihen/Forschungsergebnisse/2016AnalyseRadikalisierungshintergruendeSyrienIrakAusreisende.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
 - 19 Guido Steinberg: Junud al-Sham and the German Foreign Fighter Threat. In: *CTC Sentinel*, volume 9, issue 2, February 2016, pp. 24–28. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CTC-SENTINEL-Vol9Iss213.pdf> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
 - 20 Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport: Verbotsverfügung gegen Fussilet-33 e. V., Berlin, 8.2.2017, passim.
 - 21 Gadzhimurad K., for example, described this for the Fussilet-33 mosque in Berlin. Court testimony of Gadzhimurad K. (in the presence of the author), Kammergericht Berlin, 22.7.2016.
 - 22 Anwälte von „Abu Walaa“ legen Revision gegen Urteil ein (video). *NDR*, 3.3.2021. https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/niedersachsen/hannover_weser-leinegebiet/Anwaelte-von-Abu-Walaa-legen-Revision-gegen-Urteil-ein,a-buwalaa316.html (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
 - 23 Court testimony of Nils D. (in the presence of the author), Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf, 20.1.2016.
 - 24 Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) et al.: Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe, p. 18.
 - 25 Ibid., pp. 16 f.
 - 26 Author interview with German intelligence officer, Berlin, 7.4.2016.
 - 27 Turks and persons of Turkish origin (including Turkish Kurds) make up about 2.5 million of the 4.5 to 5 million Muslims in Germany.
 - 28 Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) et al.: Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe, p. 6.

4. GERMANS IN ISIS

When the number of Germans in Syria began rapidly rising in summer 2013, Junud al-Sham and the al-Nusra Front were only two of many groups admitting foreign fighters. Jaish al-Muhajireen wa-l-Ansar (Army of Emigrants and Helpers, Jamwa for short) would become particularly important for the history of German jihadism. It was a unit from the Caucasus, which was led by the well-known jihadist Abu Umar al-Shishani. Here too, a small German contingent formed, whose members joined ISIS along with Abu Umar and hundreds of fighters in November 2013 at the latest. A second important IS precursor organisation called itself Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen (Shura Council of Jihad Fighters). It was led by two Syrians: the Absi brothers Firas (a.k.a. Abu Muhammad) and Amr (a.k.a. Abu Athir). Firas al-Absi was a veteran of armed struggle in Iraq, so it was only consequent that Majlis Shura joined ISIS in spring 2013. The group did not only bring French, Belgian, and Dutch recruits into the new organisation, some of whom were later involved in the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015. Several Germans also joined.

Starting in autumn 2013, the overwhelming majority of Germans in Syria went over to ISIS. In the months before, there was a dramatic escalation in the tensions between the group (which first appeared in Syria in April 2013) and the other rebel groups, because ISIS was above all aiming to control rebel-held territories and its actions were increasingly aggressive. The fighters were particularly impressed by the uncompromising call for an Islamic state based on a Salafist interpretation of Islamic law that was underlying this strategy. Moreover, three leadership figures, who brought their supporters with them to ISIS, were especially important for the positioning of the Germans.

4.1 Leadership Figures

Reda Seyam

The German-Egyptian Reda Seyam was by far the most important German in the ranks of IS. Seyam came to Germany as a student in 1988 and was long a close associate of Yahia Yusuf. From Freiburg, they supported the struggle of jihadist groups in the Bosnian war in the early 1990s; Seyam made a name for himself in the Balkans as director of propaganda videos. US authorities were later convinced that Seyam, who was staying in Jakarta at the time, was one of the plotters behind the al-Qaida attack on a nightclub on the island of Bali that killed 202 people, including six Germans, on 12 October 2002. Worried that the Americans might detain Seyam and ship him to Guantanamo, Germany's Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation, or BKA, helped him quickly to leave Indonesia for Germany.²⁹

Henceforth, Seyam lived in Berlin, becoming the *éminence grise* of the German jihadist scene. He founded the Sahaba mosque in Berlin-Wedding, one of the most important jihadist places of worship of the 2010s, and was in close contact with the leaders of Millatu Ibrahim. In July 2012, he travelled to Syria via Egypt and Turkey. In Syria, he joined ISIS in 2013 and made a career in the organisation. In spring 2013, he was already the deputy governor of the ISIS province of Aleppo. He took care of administrative matters, but also enrolled foreign fighters who were supposed to carry out attacks abroad for ISIS.³⁰ In late 2013, the organisation began planning terrorist attacks in Europe and set up an external operations division in its secret police for this purpose. Seyam may have had responsibility for attacks in Germany in this division.

At the end of 2014, reports appeared in the Iraqi press that Seyam was living in Mosul and held the position of "Minister of Education" (Amir Diwan al-Ta'lim) in the newly created IS cabinet.³¹ As such, he made sure that the curriculum at the University of Mosul, and other universities and schools in the Caliphate, was guided by the strict Salafist ideology of IS. First, he had whole faculties and departments shut down: for example, of law, political science, fine arts, archaeology, sports, philosophy, and tourism. In a speech to teaching staff, moreover, he made it clear that university and scholastic education had to serve the sole purpose of strengthening the IS militarily. This included sending children to school for only eight years and to university or military training already at the age of 14 or 15. Islam and physical fitness were supposed to be the focus of study. The medical school was particularly important to him, as IS lacked medically trained staff everywhere.³² But the reforms did not get beyond the initial phase, because professors and teachers fled by the thousands, there was a lack of money starting in mid-2015, and IS would come to be targeted by numerous airstrikes. Seyam is said to have been killed in an airstrike near Mosul in 2016 at the latest.³³

Mohamed Mahmoud

In August 2014, after about a year in Turkish custody, Mahmoud was released as part of a prisoner exchange between Turkey and IS and joined the latter.³⁴ His group, Millatu Ibrahim, asked the IS leadership if it could form a German-speaking unit (or, in Arabic,

katiba, which is what IS combat formations are called). But it did not receive permission and most of the members were assigned to an English-speaking combat formation named Katibat Anwar al-Awlaki, which was initially led by a Canadian. Mahmoud was the leader of the Germans within the *katiba*. In the years to come, he was mostly in Raqqa, where he had a leading position in IS's Hayat Media Center.

