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Research Article

The Mobilization and Recruitment of Foreign Fighters: The Case of Islamic State, 2012–2014

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Abstract: This article examines how foreign fighters were recruited and mobilized for Islamic State in 2012-2014. Institutional and individual approaches to this phenomenon form the basis of understanding the mechanisms used for the mobilization and recruitment of foreign fighters. The former refers to a terrorist institution that plays a key role in the recruitment of individuals (top-down/institutional), and the latter refers to the self-radicalization process that foreign fighters undergo (bottom-up/ individual). In particular, the research focuses on an analysis of Islamic State and the recruitment/mobilization of sixteen foreign fighters from Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, France, and the United Kingdom. The analysis shows that both top-down and bottom-up concepts are important but that the extent to which each is used depends on the profiles of the country in question. The study concludes by demonstrating the comparative value of top-down and bottom-up approaches in terms of understanding contemporary terrorist recruitment and providing policy recommendations.

Keywords: Islamic State, foreign fighters, institutional (top-down) and bottom-up (individual) recruitment/mobilization, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, France, the United Kingdom.

Introduction

The study of foreign terrorist fighters has become crucial to understanding the evolving nature of "terrorism" in the twenty-first century. For many countries, terrorism and its perpetrators have become a top security threat. Despite the declaration and launch of the global "war on terror," some terrorist entities have been able not only to survive but also to develop and increase their numbers, particularly their number of recruits, known today as foreign fighters. Since 2013, Al Qaeda's offshoot known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Le-

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vant/Syria (ISIL/ISIS) or Islamic State (IS) has been rapidly gaining a foothold in territories and countries in the Middle East where state control is weakened, predominantly in Iraq and Syria.

The analysis of foreign terrorist fighters' recruitment/mobilization has become important given the rapid development of IS. A key feature of IS is the way in which it recruits foreign fighters globally and the way in which individuals join this organization on their own. It is difficult to give an exact number of the people joining IS, but there is an on-going flow of individuals from different countries who are willing to fight for IS.[1] As they have taken part in terrorist operations and become exposed to radical interpretations of Sunni or Wahhabi Islam, these people pose a potential security risk to their home countries if and when they should return.

In order to understand why IS has been successful in attracting and recruiting foreign fighters, one should study both the mechanisms of recruitment/mobilization and the independent radicalization process. Specifically, this paper focuses on institutional and individual levels of mobilization of foreign fighters from 2012 to 2014. The former refers to an institution/agency, in this case IS, as the key actor in luring in individuals,[2] whereas the latter is based on personal/group radicalization.[3] This will be assessed through the examination of merely sixteen individual case studies, due to the limited availability of foreign fighters' profiles. Based on the large scale of mobilization of foreign fighters, their numbers and the countries they come from, the case studies have been randomly selected from the following countries that head up the list of foreign fighters statistics on a regional basis (in terms of absolute numbers): Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, France, and the United Kingdom (UK).[4] Firstly, I will consider IS's background, its structure, strategy and tactics. This will be followed by an explanation of the concept and role of foreign fighters. Additionally, the relationship between the country profiles and foreign fighters will be examined. Finally, this will be followed by an analysis of the mobilization and recruitment processes and by sections offering a conclusion and policy recommendations.

The Rise of Islamic State

As a terrorist entity, IS was formed in 1999 and was known as Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad under the command of Abu Musab al Zarqawi. It was primarily active in Jordan and Afghanistan. Later, in 2004, it pledged allegiance to Al

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1 Peter R. Neumann, "Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s," *ICSR,* January 26, 2015, http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/.

2 Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 43.

3 Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 69.

4 Ibid.

Qaeda and the Taliban. Al Qaeda funded its training camps, and the Taliban provided it with territory in the western province of Herat in Afghanistan.[5] The same year, this entity renamed itself Al Qaeda fi Bilad al Rafidayn (Al Qaeda in Iraq [AQI]) and participated in the Iraqi insurgency. AQI recruited Iraqis and was very active in cooperating with nationalist and Ba'athist insurgents in Iraq.[6] Being "[l]ess disciplined, more violent and often terroristically more efficient," al Zarqawi attracted new groups to his unit under Al Qaeda's wing.[7] His successful operations helped him to strengthen his position and reputation in the terrorist world.[8] Following his death in 2006, the organization merged with other entities, renaming itself several times before separating from Al Qaeda and becoming Islamic State (IS) in 2014 under a new leader, "Caliph" Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.[9]

IS has grown in strength following the capture of territories in Iraq and Syria and has approximately 25,000 fighters.[10] Being able to act as a three-branch force, specifically, having "units devoted to terrorist, insurgent and light-infantry roles," IS has captured territories between Akhtarin in Syria's Aleppo Governorate and Salah ad Din province north of Baghdad in Iraq.[11] It took complete control of Raqqa Governorate in Syria and made it its capital.[12] In answer to the question of why IS managed to become powerful, especially over the past two years, the likely response is "a global Jihadist power vacuum" triggered by "the US intervention in Iraq, Maliki's authoritarianism, Assad's ruthlessness, and post-Bin Laden Al Qaeda's discomposure."[13] While (it is assumed that) there was worldwide "euphoria" following the Arab Spring and the weakening of Al Qaeda, IS decided to fill the Jihadist power vacuum in the Middle East, and exploit the situation of weak state governance and control in Iraq and Syria.[14] A lack of stability both in Iraq and Syria, and the consequences of this, was one of the key factors that led to the strengthening of IS.

