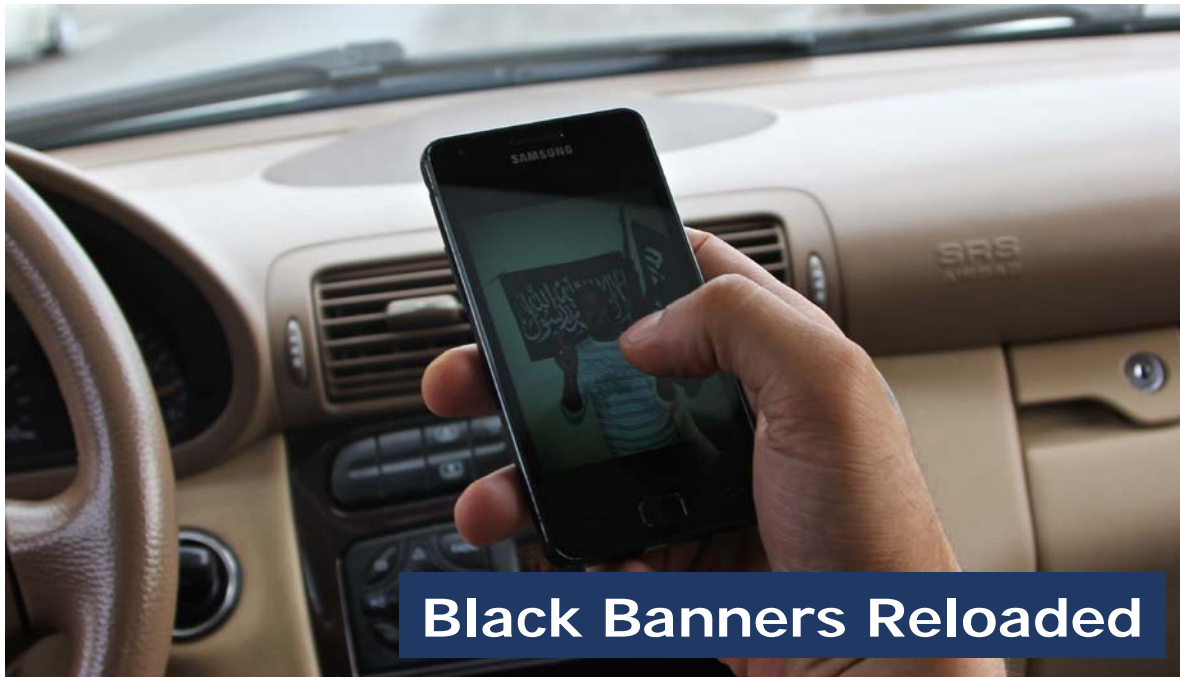




Mediterranean

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REGIONAL PROGRAM POLITICAL DIALOGUE SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN



A GUIDE FOR EU-NATO SECURITY COOPERATION ON FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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Key Findings

- ISIS' center of gravity lays at the intersection of the terror network's ability to translate military success into political power, control of vast territory, and function as a statelet. In the absence of a viable day after plan, the ongoing military operations will not eradicate the terrorist organization, but will lead to a shift in its center of gravity. There is a grave risk that ISIS may transform into the champion of 'global jihad' in a de-territorial fashion.
- Foreign fighters would play a substantial role in ISIS' transformation. Especially, the returnees with their intentions to pursue the legacy of the so-called Caliphate could give a notorious boost to the homegrown extremism potential of the Euro-Mediterranean area.
- Recently, some experts draw attention to the prospects of a merger between al-Qaeda and ISIS. Although the organizational structures of these two terrorist entities differ to a great extent, an operational cooperation between the affiliated groups could lead to serious threats to the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Another trend to monitor regarding the foreign fighters remains the category that could be classified as the 'radical mercenaries'. These militants will likely pursue the ideal of raising the black banners of the so-called Caliphate in another place. In this regard, we might see an influx of foreign fighters into

the Maghreb and Sahel region, as well as other parts of Africa. Without a doubt, such a development would plague the Euro-Mediterranean security environment.

- The threat landscape along the southern coastlines of the Mediterranean could be depicted as a series of Pandora's boxes intertwined in a matryoshka fashion. Tunisia's homegrown militancy converts into Libya's foreign fighter problem; the power vacuum in Libya leads to terrorist militancy in the western desert area of Egypt; and the western desert militancy throws a lifeline to the terrorist presence in Sinai since it diverts the Egyptian security forces' operational focus.
- The lack of border control, the power vacuum emanating from failed or fragile states, the incapacity of national security sectors, and the Western states' inadequate understanding of the regional strategic cultural landscape may lead to a reloaded ISIS problem following the terrorist group's major setbacks in Syria and Iraq.
- More dangerously than ever, some open-source pieces of evidence now suggest that ISIS militants from the north Caucasus might be moving to North Africa.
- NATO has the capability to address some of the security issues in the region. In this regard, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub are two key assets. Besides, the ongoing intelligence reform is promising. It is of vital importance to understand that most of the actors of the MENA region have a skeptical view about the Western political and security bodies. Especially, the indispensable security and intelligence cooperation with the Mediterranean Dialogue partners can only be maximized through a case-by-case approach, and, by all means, paying utmost attention to the strategic cultural factors.
- Intelligence sharing within NATO has always been a complex issue as reflected in various multinational operations. The Alliance has been renewing its intelligence structures in recent years, which led to the establishment of a specific Assistant Secretary General post. At this point, the decision to approach the ISIS issue whether as a military intelligence case to protect the deployed forces or through a broader lens to address the homegrown radicalization will be determining. Besides, following the Warsaw Summit, the European Union and NATO have agreed to foster their intelligence and security cooperation. Extending this vision to the regional partners across the Euro-Mediterranean area remains a must to confront 'ISIS reloaded'.
- Syria has not only served as a training ground for ISIS, but also a pool of selection through which the surviving militants boosted their resilience and adaptation capacity to a notable extent. Indeed, the ongoing military efforts have succeeded in targeting the territorial control of ISIS. Yet, the returnee foreign fighters are already equipped with very critical battlefield experience against a wide array of actors ranging from the US-led anti-ISIS coalition to the Lebanese Hezbollah. Such a background alone would be enough to inspire the homegrown extremists across the Euro-Mediterranean area.

I. The Changing Threat Landscape in the Euro-Mediterranean Area

Shifts in the ISIS Center of Gravity and the Need for a New Terrorism Risk Modeling and Intelligence Guidance to Counter the New Violent Impact

At its' peak, some 10 million people were living in the ISIS controlled territory, more than the total of the Baltic States. In 2015, ISIS was a beast ranging from Mosul to Raqqa, enjoying the hydrocarbon resources of Deir ez Zour, threatening to flood Iraq by using the Mosul Dam, and more importantly, the group had become the first non-state actor physically challenging the Sykes-Picot *status quo* decisively.

Thanks to the anti-ISIS coalition, Turkey's Euphrates Shield, as well as the partial shift in the Russian target set in Syria, ISIS, within three years, has backed down from being a terrorist statelet into a very dangerous, but a militarily contained violent armed group. At least, this is the case for Iraq and Syria.

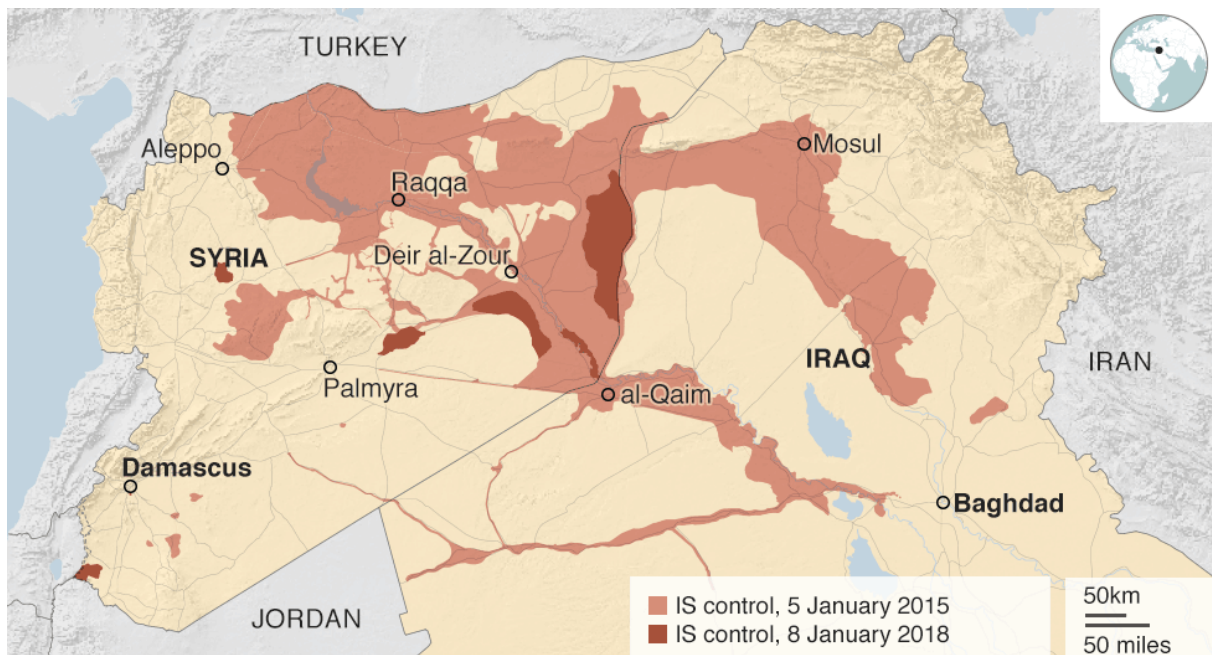


Figure 1: ISIS's territorial losses since January 2015¹

On the one hand, destroying the most significant challenge to the free world in the 21st century, and in one of the most problematic regions of the globe, marks, by all means, a vital breakthrough for global security. On the other hand, such a swift territorial setback could lead to the mutation of the terrorist network.

At this point, the key question arises as follows: Are the US-led coalition and the West successfully prepared for the defeat of ISIS; and, are all these actors ready to face the territorially defeated ISIS? In order to give a precise response to this question, one should understand a simple, yet crushing fact. Defeating ISIS in the way the anti-ISIS coalition has been doing will not make the group vanish. Rather, it will change the terrorist network's center of gravity.

Military-strategic analyses on ISIS show that the terrorist organization's center of gravity was formed at the intersection of physical control of territory, political capacity to function as a statelet, and finally, the ability to translate military control into political power and authority over the local populace.² Fighting ISIS and forcing it to a major territorial setback, especially in the absence of clear way out to mitigate the foreign terrorist fighters risk, would be tantamount to mutate the terrorist network, not wiping it out.