Just as in previous years in Austria and Germany, Mahmoud made a name for himself as a propagandist above all. In June 2015, he made the video "The Tourism of this Ummah" (*ummah* = the community of Muslims) along with other Germans from the Katibat Anwar al-Awlaki. In the film, Mahmoud and the German Yamin Abou Zand shoot two alleged government soldiers in the ruins of Palmyra. Mahmoud also called on Muslims in Austria and Germany to come to Syria or to carry out terrorist attacks at home.³⁵ The execution of other regime soldiers by Mahmoud and his group in the new city of Palmyra on the same day was not shown in the video.³⁶ These were the most serious crimes committed by Germans in IS that have become public to date.

Mahmoud's career in IS stalled after the summer of 2015. There were reports that he had assumed a function in the religious administration of the organisation and that he had become – as successor to Reda Seyam – an emir for foreign operations.³⁷ This would also explain why somewhat less was heard about him in the following years. Other versions mention problems between Mahmoud and the IS leadership, which would culminate in being temporarily banned from Raqqa and later imprisoned.³⁸ Although the details of his role in IS are not yet clear, there are indications that Mahmoud himself believed he could take on a more important role. It is regarded as certain, on the other hand, that he was killed in an airstrike in eastern Syria in November 2018.

Denis Cuspert

Denis Cuspert was the son of a German mother and a Ghanaian father and was the pop star among German jihadists. In the 2000s, he became known as the gangster rapper Deso Dogg in his hometown of Berlin. In 2010, he gave up his unsuccessful music career, converted to Islam and became a Salafist; he was one of the founders of Millatu Ibrahim in 2011. In the following years, he would become the best-known face of German jihadism by turning to so-called *nasheeds*. *Nasheeds* are atonal religious songs that Salafists and jihadists have been using as a tool of propaganda for several decades. In his *nasheeds*, Cuspert glorified armed struggle against the enemies of Islam and, starting in 2014, also Islamic State.

While Mahmoud was stuck in a Turkish prison, Cuspert appears to have taken over the leadership of the Millatu Ibrahim contingent in Syria. Bringing the latter with him, he joined Junud al-Sham, which trained the Germans and deployed them in heavy combat against regime troops in the coastal mountains in August 2013. But Cuspert already left the group in September 2013 and subsequently went over to IS. Although he was badly injured in an airstrike in northern Syria in November, he recovered and became the organisation's most important German-language propagandist. His first video for ISIS

appeared in March/April 2014. In the film, he sits in a meadow under a tree in northern Syria and declares that he has sworn allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, renounced his German citizenship and become a citizen of ISIS. Cuspert explains that ISIS is the state for which true Muslims have been waiting for almost a century (i. e. since the end of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924). His fighters will not only prove themselves in Syria and Iraq, Cuspert explains, but also march to Palestine, take Saudi Arabia and liberate the entire Islamic community of believers (or *Ummah*).³⁹

In April 2014, Cuspert brought out his first video nasheed for ISIS, in which he called on Muslims to take up the fight in Syria. The footage was above all striking, because in it a choir of twelve jihadists with their faces concealed is sitting next to Cuspert and sings the chorus, thus making clear that they are Germans.⁴⁰ For the first time, the German public became aware of the power of attraction of ISIS for young Germans and how many had already left for Syria. Less was heard from Cuspert in the years to follow, with videos only turning up sporadically. Although he maintained contact with his comrades from Millatu Ibrahim, he appears to have been the only one to have joined the Russian-speaking Katibat Sabri.⁴¹ He caused a sensation twice more in 2014 and 2015, when videos emerged that showed Cuspert desecrating the corpses of regime forces and civilians after fighting in Syria.⁴² His death was announced in October 2015, but he appears really to have been killed only in January 2018.

4.2 German Fighters in IS

Several hundred Germans became active members of IS between 2014 and 2019. They formed part of the organisation's more than 40,000 foreign fighters in all, of which from 5,000 to 6,000 came from Europe. The Germans provided the second largest European contingent after France and ahead of Great Britain.⁴³ It is telling that Seyam and Mahmoud remained the only "Germans" in prominent leadership positions, since both were Arabs and spoke Arabic well. In an Iraqi-dominated, largely Arab organisation, they had a clear advantage over many other "Germans".

After arriving in Syria and a period of training, almost all the Germans joined one of the IS combat formations. A particularly large group was found in the Katibat Anwar al-Awlaki, into which most of the English-speaking fighters were organised between 2014 and 2016. It was named after a Yemeni-American al-Qaida ideologist, who attained prominence above all thanks to his sermons and lectures in English.⁴⁴ In 2015, the unit was led by a Canadian with the *nom de guerre* Abu Bakr al-Canadi; his deputy was the Swedish-born Khalid Uthman al-Timawi/Timayare.⁴⁵ Apart from several citizens of non-European Western countries, the unit included Britons, Scandinavians, Dutch, Belgians, Austrians, and many Germans. The *katiba* was deployed in Syria and probably also in Iraq.

Among the Germans, it was above all the members of Millatu Ibrahim that were integrated into the combat group. Several returnees described Mahmoud as the leader of these

Germans, some of whom had also worked in the Hayat Media Center. The media specialists included Christian Emde (a.k.a. Abu Qutada al-Almani) from Solingen and Ismail S. (a.k.a. Abu Abd al-Rahman) from Husum. Yamin Abou Zand (a.k.a. Abu Umar al-Quraishi) and Fared S. (a.k.a. Abu Luqman al-Almani) from Bonn are said to have served as deputy leaders of the unit.⁴⁶ The most visible product of their activities were the brutal murders of detained Syrian regime soldiers in June 2015. In between combat missions, most of the Germans in this unit lived in Raqqa. A German scene developed in the city, the members of which were in close contact with each other. They met in certain mosques, internet cafés and private homes; Mahmoud gave lectures on religious ideology. The German women also met to receive religious instruction together.⁴⁷



German-Egyptian top terrorist Reda Seyam (right) praying near the "Read!" stand in Berlin in 2012