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5 Charles Lister, "Assessing Syria's Jihad," in *Middle Eastern Security, the US Pivot and the Rise of ISIS*, ed. Toby Dodge and Emile Hokayem (New York: Routledge, 2014), 73.

6 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center Report, US Military Academy at West Point, 2007), 4.

7 Mohammed-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, *ISIS and the Deceptive Rebooting of Al Qaeda* (Geneva, 2014), 2.

8 Ibid.

9 Adam Withnall, "Iraq Crisis: Isis Declares Its Territories a New Islamic State with 'Restoration of Caliphate' in Middle East," *The Independent,* last modified June 30, 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-declares-new-islamic-state-in-middle-east-with-abu-bakr-albaghdadi-as-emir-removing-iraq-and-syria-from-its-name-9571374.html.

10 Lister, "Assessing Syria's Jihad," 73.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 74.

13 Mohamedou, *Deceptive* Rebooting, 5.

14 Ibid.

Structure, Strategy and Tactics

Having established a territorial basis, IS tried to build a pseudo state. Between four and eight million people have lived under IS's governance.[15] Organizationally, IS's leadership structure is of "pyramidal form, with al Baghdadi at the top, followed by two deputies, a Shura Council and a cabinet of ministers, and then a council of provincial governors and their military commands."[16] In addition, a War Council is the main body accountable for regular operations and future planning. IS's senior leadership mostly consists of Iraqis with formidable military experience.[17] Most of these individuals have a good education but feel discriminated against and alienated; they do not like how Islam is portrayed in the media and blame the West and the double standards of its policies for the trouble in Iraq.[18] Individuals responsible for media, religious teaching, law enforcement, and recruitment are mostly Saudis, Tunisians, and Europeans.[19]

Al Baghdadi appears to be not only IS's head but also its source of religious legitimacy.[20] Having gained a PhD degree in Islamic Studies from the Islamic University of Baghdad and having been active as an imam for several years, Al Baghdadi is considered to be an important figure for IS in gaining credibility thanks to his high level of Islamic education. His radical religious rule is combined with the practice of a bureaucratic military style of command at each level within his organization. Al Baghdadi has managed to create "a cohesive, disciplined and flexible organization."[21] On the military side, IS has a good reporting system; reporting starts at the local level and goes through the provincial command to the War Council. IS is provided with detailed military reports on an annual basis that include both statistics and analysis.[22]

Financially, IS is "self-sufficient" and has its own system for collecting and distributing money. Territorial control gives IS an opportunity to gain access to oil fields and implement a variety of criminal activities and services. The amount of money IS receives by selling petroleum products is close to USD 100

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15 *Collapsing Order, Reluctant Guardians? Munich Security Report 2015* (Munich Security Conference, 2015), 37.

16 Lister, "Assessing Syria's Jihad," 75.

17 Ibid.

18 "Public Discussion: Making Sense of ISIS – The Islamic State and Changing Geostrategic Dynamics," Geneva Centre for Security Policy, accessed September 30, 2014, http://gcsp.ch/Regional-Development/Events/Public-Discussion-Making-Sense-of-ISIS-The-Islamic-State-and-Changing-Geostrategic-Dynamics.

19 Lister, "Assessing Syria's Jihad."

20 Ibid.

21 Ahmed Hashim, *From Al Qaeda Affiliate to the Rise of the Islamic Caliphate: the Evolution of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)* (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2014), 7.

22 Lister, "Assessing Syria's Jihad," 76.

million a month.[23] It spends money on its operations and also devotes a lot of financial resources to the restoration and construction of civilian infrastructure within the territories under their control, and to the maintenance of governing and organizational bodies. This is necessary for IS in order to present itself as a body able to replace Iraqi and Syrian state systems and governments. The "state of anarchy" in these two countries is used by IS to win public support "by imposing security, providing social services and implementing Sharia."[24]

Strategically, IS needs to keep destabilizing Syria and Iraq. It plays on the religious divides and political vulnerabilities of these two countries. In both Iraq and Syria, IS exploits religious and ethnic sectarian tensions. This gives an opportunity for IS to carry out its operations effectively. Its operation "Breaking Walls" was aimed at releasing prisoners from Abu Ghraib and expanding its geographical reach.[25] The result of this operation was "the escape of 500 or more prisoners" in 2013 and the beginning of another operation, "Soldiers' Harvest," which sought to weaken the military capacity of the Iraqi security forces and exploit political tensions between Shi'a and Sunni groups in Iraq.[26] In both Syria and Iraq, IS demonstrates its aggression through rapid deployment of its infantry units and the use of suicidal attacks.[27] It receives weapons in Iraq, ships them to Syria, and then uses them in the fight against both the government and the opposition. Military operations go hand-in-hand with its brutal methods of killing to provoke public fear and intimidate opponents. These methods include beheadings, mass executions and the violent displacement of minorities. All these scenes of brutality are presented on social media in high-quality imagery and in several languages. This contributes both to intimidation and to the recruitment processes.