As Daniel Byman spells out precisely, *"most troubling for the long term, the Islamic State has nurtured the flame of jihad around the world. Even as the group declines, the ideas it champions—the necessity of a caliphate, the glory of brutality and the evil of Western states—have spread further, as the staggering volume*

¹ BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

² For a detailed assessment of ISIS' center of gravity in a Clausewitzian sense, see: Jessica, D. Lewis. *The Islamic State: A Counter – Strategy for a Counter – State*, ISW, Washington D.C., July 2014.

of foreign fighters suggests. The Islamic State's propaganda is extensive and almost ubiquitous. It, or would-be successor organizations, will try to harvest the ideas that the early Islamic State leaders planted."³

In other words, if the territorial complications go as suspected— namely by defeating, yet, not eradicating ISIS – there is a grave risk of a mutation in the center of gravity as follows:

- The terrorist group's ability to translate military control into political power could mutate and become the ability to translate the warfighting experience into a boost to local radical networks in the Euro-Mediterranean region;
- The physical control of territory, the heartland of ISIS' center of gravity, could develop into the legacy of the Caliphate as a post-modern golden age icon that only lived for a few years;
- And the terrorist group's political ability to function as a statelet could turn into a hybrid capacity to function as the champion of a groundbreaking global violence campaign in a de-territorial fashion.

The key task of fighting ISIS is not over; it is not even close to a firm conclusion. In fact, just like the terror network, counter-ISIS strategies and concepts have to transform in order to adapt to the new conditions and the changing threat landscape. According to a United Nations report published at the time of writing, ISIS is transforming into a global terror network with looser operational control over its members.⁴

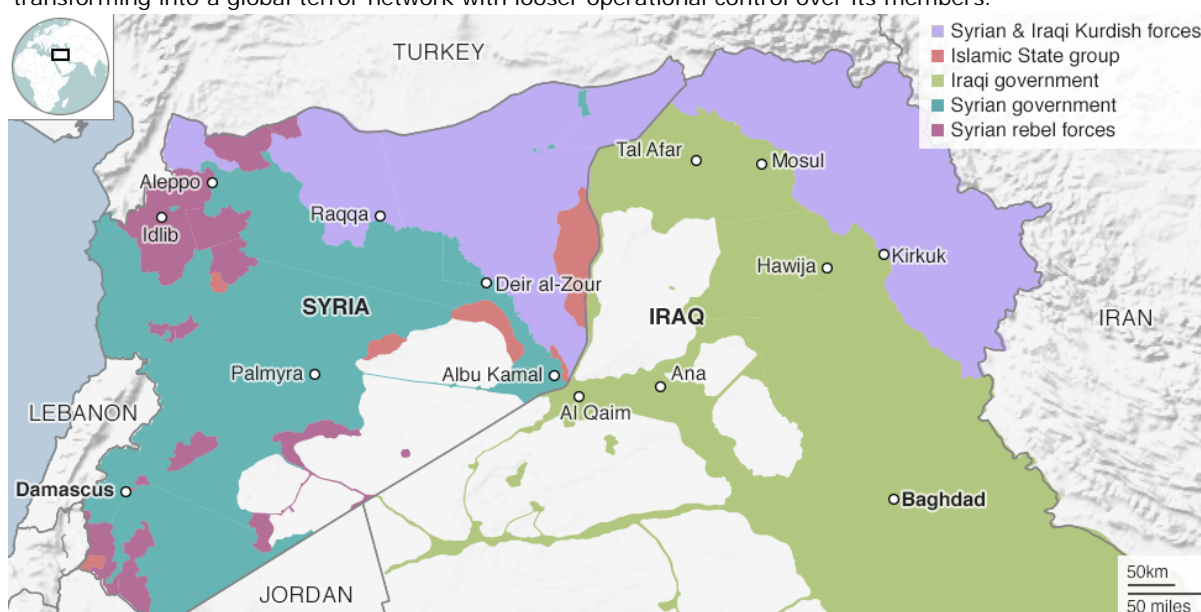


Figure 2: Comparative Visual Assessment of ISIS' Territorial Losses in Iraq and Syria⁵

ISIS and Al-Qaeda: Intra Terrorist Fight or Merger?

An apocalyptic scenario, which underpins the very need for a terrorism risk assessment model and intelligence guidance for the Euro-Mediterranean area, concerns the probability of a merger between the al-Qaeda network and ISIS, especially the foreign fighters currently under the notorious black banners. In an audio posted in April 2017, al-Qaeda's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri addressed the extremists in Syria to prepare for a long battle "against the Crusaders and their allies, the Shi'ites and Alawites" in the terrorist network's parlance. Al-Zawahiri also made it clear that this very battle should not be limited to Syria.⁶ Some analysts assessed that the audio message was an "indirect olive branch to ISIS for a possible merger, to fight a common enemy."⁷ Furthermore, in the very same month that al-Zawahiri's audio was posted, Iraq's Vice President Ayad Allawi

³ Daniel, Byman. "What Happens When ISIS Goes Underground", *The National Interest*, December 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-happens-when-isis-goes-underground-23774?page=2>, Accessed on: February 2015.

⁴ The United Nations Security Council, *Sixth Report Of The Secretary-General On The Threat Posed By ISIL (Da'esh) To International Peace And Security And The Range Of United Nations Efforts In Support Of Member States In Countering The Threat*, 31 January 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1802596.pdf>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

⁵ Retrieved from BCC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

⁶ Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-qaeda-syria/al-qaeda-chief-urges-jihadists-to-use-guerrilla-tactics-in-syria-idUSKBN17P0WI>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

⁷ Abdul, Basit. "An ISIS – Al Qaeda 'Frankenstein' Could be on Its Way", *the National Interest*, May 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/isis%E2%80%93al-qaeda-frankenstein-could-be-its-way-20648>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

explained that he received a piece of intelligence pointing out to the secret meetings between the al-Qaeda and ISIS representatives for a possible alliance or merger.⁸ If confirmed, these hints go beyond questions of open source intelligence (OSINT) or strategic intelligence and would form a trend that counterterrorism intelligence should carefully monitor. Indeed, during the territorial statelet days of ISIS, ideological differences between Baghdadi's rising groups and Zawahiri's notorious al-Qaeda were important. The dispute between ISIS and al-Qaeda was more than a simply intra-extremist power struggle. Major differences in the strategic and ideological approaches had played an important role in the divergence of these terrorist networks. Simply put, while al-Qaeda focuses on fighting what it calls the "far enemy", namely the US and the West, ISIS prioritized the defeat of the "near enemy", namely what these groups call the "apostate" regimes in the Middle East⁹. On the other hand, at present, any merger between these two terrorist organizations would center on ISIS' transformation in terms of its geopolitical approach. Therefore, a new mix of far and near target set could occur.

The prospects for the abovementioned merger scenario would be strongly related to the fate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS' so-called Caliph. A possible, more al-Qaeda friendly succession following al-Baghdadi's (future) confirmed death, or a succession crisis within the top ISIS ranks, could lead the way for the al-Qaeda – ISIS merger. Richard Barrett notes in a recent Soufan Group report,

"If Abu Bakr al Baghdadi [...] is declared dead, some may switch their allegiance (baya) to a local or regional leader of mainstream al-Qaeda or an affiliated group, especially if Ayman al Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda, who expelled al Baghdadi from the movement in 2014, is replaced by a more charismatic and dynamic figure such as Osama bin Laden's son, Hamza. Or they may follow a new leader within IS; but there is no obvious candidate to take over, especially given the criteria of ancestry and qualification set for becoming Caliph. The regional provinces (wilayat) of IS are too small to take over the leadership, but they will provide a local focus for some returnees."¹⁰

At the time of writing, leaked intelligence suggested that ISIS leader al-Baghdadi could be in Syria, seeking harbor injured and suffering from serious health problems.¹¹ Thus, there is ground to take the Soufan Group's warning into consideration.

Furthermore, the referred United Nations report also confirms not only the change in ISIS' characteristics, but also the dangerous convergence between ISIS and al-Qaeda. According to the findings of the report,

"The group continues to give prominence to external attacks and has lost its focus on conquering and holding territory. ISIL is now organized as a global network, with a flat hierarchy and less operational control over its affiliates. Member States have highlighted that the willingness of some members of the ISIL and Al-Qaida networks to support one another's attacks remains a concern, and the potential convergence of the two networks, at least in some areas, is an emerging threat. [...] The fight against ISIL is entering a new phase, with more focus on less visible networks of individuals and cells acting with a degree of autonomy. This presents, to a certain extent, a more difficult challenge for Member States, as well as the international community. Information sharing concerning the identity of foreign terrorist fighters, returnees, relocators and known ISIL members will remain vital. The ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list remains one of the key global instruments in this regard."¹²

Last but not least, it should be noted that ISIS did not only gain a notoriously invaluable warfighting experience in Syria and Iraq, but managed to get its hands on thousands of identity cards, passports, as well as other travel documents. Besides, the terrorist group seems to have the financial acumen to transfer its money to "clean individuals" in less monitored parts of the world, infiltrate into legitimate businesses, and diversify the flow of funds.¹³ All in all, the next counter-ISIS effort, be it facing an al-Qaeda merger or a dead al-Baghdadi, will be a lot more concerned about intelligence sharing, monitoring extremist financing and

⁸ Tom, O'Conner, "Can ISIS and Al – Qaeda Unite to Save One Another in Iraq and Syria?", *Newsweek*, April 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/isis-al-qaeda-unite-save-one-another-585791>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

⁹ Daniel L. Byman and Jennifer R. Williams, "ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism's Global Civil War", Brookings, February 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/isis-vs-al-qaeda-jihadisms-global-civil-war/>, Accessed on: March 08, 2018.

¹⁰ Richard, Barrett. *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Group, 2017, p.7.

¹¹ Al Jazeera English, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-alive-wounded-north-syria-180212150123915.html>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

¹² The United Nations Security Council, *Sixth Report Of The Secretary-General On The Threat Posed By ISIL (Da'esh) To International Peace And Security And The Range Of United Nations Efforts In Support Of Member States In Countering The Threat*, 31 January 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1802596.pdf>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

¹³ Ibid.

funding, using biometric data, and ensuring utmost cooperation between states¹⁴. In other words, monitoring the returnees and foreign terrorist fighters will not only be about conducting heavy surveillance on people, but also on the flow of money. Another surveillance area would be about controlling arms and dangerous material flows around the world – such as the Libyan MANPADS or the looted arms caches of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces. All these tasks necessitate a renewed NATO-EU intelligence cooperation basis, and a new intelligence risk assessment model for the Euro-Mediterranean security.