The remaining Germans were involved in almost all areas of the organisation. There is evidence of their presence in a number of combat formations such as the largely Moroccan Katibat Tariq Ibn Ziyad, the Chechen Katibat Badr and the likewise Russian speaking Katibat Sabri. They suffered substantial losses. At least a third of the Germans are said to have died in total; it was probably more than that, since the fate of many of the fighters is unknown. Many of them died already in the battle for the city of Kobane, which began in September 2014 and in which IS lost thousands of men fighting against the Kurdish People's Defence Units (YPG), who were supported by the US air force. Somewhat more than 20 Germans carried out suicide attacks, which IS members could volunteer for. One well-known case was, for instance, that of Philip Bergner (a.k.a. Abu Usama al-Almani, born 1988) from Dinslaken in North Rhine-Westphalia. He first appeared in an IS propaganda video, before being wounded in combat and carrying out a suicide attack in Iraq in August 2014. Another case that caused a sensation was that of Mark Knoop (a.k.a. Abu Musab al-Almani, born 1989) from Castrop-Rauxel, who drove a vehicle loaded with several tonnes of explosives into an Iraqi army base north of Baghdad and then set off the explosives – as was documented in an IS-video.⁴⁸

The Germans were completely integrated into the organisation. This was shown by the presence of numerous Germans in the IS secret police, al-Amn (The Security), which was regarded as an elite unit for particularly loyal fighters.⁴⁹ Al-Amn was responsible for internal security on IS territory, searched for spies and all sorts of opponents of IS, and had very far-reaching competencies. It thus had its own prisons, in which detainees were tortured and killed. The secret police consisted above all of fighters who had already joined the IS early on or had fought in important precursor organisations. This applied, for example, to the group of German fighters from Dinslaken-Lohberg who joined the IS precursor group Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen in 2013. Many of them were subsequently recruited into the IS secret police, thus raising the suspicion that they may have been involved in crimes like torture and murder.⁵⁰

4.3 German Women in IS

If the first departees in 2012 and early 2013 were exclusively men, in summer 2013 women began to come to Syria, too. Their number increased rapidly starting in 2014, since IS argued that it was the duty of every Muslim, whether man or woman, to leave the countries of the unbelievers and live in the Islamic State. In the years from 2014 on, women represented around one-fifth of all departees to Syria.⁵¹ Initially, the organisation envisaged roles as housewives and mothers for female jihadists. They were supposed to provide cosy homes for their men and to raise the next generation of jihadist fighters in the spirit of IS ideology. In the early days, many women were, nonetheless, taught how to use the IS's standard weaponry in case of an emergency. Some of them also received suicide vests, which they wore and were supposed to detonate before being caught by enemy forces.⁵²

For a long time, the women's most important task was media work, because they could do this without coming into contact with men they were not related to. The aim was first and foremost to obtain more female recruits for coming to Syria. Whether German women were also active as virtual attack planners is not known yet.⁵³ Nor has it been possible to prove that German women worked in the IS religious police, which began recruiting women in mid-2014. But already early on there were newspaper reports that a secret division of the Katibat Anwar al-Awlaki was training women for terrorist attacks in Western countries.⁵⁴ This was a first indication of an increased mobilisation of women for the armed struggle. In 2016 at the latest, IS established a combat unit for women named Katibat Nusaiba after the female Islamic warrior Nusaiba Bint Ka'b, one of the companions of the Prophet. The American Allison Fluke-Ekren (a.k.a. Umm Muhammad) is reported to have commanded the *katiba*, where the women received military training, for which a French female fighter who had previously served in the French army is said to have been responsible at the time.⁵⁵ The Katibat Nusaiba was probably attached to the (male) Katibat Anwar al-Awlaki and dominated by foreign women – including some Germans.⁵⁶

Up to now, there is no evidence that women were subsequently also deployed in battle. The reports about IS's increasing mobilisation of women in media work, the religious police and a combat unit probably had an influence on how the German government dealt with the women: up until autumn 2021, the government enabled only a few of the female jihadists being held in Kurdish internment camps to return to Germany. The numbers rose, however, shortly before and after the new government was sworn in. From October 2021, a total of less than 20 female jihadists and their children were brought back from Syria, most of them facing trials in Germany.

29 Britta Sandberg: Der Diener Gottes. *Der Spiegel*, no. 38, 14.9.2008.

30 Under questioning, Nils D. said that he first asked the IS governor for permission to leave and was then referred to Seyam, who was responsible for him. Court testimony of Nils D. (in the presence of the author), Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf, 27.1.2016.

31 Khaled Joumah: Profiling Mosul's Extremist Celebrity: The Minister of Education, The Man With Two Horns. *Niqash*, 20.11. 2014.

32 Hélène Sallon: L'État Islamique de Mossoul. Histoire d'une entreprise totalitaire. Paris: La Découverte, 2018, pp. 139–142 and pp. 210 f.

33 Ibid., pp. 149 f.

34 Jörg Diehl/Roman Lehberger: Türkische Polizei lässt Hassprediger frei. *Spiegel Online*, 24.9.2014. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/mohamed-mahmoud-tuerkei-entlaesst-hassprediger-aus-gefaengnis-a-993562.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).

35 Der Tourismus dieser Ummah (video). n.d., June 2015.

36 Souad Mekhennet/Greg Miller: This ISIS defector said he was an innocent bystander. A new video questions his story. *Washington Post*, 4.10.2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-a-former-isis-recruit-and-media-darling-edited-his-own-story/2016/10/04/5740ff50-8582-11e6-a3ef-f35afb41797f_story.html?utm_term=.645f96005adf (last accessed: 31.5.2021).