Foreign Fighters as a Key Component

The term "foreign fighters" can be understood in a range of ways, but is also often associated with another word, "jihadist."[28] In fact, in addition to terrorism, "foreign fighter" does not have a commonly agreed definition in political science. However, in this work, a "foreign fighter" will be defined as "an individual who leaves his or her country of origin or habitual residence to join a non-state armed group in an armed conflict abroad and who is primarily motivated by

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[23] *ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization*, The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center Report, November 26, 2014, p. 154, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/20733.

[24] Hashim, *From Al Qaeda Affiliate*, 9.

[25] Jessica Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: the Breaking the Walls Campaign, Part I* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2013), 7.

[26] Ibid., 8.

[27] Charles Lister, *Profiling the Islamic State* (Brookings Doha Center, 2014), 18-19.

[28] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (2010/11): 53-94.

ideology, religion, and/or kinship."[29] In some cases, foreign fighters may be paid, but money is not the only or primary stimulus. Foreign fighters can be recruited and mobilized in different ways. The manner of recruitment and mobilization depends on the country in question and its regional peculiarities.

In spite of the fact that the key leadership positions in IS are held by Iraqis, a major part of its military structure is comprised of foreign fighters. This is strategically important for IS in order for it to live up to its image of a transnational organization striving to build an Islamic caliphate on a regional level, and then rolling this out on a global level. In addition, it is beneficial to have access to the different skill-sets that foreign fighters possess. One of the main tactics that IS uses to attract foreign fighters is the effective exploitation of social media platforms. It produces high-quality videos at near-professional standards and in various languages to address a wider audience and illustrate its global ambition. IS speaks to everyone, calling for the mobilization and support it needs to win the religious war it is fighting.

IS has shown the results of its activities on social media, for example, how it has taken cities, used weaponry and created safe havens.[30] It offers individuals "religious righteousness, … adventure, … a sense of self and community,"[31] a chance "to feel powerful," and "an opportunity … to take refuge in a group mentality" and ideology.[32] IS's media department, Al Hayat, addresses individuals via such messages with reference to the call of duty, the notion of jihad as an obligation, and existential threats posed against Islam. These messages can easily be found on the Internet, and people can discuss how they can join IS and attend its religious courses online. Those people who make contact with IS's members online "have to give over their passwords to the group."[33] Potential recruits also undergo online interviews using anonymous browsers, secure programs, and proxy servers. As they talk to the potential recruit, recruiters maintain a warm and welcoming atmosphere, enabling the potential recruit to feel as if they are joining a fraternity or brotherhood.

Fighters from the West are a key asset for IS. American and European fighters can be used by IS as a tool to carry out attacks in Western countries in the future. The presence of these fighters during the filming of IS's activities plays a

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[29] Sandra Kraehenmann, "Foreign Fighters under International Law" (Geneva: Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2014), 6.

[30] Jesse Singal, "Why ISIS Is So Terrifyingly Effective at Seducing New Recruits," *Scienceofus.com,* last modified August 18, 2014, http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2014/08/how-isis-seduces-new-recruits.html.

[31] Audrey Kurth Cronin, "ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group: Why Counterterrorism Won't Stop the Latest Jihadist Threat," *Foreign Affairs,* accessed February 20, 2015, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143043/audrey-kurth-cronin/isis-is-not-a-terrorist-group.

[32] Singal, "Why ISIS Is So Terrifyingly Effective."

[33] Alessandria Masi, "Here's How ISIS Recruits Westerners," *Business Insider*, September 10, 2014, http://www.businessinsider.com/how-isis-recruits-westerners-2014-9.

crucial role in recruiting individuals not only from the West but also from other regions around the world. The appearance of Western individuals on social media as foreign fighters contributes to IS's promotion. IS does not only use religious justification to attract foreign fighters, but also "a promise of real and imminent success" based on its military capabilities.[34]

Relationship between Country Profiles and Foreign Fighters

Tunisia is an Islamic country with a predominantly Sunni Muslim population. In 2010, there was an uprising which resulted in the corrupt government of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali being overthrown. Following the uprising, however, Tunisia's socio-economic situation has remained poor, as indicated in Table 1 below. These socio-economic difficulties, on the one hand, and the unstable political situation that some "radicals took advantage of," on the other, could contribute to the radicalization of young people who "had lost faith in the political elite" and "who no longer believe in a democratic transition."[35] The high level of corruption, low GDP, high level of youth unemployment, a very fragile state, and a lack of provision of civil liberties only serve to increase frustration and the likelihood that young people are recruited and mobilized. After the uprising, the level of unemployment among young people has remained high, at 31.2 %. Impoverished, unemployed young people are likely to support extremists and become jihadists themselves.[36] However, some "jihadists [from Tunisia] are not necessarily poor, but are often from the middle and lower-middle classes."[37] They are mostly university, college, and high school students, graduates or civil servants aged between 17 and 27 years old.[38] In general, jihadists come from a variety of backgrounds and do not fall under single category.

