Foreign fighters from Western countries in the ranks of the rebel organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria

A message to the West from an American foreign fighter killed in

A foreign fighter, probably American, calling himself Abu Dujana al-Amriki, killed in the fighting in Syria. He appears in an Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (henceforth the Islamic State) video; behind him is the Al-Qaeda flag. He says that "...this is a message for the people of the West from the jihad fighters in Syria. We have come from all nationalities to defend our land, this Islamic land, to spread the Sharia of Allah on the face of the earth and to sacrifice our lives and souls for jihad. We have come to kill all those who stand in our way. This flag [of Al-Qaeda] will yet wave over the capitals of [all] the countries in the world. With this simple weapon [pointing to the rifle he carries] we will liberate our lands and our people and bring Islamic law [the Sharia] to rule over the entire earth..." (Weaselzippers.us website).

Overview

1. This is a follow-up study of the ITIC's in-depth study of foreigners in Syria. It deals with foreign fighters from Western countries in the ranks of the Syrian rebels, mainly the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (henceforth the Islamic State).

We estimate their minimum number as 1,600, and their maximum number as 2,100. Most of the Western foreign fighters are from Western Europe and a small number are from other countries. Reasons for the range of numbers will be presented below.

1 Continuation of the December 2013 ITIC study on foreign fighters in Syria: "This past year saw a marked increase in the involvement of foreigners in the fighting against the Syrian regime. Most join Al-Qaeda- and global jihad-affiliated organizations, gain military experience, and undergo radicalization and jihadization. They are liable to import continue terrorist and subversive activities to their countries of origin when they return (the 'Afghanistan model')."
Returning to their countries of origin after having undergone military training and ideological indoctrination, they pose a potential subversive-terrorist threat.

2. The study examines the countries of origin of the Western foreign fighters according to two categories:

1) **Europe** (the origin of most of the Western foreign fighters)

2) **Other Western countries** (the United States, Canada and Australia)

3. **Our current estimate is higher than the previous one of a minimum of 1,000 Western foreign fighters.** One reason is the sharp rise in their overall number during the second half of 2013, mainly foreign fighters from West. Another possible reason is a growing awareness of the phenomenon and its risks, as well as an improvement in monitoring the fighters leaving for Syria and returning to their countries of origin.²

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### Western Europe

#### Estimated Number of European Foreign Fighters

4. The estimated number of European foreign fighters **falls into a wide range for a number of reasons:** the rapid rate of enlistment, especially during the second half of 2013 (necessitating the update of the estimate); information about foreign fighters is incomplete; there is no systematic register of names; some foreign fighters have returned to their countries of origin; and deaths or/or wounding, which are not always taken into account when estimates are made.

5. At the International Economic Forum held in St. Petersburg in June 2013 Russian President Putin said that in his assessment **there were 600 European foreign fighters in Syria,** some of them Russian (RT.com website, June 21, 2013); since then hundreds of fighters from Europe have joined the ranks of the rebels. The American Gatestone Institute estimated that **the number was approaching 1000,** but in our assessment **that figure has not been currently updated.** Updated estimates have placed the number even higher. For example, according to "European intelligence services" the number is **between 1,000 and 1,7000** (Newsmax.com website, December 9, 2013). According to Belgian Minister of the Interior Joelle Milquet, "**With regards to the European figures, we estimate it's between 1,500 and 2,000, given what we have heard from our counterparts"** (European Jewish Press, December 15, 2013).

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² However, the number of Western fighters is not static. Estimates issued in Western countries in recent months are significantly higher than estimates for the first half of 2013.
Number of Fighters from the Various Countries

6. European countries from which foreign fighters join the Syrian rebels can be divided into three categories:

1) **Countries with high participation**, from which the number of foreign fighters may reach several hundred. They include Britain, Belgium, France, Holland, Germany and the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia). The largest number come from Britain (more than 300).

2) **Countries with medium participation**, from which between several dozen and 100 fighters have gone to Syria. They include Ireland, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Austria.

3) **Countries with low participation**, from which ten or fewer fighters have gone to Syria. They include Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, Romania and Switzerland.