- 37 Police interrogation of Muhamed H., Erbil, 13.9.2017, p. 4.
- 38 Björn Stritzel: BILD enthüllt unbekannt Details über Mohamed Mahmoud: Wie ISIS einen Terror-Henker brutal fallen ließ. *BILD*, 28.1.2019.
- 39 Der Islamische Staat von Irak und Sham (video). *Al-Tibyan*, March/April 2014.
- 40 Millatu-Ibrahim. Für Allah und sein Gesandten (video). *Al-Tibyan*, April 2014.
- 41 Court testimony of Gadzhimurad K. (in the presence of the author), Kammergericht Berlin, 15.7.2016. The *katiba* is said to have had its headquarters in Tabqa and to have later been renamed al-Qadisiya.
- 42 Berlin rapper in "Islamic State" beheading video. *Deutsche Welle*, 5.11.2014. <https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-rapper-in-islamic-state-beheading-video/a-18039786> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 43 Richard Barrett: Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees. The Soufan Center, October 2017, p. 10 and p. 13. <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 44 For a detailed treatment of Awlaki, cf. Scott Shane: Objective Troy. A Terrorist, a President, and the Rise of the Drone. New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015. For a brief summary of his role, cf. Guido Steinberg: Avantgarde des internationalen Terrorismus. Die jemenitische al-Qaida profitiert trotz Rückschlägen vom Bürgerkrieg. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP-Aktuell 87), October 2015, pp. 4 f.
- 45 Barbara Starr/Ryan Browne: ISIS foreign fighters killed in U.S. airstrikes. *CNN*, 7.4.2016. <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/07/politics/isis-foreign-fighters-killed-airstrikes/index.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021). In one Austrian source, "Timawi" was referred to as "Timayare". Luftschiäge: Vizeemir aus Schweden im Irak getötet. *Der Standard*, 11.4.2016. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000034579695/welle-toedlicher-luftschlaege-schwedischer-vizeemir-im-irak-getoetet> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 46 Police interrogation of Harry S., Oldenburg, 15.1.2016, p. 26; interrogation of Harry S. by intelligence services, s.l., 10.12.2015, sheet 185. Detailed information on this *katiba* is found in: Guido Steinberg: Gutachten zur Ausbildung und militärischen Verwendung europäischer Rekruten im Islamischen Staat (IS) im Verfahren gegen Enes S. u. a. (unpublished expert report), Berlin, 23.1.2017.
- 47 A female German returnee mentioned such Sharia lessons in Raqqa. The course for the Germans is supposed to have taken place in the Martyrs' Mosque (Masjid al-Shuhada) and the Moroccan-born Umm Musab al-Almaniya is said to have been the teacher. Court testimony of Carla-Josephine S. (in the presence of the author), Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf, 30.3.2020.
- 48 The Capture of the 4th Regiment Base in Wilayat Shamal Baghdad. *Dabiq*, no. 9, Sha'ban 1436/May–June 2015, pp. 29 f.
- 49 Some returnees also called the organisation "Amniyat" (in Arabic) or "Emniyet" (in Turkish) or "Police of the Soldiers". Court testimony of Derya Ö. (in the presence of the author), Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf, 4.10.2019. Ö's German husband Mario Sciannimanica (a.k.a. Abu Zubair) was a member of the secret police, before he was killed by it, probably on suspicion of espionage.
- 50 Björn Stritzel: Folterte und mordete ISIS-Terrorist Nils D. in Syrien? *BILD*, 2.3.2016.
- 51 Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) et al.: Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe, p. 12.
- 52 Reports about suicide vests for women are widespread especially for the early period in Syria in 2013/2014 and for later phases in 2017/2018.
- 53 One well-known case is that of the Australian Shadi Jabar (a.k.a. Umm Isa al-Amrikiya), who remotely coached the young German Safia S. up until she carried out the attack in the Hanover Hauptbahnhof railway station on 26 February 2016.
- 54 David Trayner: "Mrs Terror" Sally Jones to lead female jihadi army against West. *Daily Star*, 12.9.2016. <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/sally-jones-isis-dash-mrs-17117228> (last accessed: 31.5.2021); Josie Ensor: Revealed: Isil bride Sally Jones's role in training female recruits for attacks on West. *The Telegraph*, 11.9.2016 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/11/revealed-isis-white-widow-sally-jones-role-in-training-female-r/> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 55 Court testimony of Carla-Josephine S. (in the presence of the author), Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf, 30.3.2020.
- 56 Ibid.

5. TERROR ATTACKS AND ATTEMPTED TERROR ATTACKS IN GERMANY

The first jihadists began returning from Syria in 2013. From then on, government officials, the security services and the public began to fear that former Syria fighters and their women posed a great danger. That the concern was justified became apparent in 2014 and 2015 as returnees from combat zones in the Middle East were responsible for numerous terrorist attacks and plots above all in France and Belgium. These culminated on 13 November 2015 in the Paris attacks by IS terrorists, who killed 130 people and injured hundreds. Germany was not only itself affected, because France is Germany's most important European ally, two Germans were among the victims and the German national team's football match against France in the Stade de France was one of the targets. The perpetrators travelled from Syria via Greece, the "Balkan route" and Germany in the prior months and benefited, in so doing, from the almost complete collapse of the EU external border control from 2014 until the beginning of 2016. As many experts feared, the IS took advantage of the unique opportunity to send fighters to Western Europe without their having to expect any difficulties when gaining entry.

The situation showed how problematic the dependence of German security services on electronic intercepts by US security authorities is. For the latter failed in decrypting the jihadists' communications via social media – primarily the instant messaging service Telegram – on time. As a result, IS was not only able to send attackers to France unhindered, it was also able to mobilise supporters who had not travelled to Syria at all previously or had left Syria without an assigned mission. The result was a dramatic deterioration of the security situation in Western Europe as a whole and a wave of terror attacks in Germany in 2016:

- › On 26 February, the jihadist Safia S., who was just 16 years old, stabbed a federal police officer in the Hanover Hauptbahnhof railway station. The perpetrator was in close contact with an Australian IS attack planner in Syria and recorded a video taking responsibility for the attack according to the police. IS refrained from publishing the video, however.
- › On 16 April, this was followed by the bombing of a Sikh temple in Essen, in which the priest was seriously injured. The perpetrators were three, likewise just 16-year-old, Turkish youngsters, who disseminated IS propaganda on social media. But no direct connection of them to the organisation could be proven.
- › On 18 July, there was then the axe and knife attack by the Pashtun refugee Muhammad Riad (a.k.a. Riaz Khan Ahmadzai) in a regional train near Würzburg, in which five tourists from Hong Kong were injured, some of them seriously. The perpetrator was shot dead shortly after the attack. He too was in close contact with IS. His video claiming responsibility for the attack was subsequently published by the IS media agency *Amaq*.
- › Just seven days later, the Syrian Mohammad Daleel detonated a backpack filled with explosives in the vicinity of a music festival in Ansbach. 15 people were wounded and the perpetrator died. *Amaq* disseminated a video of the Syrian taking responsibility for the attack and the IS magazine *al-Naba* published an obituary.⁵⁷
- › Finally, on 19 December, Anis Amri, a Tunisian, drove a truck into a bustling Christmas market at Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, killing 13 people. He was shot dead by the police in Italy while on the run. Amri too had been in contact with IS and his video claiming responsibility for the attack was published by the organisation shortly after.