Saudi Arabia is an autocratic state (monarchy) in which Sunni Islam is the official state religion, and expression or demonstration of other forms of Islam (particularly Shi'ite) is severely restricted. According to its country profile, there is a high level of corruption and civil liberties are widely suppressed. Freedom of expression is tightly controlled. Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is an oil-rich country, with a high GDP per capita, more than a quarter of its youth is un-

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[34] Jessica Lewis, *The Islamic State: a Counter-Strategy for a Counter-State* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2014), 18.

[35] "Tunisian Youth at Forefront of Syria's Foreign Fighters," *Middle East Eye*, last modified February 13, 2015, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisian-youths-forefront-syrias-foreign-fighters-2092065276.

[36] Pierre Bienaimé, "Here's Why So Many of Tunisia's Youth Are Drawn to ISIS," *Business Insider*, last modified October 22, 2014, http://www.businessinsider.com/heres-why-so-many-of-tunisias-youth-are-drawn-to-isis-2014-10.

[37] Hazem al-Amin, "Who Is the 'Typical' Tunisian Jihadist?" *Al-Monitor*, last modified November 3, 2014, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/11/tunisian-jihadis-profile-fighting-syria.html.

[38] Dario Cristiani, "The Geography of Discontent: Tunisia's Syrian Fighter Dilemma," *Terrorism Monitor* 12, no. 20 (2014): 7-9.

employed (2013). The state is fragile. As in the case of Tunisia, these indicators suggest a link with recruitment to IS. Some well-known religious clerics have been strongly critical of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria,[39] and several militant groups in Syria who fought against Assad's rule, including IS, were financially supported by Saudi donors.[40] This continued until Saudi Arabia joined Western counter-terrorism operations against IS and later played a leading role in the formation of the Islamic anti-terrorism coalition. Although the creation of the "Muslim" anti-terrorism coalition has been positively accepted by many states, there have been doubts regarding its effectiveness.

In comparison to Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, both *France* and *the UK* are democracies in which Christianity is the majority religion. In France, 5 – 10 %, and in the UK, 4.4 % of the population is made up of Muslims.[41] There is corruption in both countries, but the level of this is much lower than that of Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. Both France and the UK have advanced economies, and are not particularly fragile states. The citizens of these democratic countries enjoy freedom of expression and free access to all types of media. However, more than 20 % of young people are unemployed in both countries. Despite hav-

Table 1: Country Profiles, 2013.

Indicators	Tunisia	Saudi Arabia	France	United Kingdom
Corruption Perception Index (ranking)	77 (out of 177 countries)	63 (out of 177 countries)	22 (out of 177 countries)	14 (out of 177 countries)
GDP per capita (USD)	4,316.7	25,961.8	42,503.3	41,787.5
Unemployment rate among youth (% of youth, labor force, total)	31.2	28.7	23.7	20.3
Fragile States Index (score)	76.5 (out of 120)	72.7 (out of 120)	32.6 (out of 120)	33.2 (out of 120)
Civil Liberties (1=best, 7=worst)	4	7	1	1

Sources: Transparency International, World Bank, UNDP, The Fund for Peace, and Freedom House.

[39] Aaron Zelin, "The Saudi Foreign Fighter Presence in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 4 (2014): 10-14, quote on p. 11.

[40] Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "Saudi Funding of ISIS," *The Washington Institute*, June 23, 2014, www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-funding-of-isis.

[41] *CIA World Factbook*, April 10, 2015, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/.

ing few socio-economic problems, France and the UK have the largest number of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq out of the Western European countries. It is therefore essential to explore other possible reasons for recruitment and mobilization from these countries. While there is a range of factors that motivate some individuals to join IS, one of the major reasons behind the decision of the majority of second and third generation Muslims to become jihadists is "a conflict of identity: born and raised in Europe, they no longer identify with the country and/or culture in which their parents or grandparents were brought up, yet they also feel excluded from Western society, which still perceives them as foreigners."[42] Therefore, these individuals feel comfortable thinking about joining Islamic State where they believe they will be treated equally. A sense of duty to help "Muslim brothers" is another driver.

Mobilization and Recruitment Processes

a. Tunisia and Saudi Arabia

In Tunisia, following the uprising of 2010/11, the political, economic, and social factors that facilitated the process of radicalization have been exploited by "Islamist actors"[43] including radical religious leaders and preachers who were sending "relief messages" to the public propagating ideas about injustices, existential problems, and insecurities. These radical preachers, or even schoolteachers, help radicalized individuals join IS. In fact, many mosques were under the influence of radicals and extremists during and following the 2011 uprising; these mosques were used to disseminate extremist religious discourse.[44] The new Tunisian government confirmed that "up to 1,100 mosques, out of the 5,100 in Tunisia, were in the hands of radical imams."[45] There have also been training camps stationed in the Tunisian desert where different jihadist groups were active. The army was unable to terminate these camps. One of these camps was used by IS as a training base from where Tunisian recruiters have been sending fighters to Syria through Turkey.[46] In general, recruiters affiliated with IS have usually been preachers.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, while socio-economic issues could be one of the leading factors contributing to the large number of Saudis fighting in Syria and

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[42] Peter R Neumann and Brooke Rogers, *Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe* (London: ICSR, 2007), 16.