II. The Foreign Terrorist Fighters Threat and Vulnerability of the Euro-Mediterranean Area

The foreign terrorist fighters at the ranks of ISIS pose serious problems for the Euro-Mediterranean security. During the Afghan Jihad, the foreign component of the *Mujahedeen* was estimated between 5,000 and 20,000. It was this very fighting force that formed the nucleus of al-Qaeda, which dragged the world into a spiral of violence. Notably, even the most conservative estimates about the foreign terrorist fighters of ISIS conclude at least some 30,000 militants who have fought in Iraq and Syria.¹⁵ In addition, Turkey, the NATO country with the most important geopolitical position with regards to the fight against ISIS, has recorded the names of 53,781 individuals from more than 140 countries whose state of residence had serious concerns that they might try to become foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria.¹⁶

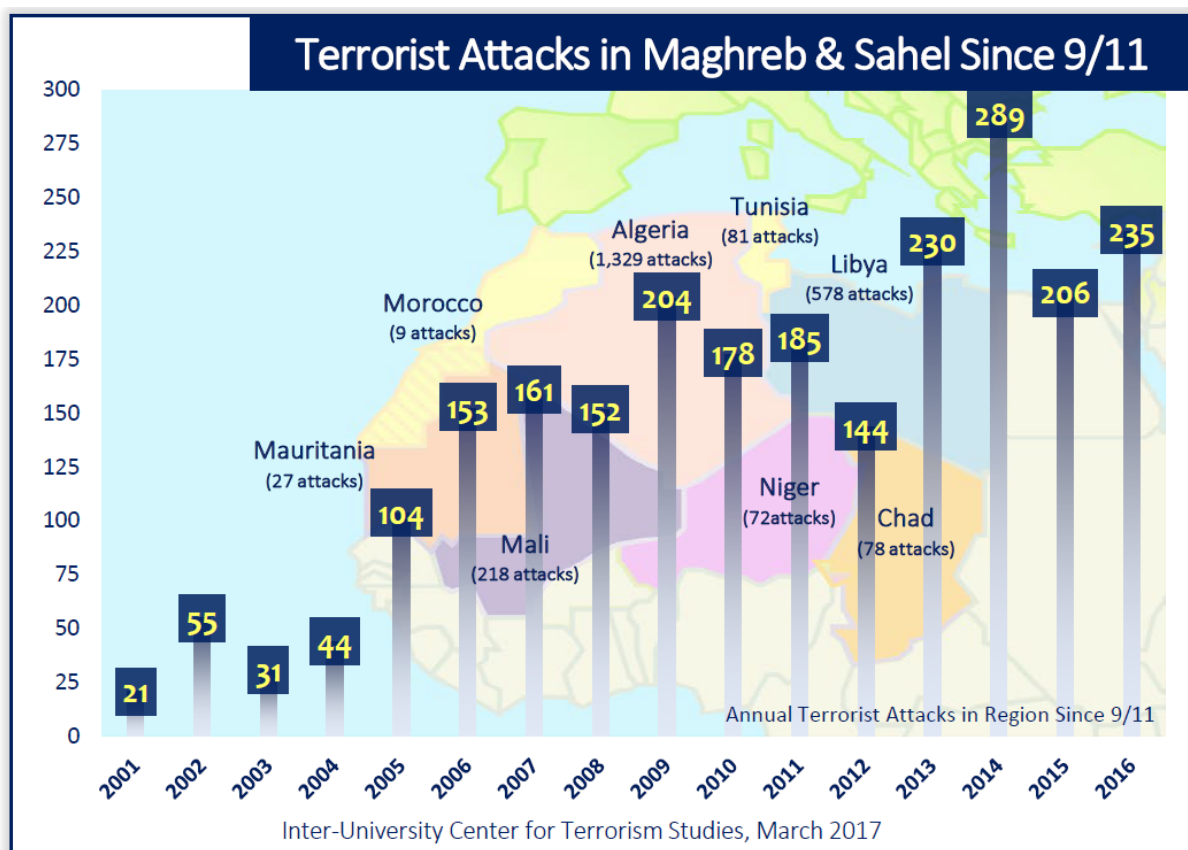


Figure 3: Terrorist Incidents in Maghreb and Sahel since the 9/11 Attacks¹⁷

According to Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre (2018 estimates), Europe might suffer from "an elevated terrorism threat posed by radicalized convicts, returned foreign fighters and other returnees who have direct ties to the legacy of the Islamic State."¹⁸ The underlying argument supporting this intelligence forecast remains the capability of returnees in transforming the local support networks into operational structures. These foreign terrorist fighter returnees would be able to provide critical capabilities – industrial scale improvised explosive devices, advanced drone tactics, and more lethal car bomb techniques – to the existing radicalized local

¹⁴ Matthew, Levitt. "Next State in the Battle Against the Islamic State", the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 8, 2018.

¹⁵ Colin P. Clarke. *The Terrorist Diaspora: After the Fall of the Caliphate*, RAND, Testimony presented before the House Homeland Security Committee Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States, July 13, 2017.

¹⁶ Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Group, 2017, p.16.

¹⁷ Yonah, Alexander. *Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel in 2016*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2017, p.8.

¹⁸ Jane's 360, February 13, 2018, <http://www.janes.com/article/77853/terror-risks-in-europe-to-increase-in-2018-as-islamic-state-s-foreign-fighters-return-jane-s-by-ih-s-markit-says>, Accessed on: February 14, 2018.

groups. Even more worrisome, so far, the precedent prison sentences have not deterred the returnees from heading back to Europe, where, in their thinking, the attractiveness of potential targets exceeds the risk of getting arrested.¹⁹

During his testimony at the US Congress, Colin P. Clarke introduced the term “terrorist diaspora” for depicting the ISIS foreign fighter threat and its possible impact on the global security environment. Within this context, Clarke made a tripartite categorization of the terrorist fighters with regard to their prospective way forward. According to the referred analysis, the hardcore fighters are likely to remain in their pockets in Syria and Iraq. These terrorists would opt for promoting their local alliances, and may attempt to rearm and recuperate until the next favorable conjuncture for the following wave of insurgency. At this period and for this category, any shifts from ISIS to other armed groups should be carefully monitored.²⁰The second category, Clarke explains, would probably act as radical mercenaries finding the next Jihadist endeavor. Just like the foreign fighters among the Afghan *Mujahideen*, who later fought from the Balkans to the Caucasus, the second category of ISIS militants would opt for flowing into the problematic areas of the world. And, the third category remains the returnees.²¹

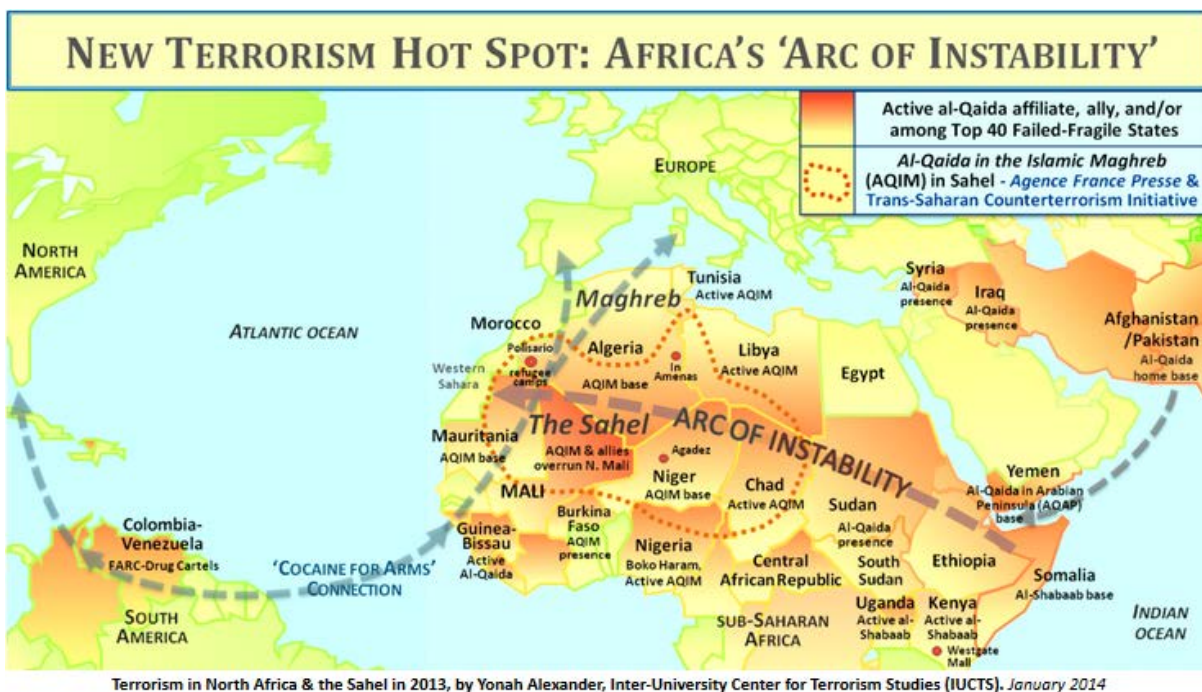


Figure 4: Africa's Arc of Instability as new terrorism hotspot

The report at hand will assess the third category in the subsequent section with a special emphasis on the NATO and EU intelligence and security cooperation. As this paper touches upon, the second category of foreign fighters could flow into the Maghreb and Sahel region if they sense favorable conditions. Thus, this group is of critical importance for the security and stability in the Mediterranean. Two flashpoints, namely Libya and Egypt's troublesome Sinai Peninsula could magnet those “mercenary extremists” who search the next stop of the so-called Caliphate.

In this regard, one should be careful in forecasting the political-military flow and trajectory of terrorism after the “fall of ISIS” in the Levant. In 2016, Iraq and Syria counted for nearly 45% of all terrorist attacks around the globe (24,202), while the Maghreb and Sahel regions witnessed only 235 attacks, which would fall somewhere around 1%.²² In the same year, ISIS lost 22% of its territory in Iraq and Syria as a consequence of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Colin P. Clarke. *The Terrorist Diaspora: After the Fall of the Caliphate*, RAND, Testimony presented before the House Homeland Security Committee Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States, July 13, 2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alexander, Yonah. *Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel in 2016*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2017, p.8.

the coalition operations.²³ Now, as ISIS is on decline in Syria and Iraq, there is a risk of a terrorist influx to the south of the Mediterranean, along with other possible destinations ranging from Afghanistan to Yemen.