All the attacks other than the one in Essen were remotely “directed” attacks. The latter represent an important terrorist innovation, which has greatly increased IS's capacity to strike abroad. Since 2014, the organisation moved more and more to calling on individuals to carry out attacks on their own. The most important reason was that many IS supporters could no longer travel since security services around the world prevented people from travelling to Syria after the proclamation of the Caliphate. At the same time, IS used the increasing spread of encrypted means of communication (like Telegram, above all), in order to recruit supporters who remained in their home countries to carry out attacks and – from 2016 on – to advise them on target selection and modus operandi.

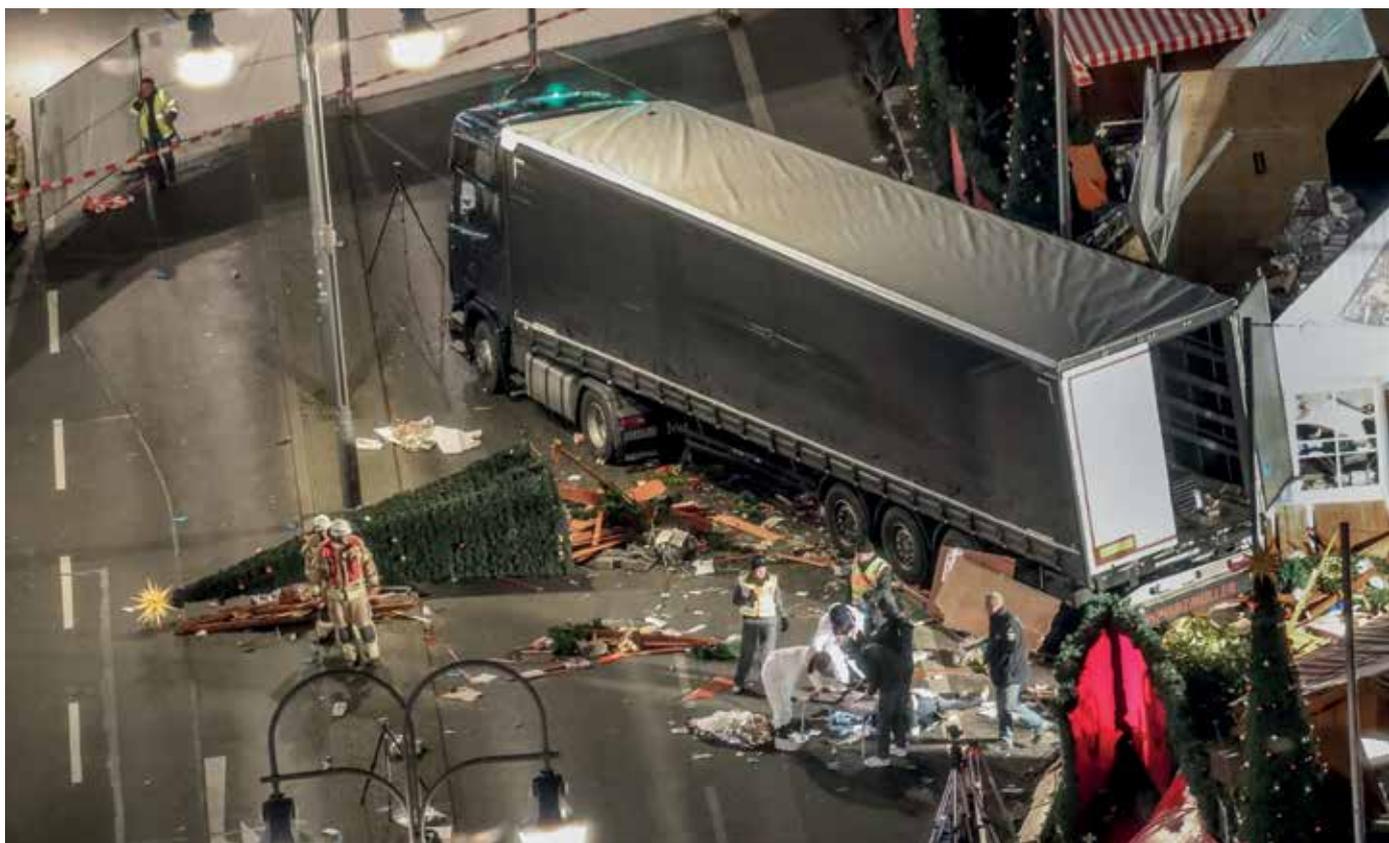
The IS's remotely “directed” attacks represented a new form of attack combining tactical elements of the “organised” and “inspired” attacks that had hitherto predominated. “Organised” attacks are planned, organised, and carried out by IS. The terrorists are trained in Iraq, Syria, or other IS areas of operations and then sent to the target country to carry out an attack. The Paris attacks on 13 November 2015 are an example of this kind

of attack. Organised attacks usually result in a high number of victims and are thus successful from the organisation's point of view. On the other hand, the long and dangerous journeys involved speak against such attacks, and the plotters' communications, moreover, can be intercepted. This vulnerability already became clear in 2016, when the number of successful centrally planned attacks by IS rapidly declined, because counterterrorism operations against the organisation were increasingly successful.

Apart from the "organised" attack, there is also the "inspired" attack. The perpetrator – who usually acts alone – has no contact with IS, but is motivated to carry out an attack by the organisation's appeals. The advantage of these actions (for IS) is that it is very difficult for the security services to prevent them since the perpetrator has neither to travel nor to communicate. The "disadvantage" is that lone-wolf perpetrators of this kind (at least when they are Islamists) usually bring about relatively limited damage. Therefore, starting in 2015 at the latest, the IS put together teams of propagandists, who built up contacts via social media like Telegram and advised potential perpetrators on choice of weapons and target selection – as occurred in the cases of the Hanover, Würzburg, Ansbach, and Berlin attacks in 2016. Some of the most serious terror attacks in Europe since 2014 were remotely "directed" attacks, including, for instance, the attack in Stockholm on 7 April 2017 – when an Uzbek assailant ran over and killed five people with a truck in the city centre.⁵⁸

Despite the success of many remotely "directed" attacks, IS continued to plan "organised" attacks and turned its attention to Germany. In the second half of 2016, a total of three