[43] James R. Clapper, *Statement for the Record. Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community* (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2013), 14.

[44] Asma Ghribi, "Tunisia Struggles to Cope with Returnees from Syrian Jihad," *Foreign Policy*, last modified September 12, 2014, http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/12/tunisia-struggles-to-cope-with-returnees-from-syrian-jihad/.

[45] Cristiani, "The Geography of Discontent," 8.

[46] Alessandria Masi, "Islamic State 'Caliphate' in Libya Depends on Tunisian Foreign Fighters and Desert Training Camps," *International Business Times,* last modified February 20, 2015, http://www.ibtimes.com/islamic-state-caliphate-libya-depends-tunisian-foreign-fighters-desert-training-camps-1822318.

Iraq on IS's side, the increase in the number of Saudi foreign fighters happened after Hezbollah joined the conflict in Syria in support of Assad's regime during the battle of Qusayr in 2013.[47] In response to Hezbollah's involvement, the popular religious leader Yusuf al-Qaradawi called upon Sunni Muslims from Saudi Arabia to go to Syria and fight for Sunni Muslims saying: "anyone who has the ability, who is trained to fight… has to go; I call on Muslims to go and support their brothers in Syria."[48] This was later supported by Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti Abdul Aziz al-Shaykh and a Saudi cleric at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saud al-Shuraym, who stated that "Sunni Muslims had a duty to support the Syrian rebels 'by all means.'"[49] Hezbollah's participation in the conflict was exploited by well-known Saudi clerics, who referred to a "call of duty," and therefore played a decisive role in the rapid mobilization and recruitment of Saudi

Table 2: Foreign Fighters from Middle East and North Africa.

Country	Name and Age	Radicalization Process (actors, events or pathways)	Form of recruitment/ mobilization
Tunisia	El Balti, 23	Radical "ulema" (Islamic religious scholars)	institutional
	Zouheir Balti, 21	Radical preacher	institutional
	Nidhal Selmi, 22	Internet videos of the violence committed against civilians in Syria + ultra-conservative salafists in a mosque	institutional (individual)
	Mohamed Amrouni, 17	Math teacher	institutional
Saudi Arabia	Suleiman Saud Subaii, 25	Death of brother and photos of dead Syrian children	individual
	Al-Zayidi Saudi, n/a	Radical preachers and fatwas (online)	institutional
	Faisal bin Shaman al-Aanzi, 25	Al-Baghdadi's statement on a call on duty	institutional
	Hamad al-Tamimi, 18	Jihadists (online)	institutional

Sources: Middle East Eye, Newsweek, Daily News Egypt, Reuters, Cold Turkey, Vocativ, Al-Akhbar, Al-Monitor, The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, Al Arabiya, The Middle East Media Research Institute, CNN, and Alalam.

[47] Zelin, "The Saudi Foreign Fighter."
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

men to fight in Syria and Iraq. The analysis of individual cases from the two countries reflects the development of events that facilitated recruitment processes. Below are eight cases that show how young people were recruited by individuals connected to IS.

In the table above, almost all the individuals were subject to "outside" influence in Tunisia. In the first two examples, radical preachers recruited both El Balti and Zouheir Balti. El Balti, who was 23, was under the powerful influence of radical "ulema" (Islamic religious scholars) who convinced him to join IS in 2012.[50] This young and educated man was from a working-class family and led a normal life. According to his father, his son was radicalized due to the marginalization of moderate "ulema" which gave an opportunity for radical religious scholars to take the lead in a number of mosques after Ben Ali's ousting. Similarly, Zouheir Balti, who was 21, also fell under the influence of radical preachers before going to Syria.[51] Zouheir did not have a special interest in religion and politics; he had a BA degree in Information Technology. However, he fell under the spell of the radical religious narrative used by preachers who persuaded him to join IS. In the third case, Nidhal Selmi, a famous Tunisian football player, also came under the influence of ultra-conservative salafists and, as a result, joined IS and was found dead in Syria in 2014.[52] Before becoming radicalized, Selmi was not interested in religious extremism or politics. However, he started spending a lot of time with radical preachers in a local mosque. Selmi's father mentions that one of the factors that motivated his son to fight in Syria was online videos about the Syrian government's violence against civilians in Syria. In the fourth case, a math teacher helped Mohamed Amrouni, a 17 year-old boy, join IS.[53] Mohamed was from a middle-class family. His older brother Ajmi Amrouni mentioned that before going to Syria he spent a lot of time on the Internet. Whereas IS's online recruitment campaign has an impact on young people, the real recruiters have been active in schools and mosques. All these cases point to the active role of recruiters and, consequently, the organization they are working for – IS. These cases can predominantly be ascribed to the institutional model of mobilization, where the organization is the key actor in attracting individuals.