Notably, a recent piece of intelligence deserves attention. According to the news coming from the ground, some Russian-speaking ISIS elements, mostly the Chechens along with other North Caucasians, are now traveling to the Sinai (or Wilayat Sinai in the terrorist network's parlance) to pick up where they left off in their violent endeavor.²⁴

The Sinai has a notoriously important value to ISIS' geostrategic calculations. This is where it sees the opportunity to target both Egypt and Israel. Based on the local affiliate Ansar Beit al Maqdis' capabilities, the terrorist network's footprint has shown an uptrend in the geopolitically crucial peninsula. The downing of the Russian airliner in October 2015 revealed the advanced planning and execution capabilities of ISIS' outreach. Experts argue that such a dangerous terrorism capacity emanates from the direct linkage between the Ansar Beit al Maqdis groups and ISIS' top echelons.

The ISIS militancy and terrorist potential in Sinai enjoy several geopolitical drivers. First of all, the motivational issue, namely hitting Israel, remained a "notorious dream" to nearly all radical extremist Islamist factions. The peninsula offers them a basic geographical proximity. The repeated attacks to the Egypt-Israel gas pipeline and the attack on a tourist bus heading to Israel in February 2014 were examples of this fact. Second of all, the Ansar Beit al Maqdis network has cunningly used the area's local grievances. Moreover, the Sinai jihadists' new connections to the ISIS core enabled them to boost their military capabilities and tactics, such as using anti-tank missiles and more advanced improvised explosive devices.²⁵ Besides, the ISIS activity in Libya, and the violent transnational extension to the Western desert area of Egypt, have diverted the attention of the Egyptian security forces, and partially relieved the pressure on the terrorist elements in Sinai.²⁶ In October 2017, for example, dozens of Egyptian policemen were killed in a tragic terrorist attack in Bahariya Oasis, 300km southwest of the capital Cairo.²⁷

Through the Borders: Terrorism Flow on the Rise

Open source data reveals that Libya, an important cornerstone of Euro-Mediterranean security, suffers from a serious foreign fighter problem coupled with tribal local insurgencies. Research of the issue reveals that violent extremists emanating from Tunisia played a key role not only in the Syrian militancy but also, and particularly so, in the Libyan one. It is reported that up to 1,500 Tunisians might have been mobilized to fight in Libya. A combination of foreign and domestic (the Libyan Attorney General's Office) data shows that up to 3,436 foreign terrorist fighters might have travelled to Libya until 2018.²⁸

Libya serves as a training area for the Tunisian violent extremists to sharpen their military skills. More importantly, due to the state collapse it offers a very fertile source for acquiring advanced arms. Some experts argue that the Tunisian Salafists used Libya as a venue to retaliate against the Tunisian government. In June 2012, the Salafists revolted in Tunisia, and violently protested an arts exhibition that they thought was against their religious values.²⁹ According to the monitors of violence in the Maghreb, three consecutive attacks on the Tunisian diplomatic facilities in Tripoli and Benghazi, in the very same month and reportedly launched by Ansar al Sharia Tunisia, were undertaken in retaliation to the exhibition and the government crackdown.³⁰

²³ Columb, Strack. "Islamic State Losses 22 per cent of Territory", IHS Jane's, March 16, 2016,

<http://www.janes.com/article/58831/islamic-state-loses-22-per-cent-of-territory>, Accessed on: February 17, 2018.

²⁴ Joanna, Paraszczuk. "Is Sinai the New Syria? Evidence Russian-Speaking Fighters Left Raqqa & Went to Egypt", December 14, 2017, <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=25591>, Accessed on: February 14, 2018.

²⁵ For a comprehensive assessment of how ISIS connected to the Ansar Beit al Maqdis activities in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, see: Mokhtar, Awad. "IS in the Sinai" in *Beyond Syria and Iraq: Examining Islamic State Provinces*, Katherine Bauer [ed.] The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington D.C. 2016.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/dozens-of-egyptian-police-killed-in-raid-on-suspected-militant-base/2017/10/21/688e24f8-8359-4492-94cc-ff7b5f55964d_story.html?utm_term=.bbe1364d2f56, Accessed on: February 14, 2018.

²⁸ Aaron, Y. Zelin. *The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya*, Policy Note: 45, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018, p.2.

²⁹ Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-salafis-clash/tunisian-salafi-islamists-riot-over-insulting-art-idUSBRE85BOXW20120613>, Accessed on: February 14, 2018.

³⁰ Aaron, Y. Zelin. *The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya*, Policy Note: 45, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018, pp.5-6.

Besides, Libya hosted, and is still believed to host, training camps for promoting militancy in Syria. The earliest date detected for the establishment of a militant camp is 2012. Open source pieces of evidence reveals that among other foreign fighters from different nationalities (first and foremost Tunisians), many Syrian militants traveled to Libya to receive training in a safe distance from the bombardment of the Ba'ath regime of Syria.³¹ During the 2013-2014 period, ISIS started to expand to Libya more adamantly. In this period and later on, the militants from Tunisia even enjoyed their own facility in Sabratha, Libya, very close to the Tunisian border.³² These militants, coupled with local sleeper cells, even attempted to take control of the Tunisian border town Ben Guerdane back in March 2016.³³

The Ben Guerdane attack was due to several reasons. First, the sleeper cells managed to hide their presence from the eyes of the Tunisian intelligence.³⁴ Secondly, the incident marked more than a terrorist attack, a complete territorial takeover raid. Thirdly, the initial success of the takeover attempt against the Tunisian security forces was alarming. Finally, and even more importantly, the local sleeper cells and active militants harbored in Libya showed a rapid and effective coordination in a *blitz*, hinting at the presence of an advanced command understanding as well as operational art.

Foreign Fighters By Region

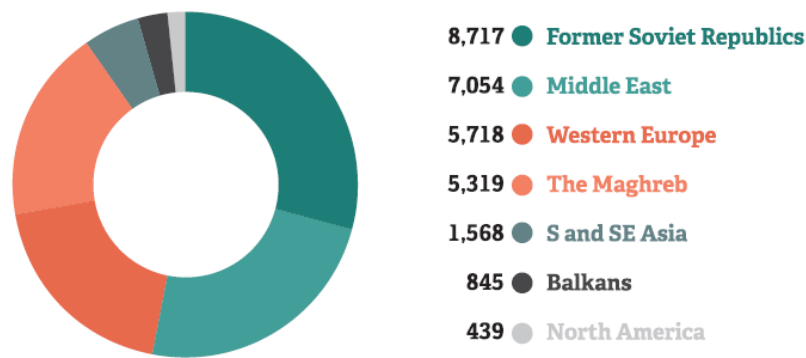


Figure 5: Foreign Terrorist Fighters by Region³⁵

Intelligence studies reveal that there is a strong link between border security and terrorism in the Maghreb. In fact, organized crime and terrorism in the region is highly intertwined. (The same could be said for the eastern part of the Mediterranean, especially war-torn Syria) Notably, organized crime groups and terrorist organizations operate along overlapped logistical routes in many border areas. Furthermore, smuggling has become a source of financial revenue for the terrorists.³⁶

The case of Mokhtar Belmokhtar – ‘the King of Marlboros’ – and his group sets an infamous example with regards to the menacing triangle between terrorism, organized crime, and foreign fighters.³⁷ Mokhtar Belmokhtar is an Algerian national who fought in Afghanistan, where he lost an eye, as a foreign fighter.³⁸ Upon his return, he became al-Qaeda’s critical link to the Algerian radical extremists.³⁹ Later on, he became an out of the box but key figure in al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.⁴⁰

³¹ Ibid. p.8.

³² Ibid. p.9.

³³ Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security/border-attack-feeds-tunisia-fears-of-libya-jihadist-spillover-idUSKCN0WF072>, Accessed on: February 14, 2018.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Retrieved from: Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Group, 2017, p.11.

³⁶ Querine, Hanlon and Matthew, M. Herbert. *Border Security Challenges in the Grand Maghreb*, United States Institute of Peace, 2015, p.27.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-21061480>, Accessed on: February 17, 2018.

³⁹ Andrew, Black. “Mokhtar Belmokhtar: The Algerian Jihad’s Southern Amir”, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol.7 Issue:12, The Jamestown Foundation, May 2009,

⁴⁰ BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-21061480>, Accessed on: February 17, 2018.

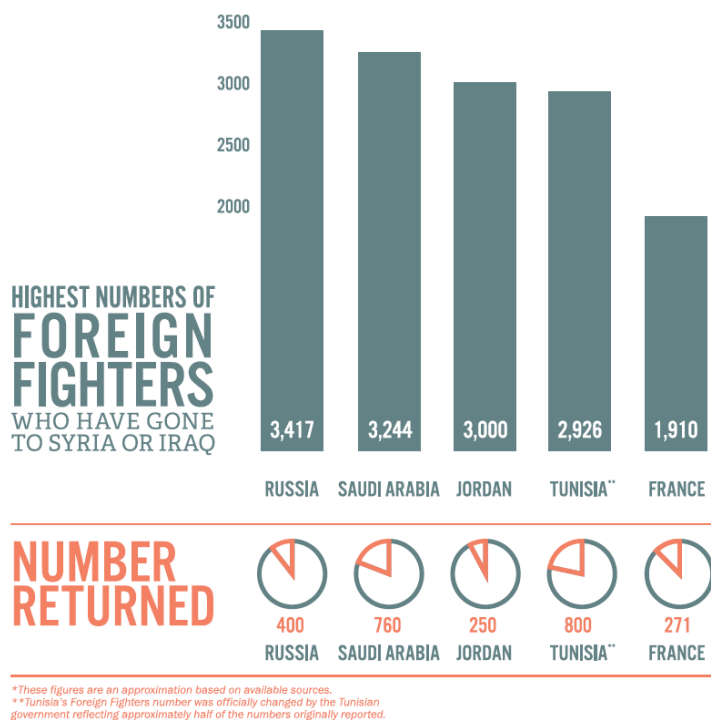


Figure 6: Numbers of Foreign Fighters⁴¹

The Need for a Tailor-Made Intelligence Analysis Model

Referring to the tripartite classification of Clarke discussed earlier,⁴² and recalling this report's argument about the mutation of ISIS' center of gravity, Euro-Mediterranean security requires a thorough assessment of the 'returnee threat.'