7. The following table summaries estimates of the European foreign fighters. They are based on estimates made by local intelligence and security services, or by governments, experts and institutions and published in the European and American media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated Number of Fighters</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>200-350</td>
<td>Based on the estimates of the British intelligence services published in the British media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>200-300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>10-26</td>
<td>According to the Irish media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>200-220</td>
<td>According to updated estimates issued in the media based on security and intelligence agencies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>According to the Dutch media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Between 10 and several dozen</td>
<td>Most of the foreign fighters come from the Spanish Morocco.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>45-60</td>
<td>According to information from the local Muslim community, among others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>More than 200</td>
<td>According to a report by the German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Estimate/Number</td>
<td>Source and Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>About 65</td>
<td>Estimate of the Danish security services, published in the local media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>At least 30</td>
<td>According to an annual report issued by the Swedish intelligence services published in the local media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Several dozen</td>
<td>Estimate of the Finnish intelligence services published in the local media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Estimate of the security services of Norway published in the local media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Several dozen</td>
<td>According to the Austrian media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>About 12</td>
<td>According to an estimate of Hungarian intelligence published in the local media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxemburg</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>At least 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>Several dozen</td>
<td>According to the local media, several dozen volunteers were in Syria and returned to Bosnia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Kosovo</td>
<td>About 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>Dozens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>More than 100</td>
<td>The number includes volunteers of Albanian extraction living outside the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>The large number of foreign fighters comes from Chechnya and the northern Caucasus. They will be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


General Profile of the European Foreign Fighters

8. An overall examination of the European foreign fighters in Syria makes it possible to determine their general characteristics (Information about the individual countries will be given below.)

1) **Countries of origin:** Most of the foreign fighters come from **Western European countries** where there are large Muslim communities (Britain, Belgium, France, Holland and Germany). Large numbers of foreign fighter also come from **Scandinavia** (Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland) and the **Balkans** (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo).

2) **Motivation:** Most of the foreign fighters share a Salafist-jihadi ideology. Some of them volunteer to realize their ideology and later to import Salafist-jihadi Islam into their countries of origin. Other reasons include identification with the suffering of the Syrian people, desire to participate in the overthrow of the Assad regime, desire for adventure.³

3) **Organizations joined by the foreign fighters:** Most of them join the **Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State.** Some of them join the **Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar,** which is affiliated the Islamic State (the Al-Nusra Front is more selective in accepting foreign fighters than the Islamic State). Others join other Islamic organizations, both extremist and moderate, not affiliated with Al-Qaeda (such as Ahrar al-Sham or Liwaa al-Ummah), or the Free Syrian Army.⁴ Foreign fighters have been known to move between the organizations. Proportionally, in our assessment, the number of Western foreign fighters joining organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad is higher than other foreign fighters who join the rebels.

³ "Malik al-Abdo, a Syrian journalist based in the UK, explained why the conflict in Syria has pulled in these young fighters. Most of these people, he said, are essentially thrill-seekers wanting to experience the jihad, which for some people is a lot of fun. They get to carry a gun for the first time in their lives. They get trained up and it's exciting. I think it's inevitable that people from the UK would go to Syria. Fighting for God and fighting for Islam is one of the pillars of being a Muslim. There was an opportunity against the Soviets in Afghanistan, against the Russians in Chechnya, against the Serbs in Bosnia and now against the Alawites in Syria. They see it as another stop on the jihadi tour, if you like. And they have to be there otherwise they are missing out on a big opportunity" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19283578).

⁴ For further information about the aforementioned networks and their ties to Al-Qaeda and the global jihad, see the September 2013 in-depth study about the Al-Nusra Front.
4) Age, religion and country of extraction: Most of the foreign fighters are in their early 20s, Sunni Muslims, the second (and sometimes third) generation of Muslim immigrant communities. Conspicuous among them are volunteers of Moroccan extraction, but there are also those whose family roots are Turkish, Kurd, Syrian, Pakistani, Lebanese, Albanian and even Somali. There are even young Christians who converted to Islam and were radicalized (a minority).

5) Gender and family status: Most of the foreign fighters are single males, although in rare instances women and children join their husbands and fathers in Syria. During the second half of 2013 there were reports of married volunteers, most of whom left their families behind, some of whom brought their families with them to Syria. A German volunteer nicknamed Abu Talha used a jihadist forum to urge married fighters to bring their families to Syria and not leave them behind in "infidel countries." However, he advised them first to go to Syria and rent apartments, and only then to bring their families (MEMRI, December 16, 2013).

6) Education: Educated men and middle-class professionals have been identified among the foreign fighters. There are also students who abandoned their studies to join the rebels.

7) Criminal record: Several foreign fighters have been identified as having criminal records (mostly for minor offenses). We could not ascertain their overall number.