In Saudi Arabia, while one out of four cases fits the individual model of mobilization, the other three cases correspond to the institutional model. Subaii was motivated to join IS after the death of his brother and of Syrian children;

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[50] Sam Kimball, "Families of Young Tunisians Fighting with IS Appeal to New President," *Middle East Eye*, last modified February 13, 2015, http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/families-young-tunisians-fighting-appeal-president-1503373820.

[51] Ibid.

[52] James Dorsey, "Football and Militant Islam Intersect in Incidents across the Middle East," *Daily News Egypt*, last modified October 23, 2014, www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/10/23/football-militant-islam-intersect-incidents-across-middle-east/.

[53] "The Beach Town That's a Favorite ISIS Recruiting Spot," *Cold Turkey*, last modified October 11, 2014.

his decision was based on anger.[54] He says that these were the main factors that pushed him to go to Syria through Turkey where he contacted a Syrian trafficker in person who then put him in contact with IS. Subaii was detained by the police when he returned to Saudi Arabia and later gave an interview about IS's activities in Syria and Iraq. Subaii says that "most of the leaders of […] ISIS were Iraqis and Saudis and that they were working to recruit young Saudis to fight in Syria."[55] Another young man, Al-Zayidi, said in his interview on a Saudi television channel that he joined IS after reading Fatwas online and contacting several preachers.[56] Al-Zaydi listened to preachers who said that Hezbollah and Iranians were destroying Syria – and mainly focused on injustice. A 25-year-old, Faisal bin Shaman al-Aanzi worked as a medical doctor in a local hospital before joining IS and was found dead after committing a car bomb suicide attack in Iraq.[57] Al-Aanzi's decision to join IS was made following al-Baghdadi's statement on the call of duty. Hamad al-Tamimi, an 18-year-old student and IS fighter, was captured in the al-Anbar province of Western Iraq by Iraqi security forces.[58] Al-Tamimi was from Riyadh, and before joining IS, he was studying religion in a religious studies college. In his confession, al-Tamimi admitted that he was contacted and recruited by jihadists through the Internet. All these three examples indicate that Zayidi, Aanzi and Tamimi were influenced by individuals linked to IS. These three cases are examples of the institutional model of recruitment.

b. France and the UK

The profiles of foreign fighters from these two countries are similar in many ways. For example, the majority of the fighters are from large Muslim communities based in France and the UK[59] as a result of the extensive flow of Muslim immigrants to these countries in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s from former Brit-

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54 "Former ISIS Fighter: Islamists Fighting Each Other in Syria," *Al-Monitor*, last modified March 7, 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/03/former-isis-fighter-saudi-islamists-syria-infighting.html.

55 *The Phenomenon of Foreign Fighters from the Arab World in the Syrian Civil War, Most of Them Fighting in the Ranks of Organizations Affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Global Jihad* (Israel: The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014), 72.

56 "Former Saudi ISIS Fighter Reveals Secrets of Militant Group," Al Arabiya News video, 16:02, September 22, 2014, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/webtv/reports/2014/09/22/Former-Saudi-ISIS-fighter-reveals-secrets-of-militant-group.html.

57 "Saudi Doctor Who Joined ISIS Killed: Reports," *Al Arabiya News*, last modified July 14, 2014, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2014/07/14/Saudi-doctor-leaves-homeland-to-tend-to-ISIS-fighters.html.

58 Jomana Karadsheh, Jim Sciutto, and Laura Smith-Spark, "How Foreign Fighters Are Swelling ISIS Ranks in Startling Numbers," *CNN*, last modified September 14, 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/12/world/meast/isis-numbers/.

59 *Foreign fighters from Western countries in the ranks of the rebel organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria* (Israel: The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014), 5.

ish and French colonies. They are young (20-35 years old), educated middle/ working-class students and professionals who represent the second and third generation of Muslim immigrant communities. There are also Christians, who became Muslims and were gradually radicalized, although these are in the minority. In general, these foreign fighters mostly "share a Salafist-jihadi ideology," and most of them do not have military skills before they join terrorist groups.[60] An analysis of mobilization and recruitment in Europe in recent years reveals that the process is more bottom-up (individual) than top-down (institutional).[61] Top-down recruitment in Europe has been weakened and undermined following international anti-terrorism operations launched in the wake of 9/11. According to the findings of a study carried out by King's College London for the European Commission, today "Islamist militancy in Europe is believed to consist of self-selected, multi-ethnic 'local networks' that have little or no connection" to terrorist organizations.[62] Mobilization and self-recruitment is widespread among young people, with converts playing a more significant role. As radicalization progresses, these people are linked to networks and cells that were created independently of terrorist organizations. This shows that an individual starts with self-radicalization, and then joins or forms a network of like-minded individuals within his/her community and country. The Internet has made it easier to find other radicalized people and their networks. Individual cases of mobilization and recruitment are considered below.

The mobilization of the four individuals from France occurred without the influence of a recruiter who, for example, was able initially to contact those individuals directly and offline in order to persuade them to join IS. In most cases, these individuals planned their trips and contacted those who helped them to travel to the conflict zones on their own initiative. Almost all the cases show traces of self-radicalization. In each case, different factors (online and offline) facilitated the radicalization of each individual and further contributed to their decision to become a foreign fighter for IS.