Berlin on 19 December 2016: a classic example of a remotely "directed" terror attack



two-member teams – the four known members were from Germany – were prepared in Syria to travel back home, where they were supposed to carry out terror attacks modelled on the Paris attacks on unknown targets: possibly including an alternative music festival near Hildesheim. The Swiss jihadist Thomas-Marcel Christen (a.k.a. Abu Hajir, a.k.a. Abu Musab al-Almani), was responsible for the plots. Christen had lived in Frankfurt am Main for several years before leaving for Syria and had converted to the Salafist version of Islam there. He arrived in Syria in spring 2013 and joined the IS precursor organisation Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen. This enabled him quickly to move up the ranks in the IS secret police, in which he already held a leadership position in Manbij in 2014.⁵⁹ He is said to have trained some of the Paris attackers of November 2015 and to have had responsibility for attacks in German-speaking countries in the external operations division.⁶⁰ The plot failed because one of the groups of two was arrested in Turkey and one member of the second was killed and the other detained while still in Syria. Nothing more is known of the third group. Christen is said to have been seriously injured in an airstrike in 2017.⁶¹

The threat diminished with the defeats suffered by IS starting in 2016 and even more clearly after 2017, but more terror plots still followed.

The case of the Syrian refugee Jaber al-Bakr was particularly dramatic. Bakr travelled to Germany in February 2015 and quickly began plotting an attack on the transportation infrastructure. In summer 2016, there was a first tip from US agencies, who had intercepted a communication between Bakr and an IS contact in Syria: hence, the plot was remotely directed. Bakr is said to have had the Berlin-Tegel airport in mind as target. He was working on an explosive device and a suicide vest when police tried and failed to arrest him in his flat in Chemnitz at the beginning of October 2016. Despite a large number of police officers involved in the operation, he was able to get away. Instead, Bakr was caught a short time later by Syrians in Leipzig in whose home he wanted to hide, but who recognised him as a wanted terrorist and handed him over to the police. Bakr hanged himself in his cell just two days later.⁶²

The German-Iraqi Kurd Yad A. (a.k.a. Abu Irbab al-Kurdi or “Father of Terrorism”) in Ludwigshafen, who was just twelve years old at the time, was also remotely directed by IS. He originally wanted to leave for Syria to join IS, but in 2016 he could not find any way of doing so anymore. Instead, he sought to make contact with the organisation and other people who shared his beliefs, and they persuaded him to carry out an attack in Germany. One of his contacts was a German in the ranks of IS who called himself “Mujahid” (jihad fighter), a second was the Austrian Lorenz K. (a.k.a. Sabur Ibn Gharib), who was himself planning an attack in Germany, but failed already during the preparations for it in November and December 2016. The two contacts convinced Yad A. to carry out a suicide attack with a homemade bomb. The youngster originally wanted to bomb a church in Ludwigshafen but was persuaded by Sabur to choose a local Christmas market as target.⁶³ On 26 November 2016, Yad A. put his plan into action and only failed because the bomb’s detonators did not work.⁶⁴

The plot of the Tunisian Sief Allah H. was also dangerous. H. had first entered Germany in November 2016 and was living in Cologne. After twice trying unsuccessfully to get to Syria via Turkey to join IS, in summer 2017, he decided with his German wife to carry out an attack in Germany. He planned to make a homemade explosive device containing the poison ricin, in order to kill as many people as possible. After a tip from American authorities, H. was placed under surveillance and arrested in June 2018.⁶⁵

The fact that the danger had not yet been exorcised even after 2017 was also made clear by the case of a group of Tajiks. According to the Federal Public Prosecutor General, in 2019 they had begun plotting attacks in Germany following consultations with IS officials in Syria and Afghanistan. A member of the group was sentenced to seven years in prison after a first trial.⁶⁶ The other members of the group were sentenced to, by German standards, long prison terms in late May 2022, although the verdicts remained subject to appeal.

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- 57 Abu Yusuf al-Karrar (in Arabic). *Al-Naba*, issue 40, 21.10.1437 [= 26.07.2016].
- 58 Christina Anderson: Sweden Mourns Stockholm Attack Victims; Suspect Is Formally Identified. *New York Times*, 10.4.2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/world/europe/sweden-terror-attack.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 59 Nils D. provided the first information about the "German" Abu Hajir from Frankfurt. He also testified that Christen had been trained by Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen along with other jihadists from Lohberg in 2013. Court testimony of Nils D. (in the presence of the author), Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf, 20.1.2016.
- 60 Holger Stark/Yassin Musharbash: Willkommen zurück. *DIE ZEIT*, 17.10.2018. <https://www.zeit.de/2018/43/islamischer-staat-syrien-rueckkehr-verhandlung> (last accessed: 31.5.2021). For further details on Thomas Christen, cf. Björn Stritzel: Drei Terror-Teams. So wollte ISIS in Deutschland ein Massaker anrichten. *BILD* 15.11.2019. Stritzel writes that Christen was responsible for planning throughout Europe.
- 61 Stritzel: Drei Terror-Teams, op. cit.
- 62 Dirk Banse et al.: Jagd auf al-Bakr. Das war knapp. Wie Deutschland der Katastrophe entkam. *Die Welt*, 17.10.2016. <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article158789912/Das-war-knapp-Wie-Deutschland-der-Katastrophe-entkam.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021); Nicolas Richter/Ronen Steinke: Ein Bombenbauer unter dieser Nummer. Übers Telefon spüren Geheimdienste den terrorverdächtigen Dschaber al-Bakr auf. Als die Polizei übernimmt, gleitet der Fall ins Chaos. Nun kommt eine Strafanzeige hinzu. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22.10.2016.
- 63 Thomas Hoisl: Die verstörenden Telegram-Kontakte des Wiener Terrorverdächtigen Lorenz K. *Vice*, 9.1.2018. <https://www.vice.com/de/article/ev5a3p/die-verstorenden-telegram-kontakte-des-wiener-terrorverdachtigen-lorenz-k> (last accessed: 31.5.2021). For a detailed discussion of Lorenz K.'s network, cf. Guido Steinberg: Jihadism in Austria: A Dangerous Scene with Considerable Ideological Reach. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V., 2021, pp. 20 f.
- 64 Jörg Diehl/Hasnain Kazim: Zwölfjähriger bastelte Bombengürtel. *Spiegel Online*, 13.1.2018. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/ludwigshafen-anschlagsversuch-zwoelfjaehriger-bastelte-bombenguertel-a-1187516.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 65 For the details of this case, cf. Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf: Urteil gegen Sief Allah H., Düsseldorf, 26.3.2020.
- 66 Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf (press release): Urteil in dem Verfahren gegen Ravsan B. wegen mitgliedshaftlicher Beteiligung an einer terroristischen Vereinigung im Ausland, Pressemitteilung Nr. 4/2021, 26.1.2021. https://www.olg-duesseldorf.nrw.de/behoerde/presse/archiv/Pressemitteilungen_aus_2021/20210126_PM_Urteil-Ravsan-B_/index.php (last accessed: 31.5.2021).