8) Military skill: In our assessment most of the European foreign fighters did not acquire previous military skills. Once they arrive in Syria they undergo a short course in military training in designated military camps (about 45 days), after which they are sent to the various units. In some instances (Holland, Britain) there were reports of basic training being given locally in preparation for the departure to Syria. It can be assumed that such training is given in other European countries as well.

9) Combat zones the foreign fighters are sent to: Judging by the number of foreign fighters killed, most of them are sent to the region of Aleppo. However, European foreign fighters have been killed throughout the battle zones in Syria.

Financing and Support
9. Initially only individual foreign fighters went to Syria and apparently financed the trip themselves. In our assessment, as the fighting progressed, financing and support became more established and local Muslim networks and clerics in the various countries were recruited for support.
10. There are two categories for financing:

1) **Financing the departure**: Going to Syria, which is relatively cheap, is usually paid for by individuals or the local Muslim community. The funding comes from donations intended for various purposes (charity, humanitarian assistance for the Syrian population), collected primarily in the mosques and Islamic centers. The local Muslim population is not always aware that their donations are used to finance the departure of foreign fighters to Syria.

2) **Financing the stay in Syria**: Apparently the stay in Syria is financed by the organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and other rebel organizations joined by the foreign fighters. The fighters are housed in apartments or houses and the organizations provide for their needs. They are apparently also paid a monthly salary.

11. A German foreign fighter in Syria nicknamed Abu Talha called on volunteers **not to allow lack of funds to prevent them from departing for Syria to join the jihad fighters**. In a video posted on a jihad forum on December 8, 2013, he advised the volunteers not to pay social security in their own countries for two or three months and to collect donations (MEMRI, December 16, 2013). He also advised them to bring money with them to cover their expenses, including fare and the clothing necessary for survival, adding that once they had arrived in Syria the daily needs would be provided for.

12. Salafist-jihadi networks in various European countries are recruited for support for the rebels. Some of the networks, called Sharia4, were involved in helping foreign fighters join
organizations affiliated with the global jihad. In some cases the networks were interconnected. Most prominent among them is Sharia4Belgium, headed by a jihadist cleric named Fouad Belkacem, aka Abu Imran. He was involved in dispatching at least 70 Belgian volunteers to Syria (about one third of the total number from Belgium). The Belgian law enforcement authorities took steps against the network and its leader. Similar networks have been established in other European countries, among them Holland and Denmark. In Italy an attempt was made to establish Sharia4Italy. However, in some cases foreign fighters were influenced by Salafist-jihadi propaganda they found on the Internet, and not necessarily by local Muslim networks or clerics.

Sharia4 in Several European Countries

Italy (Sharia4italy.blogspot.com website) Belgium (Barenakesdisiam.com website)

5 Some of the networks were dealt with by local authorities, only to be replaced by other networks. It is unclear what the status of the various networks is, some of which are Protean in nature.
13. Europol, the European Union’s law enforcement agency, in its annual TE-SAT report summing up 2012, said the following [ITIC emphasis throughout]: "In 2012 radical Muslim groups using a name composed of ‘Sharia4’ and the name of a country or region, such as Sharia4Belgium and Sharia4Holland, received widespread public attention due to their controversial demonstrations and statements. They have been careful not to incite their supporters to commit acts of terrorism. Nevertheless, they praise terrorist groups and present perpetrators of terrorist attacks as heroes. Through such activities, the Sharia4 groups contribute to spreading a highly intolerant
interpretation of Islam, including the support of violent acts in the name of religion, in the public sphere, thereby exposing vulnerable individuals to radical ideas. Individual members of these groups, which actively seek to provoke non-Muslim sections of the public, violently resisted or attacked law enforcement forces in some Member States in 2012. There are indications that the ideology spread by Sharia4Belgium and other groups has contributed to the radicalisation and engagement of EU citizens in the Syrian conflict.⁶

Arriving in Syria

14. The foreign fighters reach Syria through Turkey, which is their logistic lifeline. In most cases they fly to Istanbul, hiding their true destination from the authorities and sometimes from their families (by leaving from other countries, buying tickets at the airport at the last minute, not travelling as part of a large group). From Istanbul they fly or use public transportation, and go to safe houses in locations near the Syrian border. From there they are taken by local contacts and networks to the rebel organizations in Syria, especially the Al-Nusra Front, and others affiliated with the global jihad. Crossing from Turkey into Syria is relatively easy, the following photo illustrates:

![Border line between Syria and Turkey. Now how easy does that look!!](image)

From the Facebook page of a British foreign fighter (Vice.com website).