Not all the returnee foreign terrorist fighters are expected to follow the same behavioral and violent patterns. Of these militants, some would return as "disillusioned" adventurers. They are expected to be disappointed with what they have found. Clarke argues that this category could be used for de-radicalization programs. The second sub-category might consist of "disengaged, but not disillusioned" foreign fighters. In this respect, they are assumed to have the same ideological formation, but, for some reasons (such as starting a family), they left the conflict.⁴³ These foreign fighter returnees could always be a part of radicalized societies. At this point, it is vital to stress that starting or having a family should not be an absolute clearing factor for a foreign fighter. For instance, the perpetrator of the Istanbul nightclub shooting in 2017, Abdulgadir Masharipov, was a father and husband who brought his family to Turkey with him knowing that he will commit a terrorist attack.⁴⁴

The third category remains the "operational returnees" which refers to the most dangerous sub-group of foreign terrorist fighters. For example, perpetrators of the November 2015 Paris attacks fall in this group.⁴⁵ This group is of particular importance to monitor, since they could lead to a multiplier effect in the local cells' capabilities around the Euro-Mediterranean area. Furthermore, they can inspire and recruit the radicalized youth more easily than the old-school extremists, since these militants fought under the black banners of the so-called Caliphate.

⁴¹ Retrieved from: Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Group, 2017, p.10.

⁴² Colin, P. Clarke. *The Terrorist Diaspora: After the Fall of the Caliphate*, RAND, Testimony presented before the House Homeland Security Committee Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States, July 13, 2017.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hurriyet, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ilk-ifade-reinayi-rakkaya-hem-de-o-gece-sordum-40338595>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

⁴⁵ Colin P. Clarke. *The Terrorist Diaspora: After the Fall of the Caliphate*, RAND, Testimony presented before the House Homeland Security Committee Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States, July 13, 2017.

To address the third category of foreign terrorist fighters, the Euro-Mediterranean strategic community has to act together in terms of intelligence sharing and security cooperation. Before jumping into the NATO, EU, and the Euro-Mediterranean security and intelligence issues, one should keep in mind that intelligence sharing is a function of international relations and diplomacy, contrary to the mysterious image of spy games. Yes, there are spy games orbiting around world politics and the most volatile flashpoints of transnational conflicts. Yet, still, valuing, judging, negotiating about, and trading information is, 'simply', a function of international relations.

Mutating ISIS, and Renewed Intelligence Needs for NATO and EU

Although NATO has a deep-rooted record of close military cooperation and defense coordination, as recently monitored in the Libya campaign, the Alliance itself is not fully capable of running perfectly effective multinational operations. In fact, the intelligence dimension has long played a central role for these imperfections. Instead of depending on a perfectly shaped and tailor-made intelligence-sharing model, the Allies have mostly relied on the intel provided by the US.

In NATO structures, political considerations can override the intelligence assessment procedures most of the time. In this regard, the pieces of evidence or information gathered for intelligence analysis when testing a particular hypothesis could be used to boost a political stance that contradicts the national policy of an individual ally. As a result, outcomes of inefficient or incomplete intelligence translate into less information for the operational level commanders and officials.⁴⁶

NATO's intelligence hardships during the 1999 Kosovo intervention mirror some of the contemporary problems that the Alliance has to overcome – although not all the hardships remained unaddressed up until now. During the operation, NATO's International Military Staff supported the intelligence requirements at the political and strategic level. Assessments of the intelligence angle of the Allied Force indicate that a small team of some 25 officers, of only few had professional intelligence experience prior to the campaign, was trying its' best to support the political-military decision making process in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the Military Committee (MC).⁴⁷ It is crucial to underline that neither the 25-personnel intelligence team, nor the Alliance as a whole entity, had organic intelligence collection resources. Thus, the intelligence had to individually come from NATO member nations. The result was highly problematic. As the campaign deepened, the allied nations' reluctance to share intelligence with the Alliance itself became a bigger problem. Besides, the NATO Intelligence lacked the technological abilities. All in all, there came two major results. First, the US had to take over the intelligence support. And second, it was revealed that the US authorities were not fully equipped with determining the 'need- to- know' basis in a coalition campaign.⁴⁸ The differences of opinion surfaced especially in sharing the ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) data between American officials and the allied nations' intelligence components. Another problem area of intelligence sharing was the Air Tasking Order procedures, especially related to planning details for the strategic stealth platforms of B-2s and F-117s as well as the Tomahawk Land-Attack Cruise Missile (TLAM) launches. In the end, the American headquarters was disseminating two Air Tasking Orders, one for the allies and the other one for the US forces. This was a highly confusing situation amidst an ongoing military endeavor.⁴⁹

However, 9/11 marked a new era for NATO. The founding fathers of the Alliance may have never thought about Article V being invoked following the tragic terror attacks on the American soil. Since then, the Alliance has stepped up its counterterrorism and intelligence efforts. On the one hand, it was the 1999 Strategic Concept document that classified terrorism as a risk factor. On the other hand, it was the 2002 Prague Summit that paved the ground for the adoption of a military concept for defense against terrorism, and when it comes to the next Strategic Concept of the Alliance, Lisbon 2010, terrorism was defined not as a risk but as a direct threat posed to NATO and its member states. Following the May 2017 Brussels meeting, NATO officially became a member of the anti-ISIS coalition.⁵⁰

Naturally, intelligence reforms followed suit as the counterterrorism efforts stepped up. After the Prague Summit, the Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit was established in 2003 to foster the counter-terrorism capacity of the Alliance. Following the 2004 Istanbul Summit, which marked the initiation of the NATO intelligence reform, a liaison cell was established at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) along with

⁴⁶ For a detailed assessment of NATO's intelligence sharing issues, see: Wesley R. Curtis, *A 'Special Relationship': Bridging the NATO Intelligence GAP*, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey – California, 2013.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_77646.htm, Accessed on: February 18, 2018.

an Intelligence Liaison Unit at the NATO HQ in Brussels. In 2011, the Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit's duties were taken over by the new Intelligence Unit and the Intelligence Steering Board⁵¹

At the time of writing, the Alliance has been striving to boost its intelligence capabilities. After the Warsaw Summit, NATO appointed its first Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence and Security. A highly decorated diplomat and former Vice President of the German Intelligence Service, Dr. Arndt Freytag von Loringhoven assumed his post in late 2016.⁵² The new Assistant Secretary General post (heading the Joint Intelligence and Security Division) is responsible for providing intelligence support to the Military Committee and the North Atlantic Council, as well as advising the Secretary General on security and intelligence matters.⁵³

During the Defense Ministerial meeting in Brussels in February 2017, the allied defense chiefs decided to establish a "new southern-oriented 'eyes-and-ears' hub in Naples in the same year.⁵⁴ As a result, the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub (NSDS Hub) was inaugurated in Naples, in early September 2017.⁵⁵ During his opening speech, Alejandro Alvargonzález, NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, put a special emphasis on the common transnational security challenges that the Alliance and its Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partners all face. According to the Assistant Secretary General, these issues range from international terrorism to failing and fragile states, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means, as well as maritime security. The hub, Assistant Secretary General Alvargonzález explained, is designed to boost the situational awareness and develop a thorough risk and threat assessment regarding the southern flank challenges.⁵⁶

According to the official mission statement fact sheet provided by the Alliance, the NSDS Hub will be tasked with:

- Contribution to information collection, management and sharing,
- Contribution to the NATO Alliance's understanding of the southern neighborhood,
- Contribution to the coordination of NATO's activity in the South Mediterranean,
- Contribution to the implementation/assessment of the Framework for the South Mediterranean.⁵⁷

In addition, the hub, which will be a platform to develop and provide ideas and expertise, will be expected to "take information and analysis that already exists and transform it into knowledge and information even more useful to stakeholders."⁵⁸

The NSDS Hub is an intellectual product of NATO's new Comprehensive Approach and Strategic Direction-South. Simply put, the allied leaders know that as long as the surrounding neighborhood is unstable, NATO members cannot be safe. In this regard, terrorism, state failure, civil wars, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, violent extremism, and energy security issues (along with the Russian return to the Mediterranean and the hybrid warfare challenge) are seen as the rising threats stemming from the South.⁵⁹

All these matters necessitate a very effective cooperation with the Mediterranean Dialogue partners, and with all the partners of the Alliance in a broader spectrum. At this point, the NSDS Hub's objective of information-centric collaboration, which will cover cooperation with the existing EU mechanisms such as the Shared Awareness and De-confliction in the Mediterranean (SHADE MED) and Frontex European Patrols Network (EPN).⁶⁰

All the abovementioned issues hint at a renewed effort of strategic intelligence and open-source intelligence (OSINT) collaboration between the EU and NATO strategic communities on the rising security challenges of which nearly all pave the ground for or root from ISIS terrorism in the Euro-Mediterranean area. By all means,

⁵¹ NATO, <http://www.natolibguides.info/intelligence>, Accessed on: February 18, 2018.

⁵² NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/who_is_who_140834.htm, Accessed on: February 16, 2018.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jane's Defense Weekly, <http://www.janes.com/article/67738/nato-to-create-new-southern-oriented-eyes-and-ears-hub-in-naples>, Accessed on: February 16, 2018.

⁵⁵ NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/news_146835.htm, Accessed on: February 16, 2018.

⁵⁶ For the full text of Asst. Sec. Gen. for Political Affairs and Security Policy Alejandro Alvargonzález, see: NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions_146647.htm, Accessed on: February 16, 2018.

⁵⁷ NATO, NSDS Hub Fact Sheet Document, <https://www.thesouthernhub.org/about-us/fact-sheets.aspx>, Accessed on: February 16, 2018.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Christopher, Kremidas Courtney. *A Comprehensive Approach for NATO's Strategic Direction – South*, NSDS Hub, January 2018.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

this is a vital effort to enhance the global resilience against ISIS' forthcoming faces. Because, although they may not be instantly actionable like signals intelligence (SIGINT) or imagery intelligence (IMINT) for tactical and operational level counter-terrorism efforts, both strategic intelligence and OSINT would boost what NATO and EU policy communities badly need, namely understanding and forecasting the ongoing transformation or 'Frankensteinization' of ISIS terrorism. Yet, this paper argues, there are two issues that needed to be addressed in order to achieve the desired objectives. Firstly, an information-centric collaboration within the framework of the NSDS Hub would definitely need a strong Mediterranean Dialogue aspect, better a trilateral linkage between the EU mechanisms, related NATO actors (i.e. the NATO Defense College and/or the new intelligence structure), and the local agencies of the Mediterranean Dialogue (as well as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative [ICI]) partners. Such a way forward would mark the very difference between effective OSINT-driven strategic intelligence and a futile armchair general work that would do nothing but beating a dead horse. However, NATO would definitely need a new 'charm offensive' in promoting the Mediterranean Dialogue to adapt the pressing parameters of the new security environment. Most of the states in the region perceived a negative image of the Alliance's military intervention in the Libyan turmoil. Besides, they have fears or a patriotic jealousy over their national sovereignties.⁶¹ Thus, NATO's strategic communications skills towards the southern coasts of the Mediterranean should be revisited and mastered.