6. COUNTER- TERRORISM DIFFICULTIES

Since 2001, German authorities have had great difficulties in combating Islamist terrorism: above all, in terms of early detection of terror plots using human and technical resources. The fact that the limited capacities of the intelligence services and police in both areas did not have even more dramatic consequences was thanks above all to the support of US security agencies, which in almost all cases provided the initial information about the plots in question. How important the FBI, CIA, and NSA are for Germany's and Europe's internal security became apparent in the course of 2015 and 2016, when such tips repeatedly failed to materialise and the security situation got dramatically worse. For a brief period, US agencies had no or only insufficient information on impending terror attacks: for instance, before Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016 or before the Hanover, Würzburg, and Ansbach attacks in Germany. As soon as the US agencies had improved their technical surveillance over the course of 2016, they again reliably furnished information about terror plots like, for instance, those of Jaber al-Bakr and Sief Allah H.

The case of Anis Amri showed that the problems with German counterterrorism go deeper. North Rhine-Westphalia's Bureau of Criminal Investigation or *Landeskriminalamt* correctly recognised the Tunisian as a dangerous terrorist and thus placed him under surveillance. But when Amri moved to Berlin in February 2016, he was – presumably due to a lack of surveillance officers – arrested on arrival and his biometric information was gathered for purposes of identification. He was thus warned. In the following months, he changed his behaviour, dealt drugs and was classified by the Berlin police as a petty criminal and no longer as being dangerous. The surveillance of him ended, thus paving the

way for the Breitscheidplatz attack on 19 December. Even just a suspect moving from a *Land* (like NRW) that is better positioned in terms of counterterrorism to one that is in a worse position can thus become a security risk.

The case highlights the problems of Germany's extremely fragmented security architecture. In Germany, there are altogether 38 agencies that are responsible for counterterrorism: including 32 regional agencies just on the level of the *Länder*.⁶⁷ Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, there have been attempts at greater centralisation. The first and most important step was the founding of the Joint Counterterrorism Centre (GTAZ) in Berlin-Treptow in December 2004. The attempt by then Minister of the Interior Otto Schily (SPD) to increase centralisation failed due to the opposition of the *Länder*, such that he opted for an emergency solution. Formally, the GTAZ is not an independent agency, but rather a "platform for cooperation" among the federal and regional agencies involved in counterterrorism, which – under the de facto leadership of the BKA – is supposed to ensure better coordination and thus oversight.

Although the GTAZ eliminated many coordination problems, the Amri case already revealed the continuing weaknesses of the German security architecture – and of the security services of some of Germany's *Länder*. After the Berlin attack, the Minister of the Interior – this time Thomas de Maizière (CDU) – called for greater centralisation especially of the bureaus of the domestic intelligence agency, the *Verfassungsschutz*.⁶⁸ But the *Länder* yet again resisted, such that in summer 2017, the Risk Management Working Group was founded in the GTAZ instead, which henceforth was supposed to classify known *Gefährder* – "endangerers", Germany's bureaucratic term for people who are assumed to be capable of carrying out a terror attack at any time – according to their dangerousness. The unit was also supposed to recommend appropriate measures to the regional security agencies or, as needed, to initiate surveillance measures itself. The GTAZ thus possessed an instrument with which it could coordinate all the steps taken against "endangerers" nationwide, whereas up until 2017, their classification and surveillance was strictly a competency of the *Länder*.⁶⁹

In addition, both the federal government and the *Länder* repeatedly responded by banning associations, closing mosques, and imprisoning preachers and recruiters. The first to be affected was Millatu Ibrahim in 2012 and then its successor organisation Tauhid Germany in March 2015. "The True Religion" and the "Read!" campaign followed in November 2016. The Fussilet-33 mosque was closed in February 2017; the Hildesheim mosque in March 2017. The trial of the preacher Abu Wala and his alleged IS recruitment network became the most important Islamist terrorism trial since the Düsseldorf cell in 2014. Moreover, starting in 2015 at the latest, the departure of German fighters for Syria was prevented more frequently, and an amendment to section 89a of the Criminal Code that came into force on 1 July 2017 ("Preparation of a serious offence endangering the state") made it a punishable offence.⁷⁰ The German government supported, moreover, the efforts of the US-led anti-IS coalition in Syria and in Iraq by dispatching reconnaissance planes and with weapons supplies and by providing training for the Iraqi Kurds.

The December 2016 Berlin attack represented a turning point for domestic security policy. This was noticeable, above all, in changed deportation practices (a competency of the *Länder*). In the following years, “endangerers” were deported whenever possible. Evidently in order to make an example of him, the jihadist preacher Sami Aidoudi from Bochum was deported to his home country Tunisia in 2018 – after legal wrangling over his German residency that had already begun in 2006. Besides Tunisia, potential terrorists were also increasingly sent back to Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and other countries. Many Turkish citizens were affected more often than before, no matter how long they had already been living in Germany. It was particularly striking that even Chechens were deported to Russia: a move that would have been unthinkable just a few years prior due to the Russian Federation’s harsh treatment of the Chechen minority and the poor conditions in Russian prisons.⁷¹

But the problem of the many Syrian jihadists who had carried out or plotted terror attacks in Germany since 2016 remained unresolved for the time being. The Ansbach and Dresden attacks, as well as the plans of Jaber al-Bakr and some other foiled plots, showed how dangerous young Syrian terrorists could become. Inasmuch as Syrians still cannot be deported to their home country, since they could face torture or even death, the problem remains. The fact that the German government has in the meanwhile issued authorisations to prosecute under Section 129b of the German Criminal Code for up to 20 Syrian organisations and organisations operating in Syria could be a response to this problem; in addition to IS and al-Nusra Front, the organisations in question also include numerous non-jihadist Islamist groups.⁷² This approach has led to a sharp increase in the number of Syrians who have been convicted of being members of or supporting terrorist organisations in Germany since 2014.