How Europe Copes with Volunteers Going to Syria

15. How significant is the number of young foreign fighters joining the ranks of the global jihad in Syria? Considering their absolute numbers and the size of the Muslim

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⁶ https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/europol_te-sat2013_lr_0.pdf (Section 2.2)
population in Europe, in most of the countries the phenomenon is still not widespread. However, their numbers are rising and it can be assumed they will continue to do so. **The European security services consider the phenomenon serious.** They are concerned that when the foreign fighters return to their countries of origin, after having undergone military training and radicalization in Syria, they will have the potential for spreading extremism in the local Muslim communities and possibly be involved in terrorist activities (as happened in the case of foreign fighters who returned from Afghanistan).

16. Their concerns led to an internal European dialogue about how to cope with foreign fighters. The approach of some countries is that **local law enforcement authorities should take steps to prevent the young men from going to Syria.** Others claim that their departure is a function of the difficult socio-economic conditions of the Muslim communities, where **thorough grass-roots activity in the economic, social and educational spheres is necessary to treat conditions** outside the context of fighters going to Syria. In addition the EU is examining **legal ways** to keep the volunteers from leaving their countries of origin and to monitor them once they return. **There is an awareness** of the need for European and international collaboration in gathering information about the foreign fighters, although there are legal restrictions and practical difficulties involved. A desire was also expressed for **cooperation with Turkey,** which as noted, is the main transit country for the foreign fighters going to Syria.

17. **In effect, the European countries are limited in their ability to deal effectively with foreign fighters going to Syria.** One reason is that the rebel organizations fighting in Syria have not been designated by Europe as terrorist organizations (with the exception of the Al-Nusra Front, designated by only some of the countries). Therefore, **going to Syria to fight does not necessarily break local laws,** and in some instances it is consistent with the public call in Europe to topple the Assad regime. However, in some cases efforts to prevent European foreign fighters from leaving were made by local public figures from the Muslim communities, who were asked by the authorities to convince them not to join the fighting. In addition, steps have begun to be taken against Islamic activists, clerics, networks and agencies enlisting volunteers and helping them reach Syria. **In our assessment, the steps are hesitant and the practical influence is as yet limited.**

18. **Regarding international cooperation,** there are signs of a beginning. In early December 2013 Belgian Interior Minister Joelle Milquet organized a meeting of foreign ministers and secretaries from Holland, France, Britain, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, Australia, Canada and the United States. They dealt with the issue of foreign fighters in Syria and their influence on their countries of origin upon return. **Gilles de Kerchove,** EU Counterterrorism Coordinator, presented what he called the "**major security threat**" of
the foreign fighters who joined the ranks of the Assad regime's opponents. He also called for an improvement in the exchange of information among government officials in the various countries regarding the use of air routes to reach Syria (European Jewish Press, December 15, 2013).

19. In conclusion, the problem of foreign fighters is complex. Most of the European foreign fighters in Syria are fighting against the Assad regime, also opposed by European countries which want to see it toppled. However, the foreign fighters join the ranks of organizations affiliated Al-Qaeda and the global jihad, which consider the West and its ideology as enemies that have to be fought. In January 2014 the media reported that the European intelligence agencies were holding secret communications with senior figures in the Assad regime in order to counter the arrival of European foreign fighters who go to Syria to fight the regime in the ranks of jihad organizations. In response Khaled Saleh, spokesman for the Syrian National Coalition, told the BBC that if the reports of European intelligence contacts with Damascus were true, "it would show a clear contradiction between the words and actions of the Friends of Syria group" who had "clearly identified the Assad regime as a source of terrorism in the region."\(^7\)

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### Distribution of Foreign Fighters According to Countries of Origin

20. The following are the distributions of European foreign fighters and an analysis according to the various countries. Each country will be analyzed according to the estimated number of its foreign fighters, its characteristics and the position of the local authorities. In addition, the names, nicknames and pictures of foreign fighters (dead and alive\(^8\)) will be provided.

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\(^7\) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25738178](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25738178)

\(^8\) It is not always possible to distinguish between foreign fighters killed in Syria and those still fighting there, or between those in Syria and those who have returned to their countries of origin. The lists of foreign fighters in this study include all the categories.
## Britain

### Overview

21. **Britain has the greatest number of foreign fighters in Syria.** The ICSR (The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence), which monitors volunteers going to fight in Syria, estimates their number at between 200 and 350 (ICSR, October 15, 2013). According to other estimates recently published in the British media (December 2013-January 2014), the number has increased and possibly exceeded 300.