Secondly, one should understand that strategic cultural landscape differs between the northern and southern coastlines of the Mediterranean. This will remain a determining factor for tangible intelligence issues. For example, a perfectly publicly available OSINT and strategic intelligence input for the Western policy community could be treated as a highly classified issue in the North African shores of the Euro-Mediterranean area.

NATO's intelligence transformation efforts, especially in the post- Warsaw period and with the inauguration of the new Assistant Secretary General position or the first intelligence chief post, sounds much brighter and represents a more striking promise of optimism for Euro-Mediterranean security in the face of the transforming terrorist threat. Regarding the focus of this paper, NATO's new intelligence structure will have to deal with some key issues.

The first one is intelligence sharing. A key driver in NATO's intelligence sharing is the very fact that it depends on individual members' principles and stances. In fact, despite being a more than half a century old Alliance, which weathered the hardest days of the Cold War, NATO member nations' intelligence sharing parameters and patterns differ to a serious extent. France can approach the intelligence sharing issue on a more case-by-case context; Italy, especially when it comes to the new Euro-Mediterranean threats, could be the most willing; Turkey, the NATO ally with the most important geopolitical position in the fight against ISIS, would be eager to share as long as its security needs emanating from the Kurdish separatist terrorism are met.⁶²

Secondly, the scope of NATO's new intelligence structure would be of critical importance regarding the division of labor on counterterrorism issues and foreign terrorist fighters. In 2017, the foreign terrorist fighter issue has been added to the new NATO Assistant Secretary General's portfolio, which already included countering the terrorist threat. This could potentially cause differences of opinion between different national agencies of NATO member states. Above all, while domestic security agencies tend to see the foreign fighters item under their area of responsibility due to the direct threat to homelands, military and foreign intelligence services mostly see a leading role in their capacity because of the deployed national forces in the areas of counterterrorism operations against ISIS.⁶³ Furthermore, not all NATO member states are on the same page when handling the terrorism and foreign fighter issues. The UK and the US tend to see the terrorism threat through the prism of military measures, while the NATO allies in the European Union mostly perceive it as an issue of crime prevention and law enforcement.⁶⁴

Furthermore, Turkey has so far been the first and only member of the Alliance that deployed massive conventional forces against the terrorist network during Operation Euphrates Shield. However, while Ankara tends to see the issue in a more militarily-driven fashion, resembling Washington and London, it has grave problems with many other members of the Alliance, most notably with the US, about the offshoots of the PKK terrorist organization in Syria, PYD / YPG militants.

⁶¹ George, Joffé. *Insecurity in North Africa and the Mediterranean*, NATO Defense College, January 2017.

⁶² Columbia School of International and Public Affairs, Capstone Research Project, *NATO Intelligence Sharing in the 21st Century*, Spring 2013.

⁶³ For a detailed and groundbreaking study on NATO's new intelligence chief position and reforms, see: Jan, Ballast. *Trust (in) NATO: The Future of Intelligence Sharing Within the Alliance*, NATO Defense College, Rome, 2017.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.10.

Some argue that an option to boost the intelligence sharing within NATO could depend on more carefully planned NATO-EU cooperation with a sense of division of labor. In this regard, in case the EU and the NATO member states individually focus on homegrown terrorism and domestic threats at their homelands, the Alliance could focus on foreign fighters and the terrorist threat stressing the deployed forces. Such a cooperation framework could encourage the Allied nations to share more intelligence with each other. In fact, as Jan Ballast spells out in his report published by the NATO Defense College, *“as long as nations are unable to multilaterally share secret intelligence on (homegrown) terrorist groups and threats, NATO, without a clear and present danger, will not witness structured and transparent intelligence sharing; open source exchange being the exception.”*⁶⁵

Apart from NATO, the European Union is also in strong need of better intelligence sharing between the member states and the EU actors. In doing so, stated in a 2017 report,

*“The walls that currently exist between the member states, the EEAS (European External Action Service) and the Commission need to be torn down. Also, information – exchange with NATO needs to be improved. The planned European Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats, which brings together the EU’s Hybrid fusion cell with relevant NATO structures, is a step in the right direction. This center could serve as a model for other information fusion cells. These capability improvements would not only benefit a future activation of the mutual assistance clause, but would benefit the CSDP as a whole and enable the EU to live up to its potential in the protection of Europe.”*⁶⁶

In fact, a Euro-Atlantic information and intelligence vision has already been put in sight by NATO and EU leaders. In this regard, the triplicate declaration signed by the NATO Secretary General, the President of the European Council, and the President of the European Commission in 2016, in Warsaw, openly states that boosting the ability to counter hybrid threats and bolstering the resilience against them remains a top priority. In doing so, the scope of the cooperation shall include intelligence sharing, intelligence analysis, prevention and early detection of threats with a joint focus on promoting defense and security capacity in all operational domains including the cyberspace.⁶⁷

Although the EU-NATO intelligence cooperation, especially regarding the ongoing crisis in the Euro-Mediterranean area is not enough at the time being, still, some developments give hope. One of these developments is the intelligence sharing and surveillance cooperation between the NATO’s Standing Maritime Group 2 and the EU’s border management agency, Frontex. The operation is mainly taking place in the Aegean Sea to address the pressing migrant crisis⁶⁸. After all, while NATO’s 2014 Wales Summit had a more Russia-driven focus – understandably due to the hybrid warfare threat in Ukraine and Eastern Europe – in 2016, the Warsaw Summit witnessed a special emphasis attached to the Mediterranean area along with the will to boost cooperation between the Alliance and the EU.⁶⁹

III. A Terrorism Risk Modeling and Intelligence Analysis Guide for the Euro-Mediterranean Area regarding the Foreign Fighters Threat and ISIS’ Transformation

Intelligence remains an invaluable and indispensable component of counter-terrorism efforts. It has a vital role in the pre-emption of terrorist activities, it can boost the quality of post-incident investigations, and it contributes to protective and preventive security measures⁷⁰. However, the nature of typical targets in counter-terrorism intelligence, namely terrorist plots, offers much less signatures to follow when compared to, for example, a covert nuclear program of a rogue nation, or political instability in a country.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.15.

⁶⁶ Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations), *Defending Europe: Translating Mutual Assistance into Action*, January 2017, p.3.

⁶⁷ For the full text of the triplicate declaration signed in 2016, in Warsaw see:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21481/nato-eu-declaration-8-july-en-final.pdf>, Accessed on: February 15, 2018.

⁶⁸ Michael, J. Mc Nerney, et.al. *Cross – Cutting Challenges and Their Implications for the Mediterranean Region*, RAND Europe, 2017.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Frank, Gregory. *Intelligence-led Counter-Terrorism: A Brief Analysis of the UK Domestic Intelligence System’s Response to 9/11 and the Implications of the London Bombings of 7 July 2005*,

The ISIS Attack Campaign in Europe

January 2014-September 14, 2017

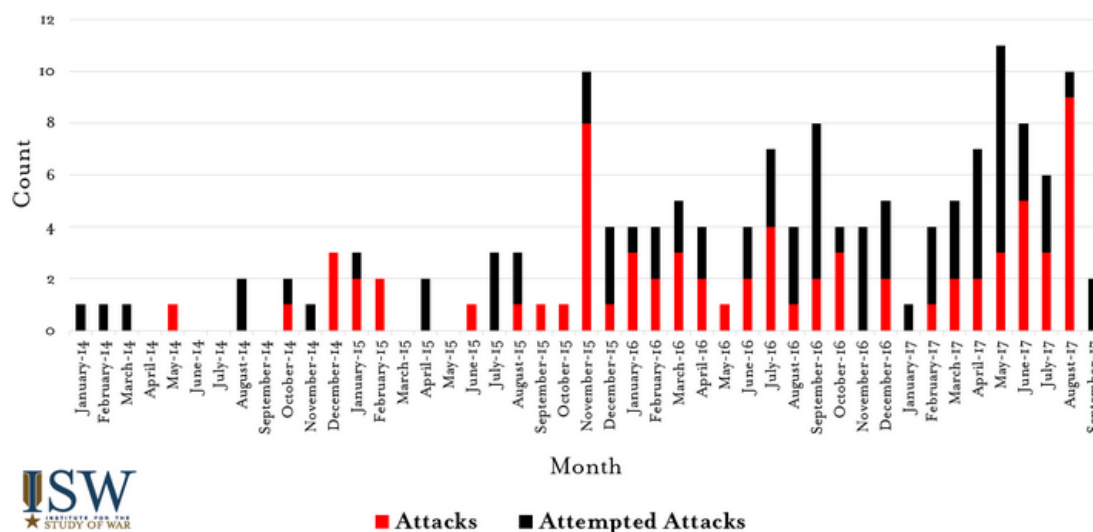


Figure 7: ISIS' Violent Campaign in Europe 2014 – 2017⁷¹.

ISIS is now in a troublesome situation territorially in the core of its so-called Caliphate, Iraq and Syria. In return, the terrorist organization is reinventing itself as a global threat. Despite the drawbacks, the December 2017 church attack in Pakistan, which killed 9 people, and the New York City truck-drive attack which claimed 8 lives, show that ISIS' global terror campaign is still dangerous. In May 2017, ISIS-affiliates even attempted to takeover Marawi in the Philippines⁷². The threat lasted some five months in the area. Besides, ISIS' political-military structure is becoming more and more decentralized. Once a statelet in Syria and Iraq, the terrorist network's strategic priorities are now shifting to the 'wilayats' that include the North African coastline, Nigeria, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, and East Asia⁷³. In the meanwhile, al-Qaeda affiliates, such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), are likely to fill the vacuum left by ISIS in Syria⁷⁴.

A good intelligence analysis is the first line of defense against terrorism. However, in counter-terrorism intelligence, the target, namely terrorist groups, is hard to penetrate⁷⁵. The hardship is not only about collecting pieces of evidence about the terrorist organizations, but to understand how they operate, how they perceive the environment in which they operate, and how they think strategically.

Familiarization with the subject matter is also complicated in counter-terrorism intelligence. Simply put, a regional expert intelligence analyst could spend time in its area of responsibility, yet, doing the same for a counter-terrorism intelligence analyst, namely spending time among terrorists to increase his / her familiarity, is most of the time not an option⁷⁶. Thus, the ability to think outside the box and thinking of unthinkable scenarios would be the most important familiarization tools of a counter-terrorism intelligence analyst⁷⁷.

In the literature, terrorism risk is measured as a function of threat, vulnerability, and consequences.⁷⁸ Thus, viable risk modeling and intelligence analysis guidance for the Euro-Mediterranean strategic community should incorporate these three factors. Below, this report offers six primary priority areas, and three wildcards to form an analytical guidance for predicting the scope and trajectory of the threat, which this study calls 'the black banners reloaded'.