Having experienced discrimination and spent some time in prison, Mehdi Nemmouche became a jihadist.[63] Nemmouche was from an underprivileged family that lived in Roubaix, a poor industrial city in northeastern France close to Belgium. Nemmouche's mother said that their family was economically deprived and considered by the local population to be outsiders because of their physical appearance. Before joining IS, Nemmouche was imprisoned several times for different types of crime, including robbery. He was significantly radicalized in prison, and following his release, Nemmouche traveled to a number of places and finally arrived in Syria to join IS. Maxime Hauchard discovered

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Neumann and Rogers, *Recruitment and Mobilisation*, 17.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Loretta Bass, "What Motivates European Youth to Join ISIS?" *Syria Comment*, last modified November 20th, 2014, http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/push-factors-helping-isil-recruitment-loretta-bass/.

Table 3: Foreign Fighters from Western Europe.

Country	Name and Age	Radicalization Process (actors, events or pathways)	Form of Recruitment/ Mobilization
France	Mehdi Nemmouche, 29	Discrimination and prison	Individual
	Maxime Hauchard, aka Abu Abdallah el-Faransi, 22	Internet + desire to create a caliphate and commit martyrdom	Individual
	Mickael Dos Santos, 22	Muslim friend + home-grown	Individual / Institutional)
	Salahudine al-Faransi, 27	Conflict in Syria + inability to express frustration in mosques + videos of bin Laden's sermons on the internet	Individual
United Kingdom	Abu Muhadjar, n/a	Duty to protect Muslims and do aid work	Individual
	Abdul Raqib Amin, 26	Internet + desire to leave the land of 'disbelievers' and establish a caliphate + inability to find like-minded people in mosques	Individual
	Mohammed Emwazi *aka* Jihadi John, 26	Suspected of having connection to terror groups + suppression by the security services	Individual
	Brothers Muthana, Nasser and Aseel, 20 and 17	Mosques (radical preachers) + jihad as obligatory	Institutional

Sources: BBC, Syria Comment, The New York Times, The Economist, The Guardian, The Los Angeles Times, International Business Times, France 24, Jihadology, The Soufan Group, Socjournal, The Straits Times, The Telegraph, Mail Online News, NBC News, Daily Record, Mirror, and The Independent.

radical Islam online and was mobilized by online networks.[64] Hauchard, also known as Abu Abdallah el-Faransi, is a 22-year-old Frenchman from Le Bosc-Roger-en-Roumois in Normandy, who carried out beheadings of Syrian soldiers as well as American and Syrian hostages, after joining IS. Hauchard was from a

[64] "The French jihadi: Enfant de la Patrie," *The Economist*, last modified November 18, 2014, http://www.economist.com/blogs/charlemagne/2014/11/french-jihadi.

Catholic family but converted to Islam at the age of 17. In his interview with the French TV news channel BFMTV, Hauchard said that "he became interested in Islam via the internet" and decided to go to Syria "to help create a caliphate" and commit "martyrdom."[65]Another Muslim convert, Mickael Dos Santos, an acquaintance of Hauchard, also joined IS at the age of 22.[66] He was from a town to the east of Paris and grew up in a Catholic family. It was his Muslim friend who helped him learn about Islam, and then Dos Santos became radicalized on his own. According to Dos Santos's girlfriend, he acquired radical views quickly and had "gone astray."[67] Another individual, a 27-year-old Frenchman of Moroccan origin, who prefers to call himself Salahudine al-Faransi, left Paris with his wife and two daughters to join IS.[68] Salahudine became gradually radicalized after he started following news about the Syrian conflict and, from there, jihad became an obligation for him. Salahudine was angered by the "world's indifference toward [his] Muslim brothers" and was unable to express his frustration in mosques.[69] Instead, Salahudine started watching videos online and listening to radical speeches, and finally decided to go to Syria on his own. Salahudine claimed that he did not undergo a religious radicalization process: rather, his levels of awareness were raised. He said, "I did not join any network or group, believe me. I did not know anyone. I prepared for my journey alone."[70]

In three out of four cases in the UK, individuals became radicalized and then joined IS because of personal reasons, which fits with an individual model of radicalization. Moral outrage and a sense of duty to protect Muslims pushed Abu Muhadjar to leave his home.[71] Muhadjar was from a well-educated middle-class family, but he decided to leave his family "to protect Muslim lands and blood of [Sunni] Muslims" and "do aid work as well."[72] Importantly, Muhadjar stated that no one influenced his decision to become a foreign fighter; he says, "There was no recruitment process to come here. It was an individual decision

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[65] Anne Penketh, "Frenchman in Isis Beheading Video Had Told TV of Caliphate Hopes," *The Guardian,* last modified November 17, 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/17/islamic-state-isis-maxime-hauchard-beheadings-video-france.

[66] Umberto Bacchi, "Isis: French Jihadist Mickael Dos Santos 'Denies Appearing in Beheading Video,'" *International Business Times*, last modified November 20, 2014, http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-french-jihadist-mickael-dos-santos-denies-appearing-beheading-video-1475833.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Stéphane Mantoux, "Hide These Jihadists That I Can't See: The French Volunteers In Syria," *Jihadology*, last modified February 25, 2014, http://jihadology.net/2014/02/25/guest-post-hide-these-jihadists-that-i-cant-see-the-french-volunteers-in-syria/.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Jenny Cuffe, "Who are the British Jihadists in Syria?" *BBC,* last modified October 15, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-24520762.