The government went even a step further in the case of Germans that departed to join the IS and were being held in Syrian-Kurdish prisons or refugee camps from 2017 on. In 2021, there were about 120 adults in this situation, almost 30 of whom were men. They had fallen into Kurdish hands in the wake of the IS’s defeats. US authorities had already asked Germany to take back these Germans in 2017, but the German government refused putting forward what were evidently mere pretexts.⁷³ Berlin presumably feared public opposition to their repatriation. The fact that most of the detainees in the Kurdish prisons and camps had already lived in Syria with the IS for several years, and hence were regarded by the security services as particularly convinced and dangerous jihadists, could also have played a role. Some female jihadists and their children have been repatriated from the internment camps in the meanwhile, but these are still only isolated cases. There are no indications that men might soon follow.

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- 67 Namely, the 16 regional Bureaus of Criminal Investigation and the 16 regional bureaus of the *Verfassungsschutz*. In addition, there are the Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BKA), the Federal Office of the *Verfassungsschutz* (BfV), the Foreign Intelligence Service or *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND), the Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD), the Customs Bureau of Investigation (ZKA) and the Federal Police (*Bundespolizei*).
- 68 Thomas de Maizière: Leitlinien für einen starken Staat in schwierigen Zeiten. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3.1.2017.
- 69 Florian Flade: Neue BKA-Einheit hat Gefährder ständig im Visier. *Die Welt*, 4.7.2017. <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article166234536/Neue-BKA-Einheit-hat-Gefaehrder-staendig-im-Visier.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 70 The amendment in question is paragraph 2a: "(2a) Subsection (1) also applies to offenders who prepare a serious offence endangering the state by undertaking to leave Germany for the purpose of committing a serious offence endangering the state or the acts referred to in subsection (2) no. 1 in order to enter a state where people are given training and instructions within the meaning of subsection (2) no. 1.": § 89a Strafgesetzbuch (StGB). <https://dejure.org/gesetze/StGB/89a.html> (last accessed: 31.5.2021).
- 71 The first case of this sort was the deportation of the Chechen IS returnee Suleym Khankarov (born 1997) from Herzogenrath in the suburbs of Aachen to Russia at the end of 2017. He had spent several months with IS as a 17-year-old in 2014.
- 72 The groups in question are Ahrar al-Sham, Liwa at-Tauhid, Junud al-Sham, Jaish al-Muhajireen wa-l-Ansar and numerous smaller Islamist and Salafist groups.
- 73 The government argued, for instance, that it could not provide consular assistance to the Germans, since there is no German embassy in Syria. The argument does not stand up to scrutiny, since repatriation by the BND can take place via Iraq (and in at least two cases in 2015, already did so). There is a German consulate in Erbil where formalities can be taken care of.

7. OLD AND NEW THREATS

Since 2017, the number of terror attacks and terror plots has fallen sharply. But this is undoubtedly due more to the defeats of IS in the Middle East and improved US technical surveillance and less to the effectiveness of Germany's still fragmented, incomplete, and error-prone counterterrorism. It is particularly worrying that despite its clear dependence on the USA, Germany was not willing to take back German jihadists from Syria, as the USA had requested. Since Germany's contribution to the military efforts at combating IS had been hardly more than symbolic, the US side undoubtedly regarded fulfilment of its request as self-evident. President Donald Trump's angry outburst in February 2019, when he threatened to release European jihadists captured in Syria, if Germany, among others, did not repatriate them, must be understood on this background. There is no reason to fear that the US administration under Joe Biden would make good on this threat or even just reduce its cooperation with its German partners. But Germany should not take the US help for granted. In the long run, it is risky to "outsource" large portions of German counterterrorism to the USA without providing anything significant in return.

This is especially so because since 2020, IS, having gone underground, has been gaining strength again in Iraq and Syria. Although for the moment, this is more a problem for those two countries and their neighbours, it cannot be ruled out that the organisation will broaden its radius of action again in the future. It is present in many more countries today than it was in 2014, and even if the IS offshoots appear relatively weak today, this can change quickly. This applies to Afghanistan above all, where the withdrawal of US troops in 2021 expanded the room for manoeuvre of the local IS branch there (IS Khorasan). Starting already in August, the number of IS attacks in the Hindu Kush increased

rapidly, and the Taliban found it very difficult to defend themselves against them. In addition, after the defeat of IS in Syria in 2019, many of its leaders and fighters were able to escape to Turkey and from there to other countries and also to preserve certain structures. The Vienna attack on 2 November 2020, which exhibited some of the characteristics of a remotely “directed” attack, was a clear warning sign for Europe. The same applies for attacks in Paris, Nice, and Dresden that took place at around the same time. Although no direct links to IS could be proven, the attacks demonstrate the continued appeal of jihadist ideas in Europe.

Without the help of a strong organisation, IS-“inspired” lone-wolf perpetrators have only rarely been able to carry out attacks claiming a high number of victims and that are thus “successful” (from the point of view of the terrorists). But if a group like IS or al-Qaida succeeds in gaining strength again, the jihadists will find many followers also in Europe. The greatest threat for Germany continues to come from Syria. On the one hand, this is because IS has regained strength there and in neighbouring Iraq and is carrying out more and more attacks in its now clandestine form. In the Idlib province in north-western Syria, moreover, several jihadist organisations are continuing the fight against the Assad regime. The strongest of them are the Syrian Liberation Authority (Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham or HTS for short) and the Guardians of Religion (Hurras al-Din) organisations, both of which emerged out of al-Nusra Front and are at least close to al-Qaida. They benefit above all from the (passive) support of Turkey, which maintains a de facto protectorate in Idlib. Hundreds of foreigners are fighting in the ranks of the jihadists, including several dozen Germans. For the time being, the groups are concentrating on the fight against the Assad regime. If, however, HTS, Hurras al-Din, and other groups can continue to assert themselves, they are likely to become a threat to German and European security as well.

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In the present study, Guido Steinberg analyses the development of the jihadist scene in Germany over the past two decades. He names pioneers and forerunners of German jihadism and discusses the causes and consequences of the exodus of many of its supporters to Syria. Steinberg depicts the role played by German fighters and women in Islamic State and the extent to which IS's terror plots affected the security situation in Germany. Finally, Steinberg discusses the weaknesses of the German security architecture and the challenges that the most recent developments since the military defeat of Islamic State pose for the security services.