⁷¹ Jennifer, Cafarella and Jason Zhou, "ISIS' Expanding Campaign in Europe", ISW, September 2017, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.de/2017/09/isiss-expanding-campaign-in-europe.html>, Accessed on: March 11, 2018.
⁷² Rohan, Gunatra, "Global Threat Forecast", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol.10, Issue 1, January 2018.
⁷³ Ibid.
⁷⁴ Ibid.
⁷⁵ Valerie, A. Ormond. *The Role of Intelligence Analysis in the War on Terrorism*, US Army War College, 2002.
⁷⁶ Ibid.
⁷⁷ Ibid.
⁷⁸ For a detailed terrorism risk modelling report, see: Henry, H. Willis et.al. *Estimating Terrorism Risk*, RAND, 2005.

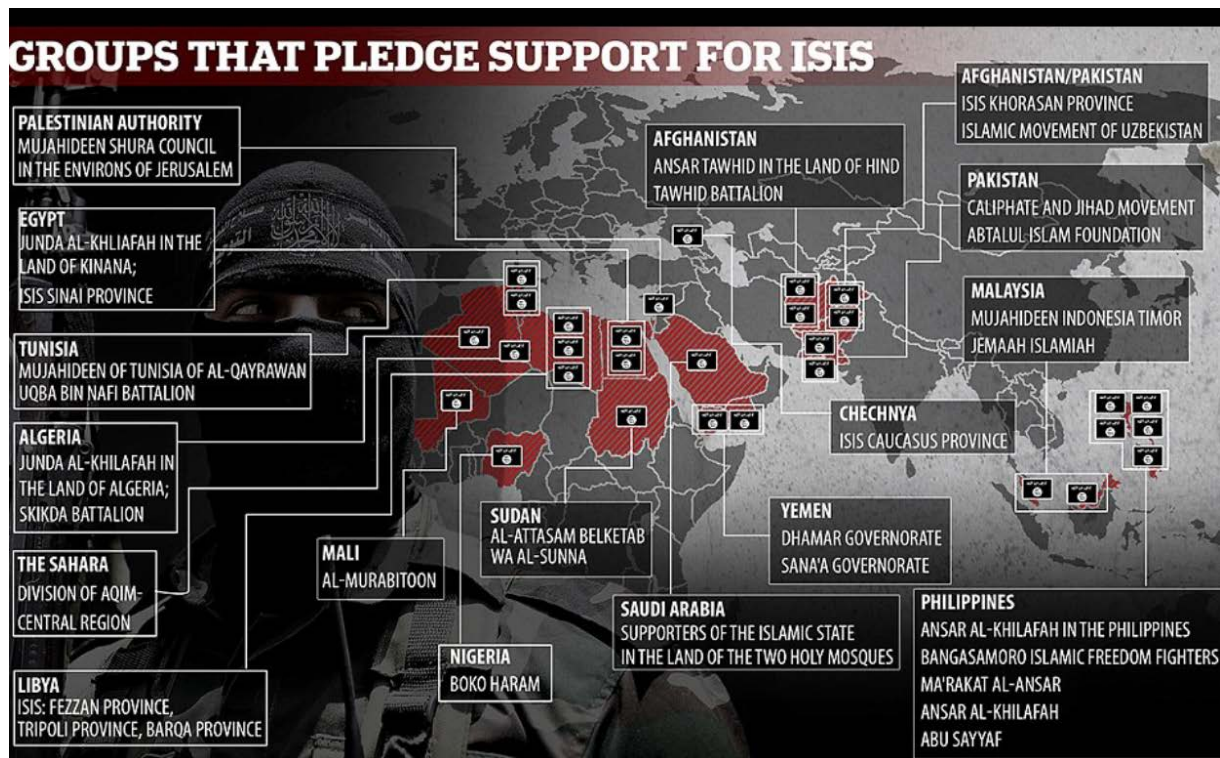


Figure 8: ISIS' Expanding Global Outreach⁷⁹.

Priority Area 1: Type of Foreign Fighters

The first parameter of risk modeling remains the categorization of foreign terrorist fighters, or as referred before, the “terrorist diaspora.” This report assesses that both the “mercenary extremists,” who are flowing or will flow into the ‘next jihad,’ and the most dangerous sub-group of the third group (returning foreign fighters), the ‘operational returnees,’ constitute the most pressing threat to the Euro-Mediterranean area.

As explained earlier, these terrorists have both the will and capability to boost the already existing radical extremist networks and militants. In other words, these foreign terrorist fighters would function as ‘violence multipliers’ in terms of planning, execution, and even a notorious inspiration.

Priority Area 2: Blowback Rates

The blowback rates, namely foreign fighters coming home or to any other country to settle, remains the most problematic issue to analyze. If not with bad intentions at all times, foreign fighters come back, or go elsewhere, with a huge potential of tactics, arms, motivation, and a notorious charisma to recruit and motivate the homegrown radicals. In fact, post 9/11 intelligence studies argue that al-Qaeda’s spread across the world and the wave of de-territorialized terrorism was a result of the ill-monitored Afghan jihad, especially regarding its foreign fighters dimension and the neglected blowback rates.⁸⁰

Blowback issues bring about different ‘super-radicalization’ cycles. As Byman and Shapiro explain, the road to becoming a foreign fighter begins with a motivation to fight – not necessarily a theological one – and could end up as an operational returnee with new skills to plot against public security or recruit others.

As of April 2017, between 20% and 30% of the foreign fighters were estimated to have already left Syria and Iraq. One year earlier, about 30% of the EU foreign fighter contingent, around 1,200 people, had returned to

⁷⁹ Daily Mail, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3344717/The-rapid-rise-death-cult-ISIS-jihadi-extremists-extending-reach-recruiting-terror-groups-jungles-South-East-Asia-forming-sleeper-cells-Africa.html>, Accessed on: March 11, 2018.

⁸⁰ Peter Bergen and Alec Reynolds. “Blowback Revisited: Today’s Insurgents in Iraq are Tomorrow’s Terrorists”, *Foreign Affairs*, November December 2005, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2005-10-01/blowback-revisited>, Accessed on: February 16, 2018.

their countries of residence. It should be once more underlined that both the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels attacks were carried out by ISIS returnees.⁸¹

Priority Area 3: Intelligence–Sharing Capacity between the Countries of Origin or Residence, Transit Countries, Receiving Countries, and Operating Countries of Foreign Fighters in Several Counterterrorism Margins

It should be underlined that the perpetrators of the Paris and Brussels attacks were on several watch lists, and some of them even had arrest warrants by different countries⁸². Even this fact underlines the very need for a more centralized database for counter-terrorism intelligence between the EU and NATO, as well as the partner nations across the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Another inevitable area of NATO and EU counter-terrorism intelligence cooperation, amidst the transformation of ISIS, would be fighting the finances of the terrorist network. Strikingly, open-source pieces of evidence show that Iraq’s some 12,000 archeological sites, some of which hosted artifacts dating back to 9,000 BCE, once remained under ISIS control. The terrorist organization engaged in the business of historical artifacts smuggling, which accounted for an important proportion of its revenues, in fact, the second main source of income after oil smuggling⁸³. Besides, before the anti-ISIS campaign began, the terrorist network was operating nearly 60% of Syria’s oil fields, in addition to some 350 oil wells in Iraq. This formidable source translated into 30,000 barrels a day in Iraq and 50,000 in Syria, with a lucrative black market price of \$40 per barrel⁸⁴. Furthermore, ISIS had its own treasury system, based on al-Qaeda in Iraq’s system, which excelled in finances since the Zarqawi times, and made millions of dollars that need to be strictly monitored⁸⁵.

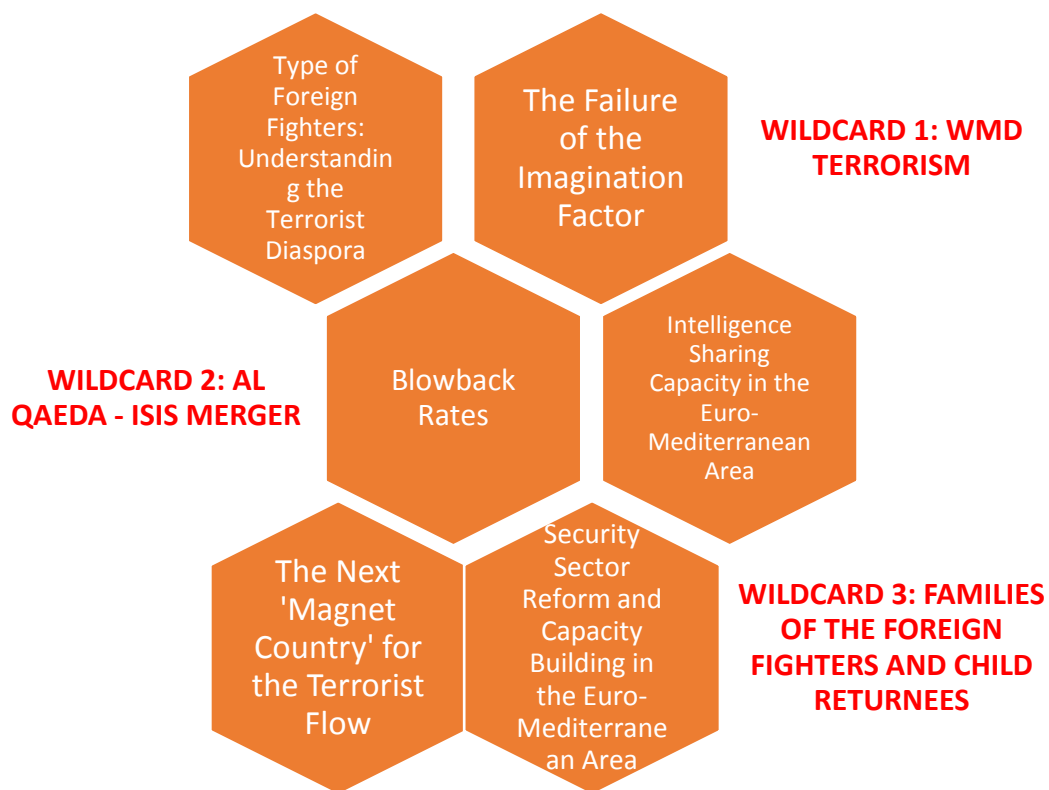


Figure 9: A Terrorism Risk Model for the “Black Banners Reloaded”

⁸¹ Alastair Reed et.al. *The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat: Making Sense of an Evolving Phenomenon*, ICCT, 2017, pp.5–6.