[72] Richard Barrett, *Foreign Fighters in Syria* (New York: TSF, 2014), 21.

that I took."[73] Bangladeshi-born Abdul Raqib Amin, a 26-year-old engineering student from Aberdeen, Scotland stated that he was mobilized by online networks and had a desire to leave the country.[74] He says, "I left the UK to fight for the sake of Allah … fight until the Khilafah (rule of Islam) is established."[75] He mentioned that mosques did not have an impact on his choice to join up to jihad; he claimed, "In the Aberdeen mosque there is not one person with the same mentality as me. They don't agree with jihad and disagree with all these extremists."[76] Another fighter, Jihadi John, who brutally killed several hostages in publicly disseminated IS videos, was identified as Mohammed Emwazi from West London.[77] His path to radicalization was different. Kuwaiti-born Emwazi was a graduate of Westminster University. In 2009, after his graduation, Emwazi took a trip to Tanzania, or what he called a safari holiday. However, upon his arrival in Dar es Salaam, he was arrested by the police and was not allowed to stay in Tanzania. He was suspected of having connections with terror groups in Somalia. Emwazi finally joined IS following bullying by the security forces. In the case of the Muthana brothers, they were radicalized in mosques, meaning that a radical preacher influenced them. Nasser Muthana, a 20-year-old Yemeni-born student from Cardiff, who was offered a place to study medicine at four universities, appeared in the recruitment video released by IS. His father said that his son became radicalized following his frequent visits to different mosques. The same path was followed by his second son Aseel, a 17-year-old teenager who, influenced by his brother, also joined IS. In his online conversation with BBC Wales, Aseel stated that he considers jihad to be obligatory.[78]

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

With the recent development of Islamic State, the phenomenon of foreign fighters and the mechanism of their recruitment and mobilization have become

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[73] Ling Chang Hong, "8 Things to know about British Islamic extremists," *The Straits Times*, last modified August 21, 2014, www.straitstimes.com/news/world/europe/story/8-things-about-british-jihadists-20140821.

[74] "Scots Jihadist Abdul Raqib Amin says he was recruited through the Internet and is prepared to die for his cause," *Daily Record*, July 7, 2014, www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scots-jihadist-abdul-raqib-amin-3823180.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Paul Byrne, "British ISIS militant Abdul Raqib Amin believed killed by Iraqi soldiers," *Mirror,* last modified July 15, 2014, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/british-isis-militant-abdul-raqib-3866692.

[77] Raziye Akkoc and Barney Henderson, "Jihadi John identified: What we know about Mohammed Emwazi," *The Telegraph*, last modified February 26, 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11436821/Jihadi-John-identified-What-we-know-about-Mohammed-Emwazi.html.

[78] "Cardiff Jihadist 'willing to die' for ISIS fight in Syria," *BBC*, last modified July 2, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-28116575.

an acute security problem. Understanding how people join Islamic State could help to reduce the scale of the threat posed by foreign fighters. Foreign fighters have been one of the primary sources of Islamic State's strength. There has been continuous growth in the number of foreign fighters from different countries and regions. This facilitates Islamic State's attempts to present itself as a transnational entity. Conceptually, the mobilization process can be divided into two categories: a) a "terrorist organization" as the main actor recruiting individuals and b) "homegrown radicalized individuals" joining a terrorist organization by their own decision.

The type of mobilization process varies by region and is dependent on the profile of the country in question. This analysis of sixteen individual case studies shows that Islamic State has actively recruited individuals in Tunisia and Saudi Arabia with the help of radical preachers while the process of self-radicalization is the main driver of mobilization in most of the cases in the United Kingdom and France. This means that both institutional and individual models of mobilization and recruitment are at play, but that the prevalence of each also depends on the specific nature of the country in question. Overall, the study of cases from Tunisia and Saudi Arabia demonstrates the dominance of institutional recruitment while domestic radicalization is more frequent in France and the UK.

Based on this analysis, the following policy recommendations have been developed: 1) Tunisia and Saudi Arabia should focus on and combat the channels of recruitment within their borders and cut external recruitment links coming from neighboring countries. At the same time, the provision of decent jobs for the population, especially young people, would be crucial in the war against terrorism. 2) France and the UK, in addition to their involvement in operations against IS, should concentrate on homegrown radicalization and work actively with the local population, and especially with Muslim population (who are prone to radicalization). These two countries should reconsider their national identity-building projects and work to prevent their minorities (or in this case, the Muslim population) being discriminated against and alienated. 3) The international community should help to build strong governments in the territories of the countries captured by IS – governments able to meet the needs of their populations and stand up to terrorist organizations. Otherwise, a lack of coherence and a common international as well as regional approach to the fight against terrorism will continue to have a negative effect on the efforts of different countries and international organizations trying to bring peace to Syria and Iraq.

About the author

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