⁸² NATO HQ, Emerging Security Challenges Division Counter – Terrorism Section, *NATO’s Counterterrorism Cooperation with Partners*, November 2016.

⁸³ Matthew, Levitt. *Terrorist Financing and the Islamic State*, Testimony Submitted to the House Committee on Financial Services, November 13, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/LevittTestimony20141113.pdf>, Accessed on: 09 March, 2018.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Priority Area 4: Geopolitical Profile of the Next 'Magnet Country' for Foreign Terrorist Fighters

As explained earlier, most probably, the 'second category of foreign fighters,' namely the 'mercenary jihadists,' will try to flow into the next 'magnet country' for their struggle to carry on uninterruptedly. This category is different than the returnees and operational returnees. These militants are still looking for the Caliphate to continue in a different place without being transformed into a global insurgency in the form of de-territorial terrorism. Southeast Asia, Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as Africa could be the next targets.⁸⁶ Yemen might also be on the list. Yet, the biggest challenge to the Euro-Mediterranean area would be a possible influx of returning foreign fighters in one of the littoral states. As seen in the effects of Tunisia's extremist movements on Libya, and the security challenges posed to the Western desert area of Egypt by Libya's militancy problems, the Mediterranean area is dangerously open to domino effects.

Priority Area 5: Security Sector Reform and Capacity-building of Euro-Mediterranean States

The ISIS threat created its own vicious cycle in the wider Middle East and North Africa. Simply put, both the homegrown militancy and the foreign fighter issue root from, and also boost, the regional instability. Most of the littoral states' security apparatuses are not ready for a transforming ISIS. Besides, the strategic intelligence capabilities of those states are very limited. Few of them, if any, enjoy a strategic community in Western-standards. Thus, not only the NATO- EU cooperation in information collaboration, but also a joint NATO-EU vision to promote the littoral states' security capabilities is needed. NATO has partnership programs in this regard. These partnership programs have to be enhanced and revised to produce more tangible results. Besides, harmonization with the EU security perspective remains a must.

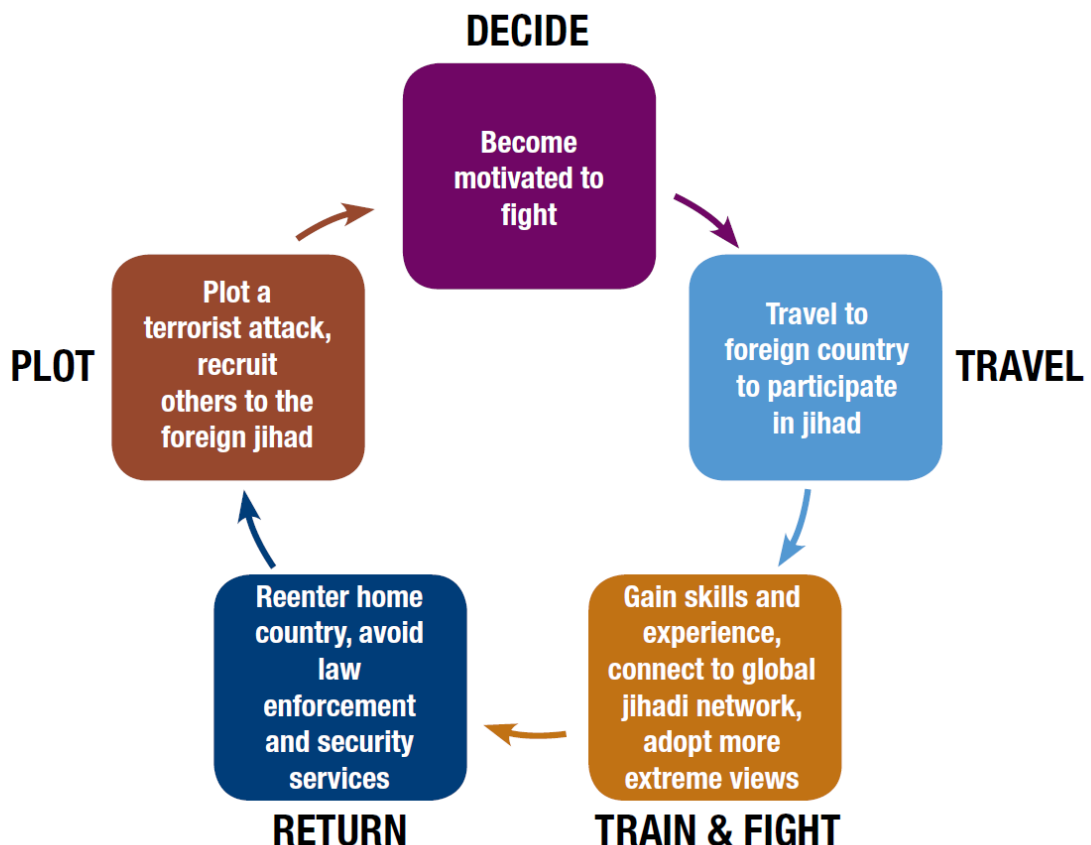


Figure 10: Byman and Shapiro: Standard Schematic Model of Foreign Fighter Radicalization⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Antonia, Ward. 'Why Africa Could Pose an 'ISIS Renaissance'', *the National Interest*, November 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-africa-could-provide-isis-renaissance-23199>, Accessed on: February 16, 2018.

⁸⁷ Daniel, Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, *Be Afraid Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*, Brookings, 2014.

Priority Area 6: Preventing Another ‘Failure of Imagination’ Regarding the Evolving Terrorist Techniques, Tactics, and Procedures

ISIS’ transformation into a global terrorist network, and the prospects of its merger with al-Qaeda, be it a pragmatic one at operational echelons or a more structural one at the strategic decision-making circles, would be the gravest security threat of the 21st century. As the 9/11 Commission Report underlined, the most substantial advantage of Osama Bin Laden was the presence of a well-nurtured organization that was well able to attract, train, and use recruits for more ambitious attacks⁸⁸. Furthermore, as the Commission Report underlined, one of the fundamental reasons that led to the terrorist attacks was the failure of imagination. The report explains that “imagination is not a gift associated with bureaucracies”⁸⁹. Tangibly, a set of telltale indicators were not adequately developed by the US intelligence community at the time –in particular by the Counterterrorist Intelligence Center– to evaluate the already existing pieces of evidence hinting at the method of the September 11 attacks, namely hijacking and using civilian aircraft to attack the US homeland⁹⁰. ISIS is a highly flexible and potent terrorist organization. It showed very good adaptation skills in its campaign in Syria and Iraq. Thus, Euro-Mediterranean intelligence community, along with related NATO and EU bodies, should be prepared to proceed with ‘institutionalized imagination’ and thorough red team analysis skills to predict possible methods of attacks.

So far, the priority areas explained the outlines of the proposed intelligence analysis guide. Subsequently, three wildcards draw attention to rogue game-changers.

Wildcard 1: WMD Terrorism

Recent open-source intelligence reports indicate that ISIS, which already waged offensive chemical warfare operations in Iraq and Syria, could indeed pose a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorism risk to global security⁹¹. Back in 2014, a laptop computer was captured from a Tunisian national chemistry and physics graduate at ISIS ranks. The content of the device showed that the terrorist organization worked not only on chemical weapons, but also on an advanced biological warfare program including the weaponization of bubonic plague⁹². The WMD terrorism was the biggest concern at the peak of al-Qaeda’s global terror campaign. Notably, following the September 11 attacks, the terrorist network even carried out anthrax plots to the US homeland, reportedly personally managed by Ayman al-Zawahiri, being al-Qaeda’s deputy chief at the time⁹³. As ISIS’ foreign fighters spread out in the world, the ones with critical capabilities on life sciences, chemistry, microbiology and other relevant fields would deserve more attention.

Wildcard 2: Families of the Returning Fighters and Child Returnees Flowing into the Euro-Mediterranean Area

Many returning foreign fighters travel with their families. Some were already married with children before the caliphate experience, and some others got married under the ISIS–ruled territories. The problem of foreign fighters’ families could lead to further homegrown radicalization problems across the Euro-Mediterranean region because of their heavy traumatization and obscure backgrounds. Furthermore, the fallout from ISIS would also bring about the problem of child returnees. Rehabilitation of child returnees, and understanding the margins of their activities at the ranks of ISIS, would be of great importance to prevent the occurrence of a new generation of traumatized and radicalized terrorists⁹⁴.

Wildcard 3: Al-Qaeda-ISIS Merger Materializes

As widely discussed by this report in the previous sections, such a merger is not unimaginable. In case these two terror networks converge at operational or strategic levels, with the latter being even more problematic, then both the homegrown radicalization and the returning foreign fighters risks would have to be reconsidered for ensuring the security of the Euro-Mediterranean area.

⁸⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report, 2004, p.55.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p.344.

⁹⁰ Ibid. pp.344 – 347.

⁹¹ Dany, Shoham. “Does ISIS Pose a WMD Threat?” BESA Center Perspectives Paper No:322, December 2015.

⁹² Harald, Doornbos and Jenan Moussa. “Found: The Islamic State’s Terror Laptop of Doom”, *Foreign Policy*, August 28, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/28/found-the-islamic-states-terror-laptop-of-doom/>, Accessed on: March 11, 2018.

⁹³ Rolf, Mowat-Larsen. *Al Qaeda Weapons of Mass Destruction Threat: Hype or Reality?*, Harvard Kennedy School Belger Center for Science and Interlational Affairs, 2010. p.6.

⁹⁴ Regarding the problems emanating from the families of foreign fighters and child returnees, see: *RAN Manual Responses to Returnees: Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Families*, 2017; Georgia, Holmer and Adrian Shutni, *Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative*, United States Institute of Peace, 2017.

All in all, confronting the new ISIS threat necessitate a tailor-made intelligence analysis effort. Especially, monitoring possible intersection points between the homegrown radicalization and the returning foreign fighters would be of crucial importance. In doing so, intelligence analysts should focus on the newly emerging contacts and connections between the returning fighters and radical suspects in their respective homelands as the most important telltale indicator. Another key telltale indicator would be the systematic flow of foreign fighters into a fragile country. This would hint at the prospects of the emergence of a new magnet state.

The so-called caliphate experience has inevitably brought about a sub-strategic culture among the violent movements. Thus, along with understanding what the ISIS leadership(s) think(s), understanding how they think remains indispensable.

All the above mentioned intelligence requirements necessitate a new intelligence analyst profile, which would correlate local socio-political and socio-economics landscapes with the global terrorism trends. Furthermore, in order to support such analysts, intelligence bureaucracies in the Euro-Mediterranean area should handle the intelligence sharing policies in a more open-minded fashion, and boost institutionalized imagination capabilities. ■

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