22. According to the **ICSR**, the foreign fighters are generally men in their twenties, educated and with access to individuals or groups with international connections. They go to Syria in search of jihad, a sense of belonging to the Muslim nation, and the lack of a "counter narrative" that would prevent them from going. In Syria they find themselves adopting a view similar to that of Western governments, namely that Assad is guilty of committing atrocities against civilians, and that he should be removed.⁹ (Maher Shiraz, "British Foreign Fighters in Syria," ICSR.info, October 15, 2013). According to estimates given by Maher Shiraz (January 14, 2014), at least 50 British foreign fighters have already returned to Britain (Telegraph, January 19, 2014).

23. According to the British media, **prominent among the British foreign fighters are young men of Pakistani extraction and members of the local North African communities** (among them Moroccans and Libyan and Tunisian exiles who found a haven in Britain). Britain also has **a large community of Syrian exiles**, estimated at 13,000, which has become the main support for the Syrian rebels (including collecting funds, sending consignments of material support and dispatching foreign fighters).

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British Foreign Fighters in Syria Posted on the Social Networks

Left: Muhammad al-A'raj. Right: Shukri al-Khalifi. Both came from west London and were killed in Aleppo on August 11, 2013 (Dailymail.co.uk, November 21, 2013).

Two British subjects, Muhammad al-A'raj and Shukri al-Khalifi, killed in Syria. The picture was taken in a jihadist Internet cafe in Atme, near the Turkish-Syrian border (Vice.com). At right on the wall is the Al-Nusra Front flag.
British Individuals and Organizations Aiding the Foreign Fighters

24. Most of the British foreign fighters go to Syria via Turkey, and some via different routes. Most of them go privately and pay the (relatively cheap) airfare themselves. However, there are also organized networks that help them reach Syria. The networks recruit foreign fighters primarily in the prayer chambers adjacent to the mosques or in the mosques. They pay for the foreign fighters' flight tickets if they cannot afford the tickets themselves. When the foreign fighters arrive in the Middle East contact personnel await them and facilitate their entry into Syria (BBC.co.uk, October 15, 2013).

25. The Sharia4UK network (with ties to Al-Muhajiroun) was active in Britain. Both organizations, whose activities were prohibited in Britain, were headed by Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad and Anjem Choudary. They were extremist Salafist organizations whose objective was to promote jihad and establish an Islamic Caliphate. They encouraged and supported dozens of British Muslims to join organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda in Syria (denied by Choudary). Both organizations are active in the social media (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube), which they use to promote the departure of foreign fighters to Syria and to spread their Salafist-jihadi ideology.

26. Anjem Choudary is a prominent figure in encouraging foreign fighters to go to Syria. He was born in Britain in 1967 and is of Pakistani extraction, studied medicine at Southampton University (it is unclear if he finished medical school and became a doctor), changed course, studied law and became a lawyer. He later headed the Muslim lawyers bureau. He was an aide of Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, a jihadist cleric (who today lives in London and is in contact with Choudary), who established the organization called
Al-Muhajiroun, 10 whose activities were prohibited by the British authorities. He later helped to found an organization called Al-Ghurabaa, whose activities were also prohibited by the British authorities. 11 In 2008 he established Sharia4UK and became its spokesman. The organization was closed down by the British authorities in 2010. He criticized Britain's actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and praised Osama bin Laden. In May 2012 he went to Holland to promote the establishment of Sharia4Holland, which encourages Dutch Muslims to join the foreign fighters in Syria (Militantislammonitor.org, July 12, 2013).

27. Sheikh Omar Bakri, who was formerly linked to Anjem Choudary, was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1958. He studied Islamic religious law at Damascus University and joined the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. He moved to Beirut, studied for a Masters’ Degree in Sharia, and afterwards studied in Egypt and Saudi Arabia for six months. While in Beirut he joined the Hizb al-Tahrir, an extremist Islamic political party seeking to establish an Islamic Caliphate. In January 1986 he moved to Britain and founded the British branch of Hizb al-Tahrir. In 1996 he left the organization and founded

10 Al-Muhajiroun is one of the terms used by the Al-Nusra Front and other jihadist organizations when referring to the foreign fighters. It is the Islamic term for the first handful of Muslims who supported the prophet Muhammad and emigrated with him from Mecca to Al-Madinah, forming the first nucleus of the Muslim nation. In contemporary times, in the wake of the influence of the Islamist ideologue Sayyid Qutb, executed in Egypt in 1966, the term began to mean Islamists who left Muslim society to establish a new nation, claiming that other Muslims were not sufficiently orthodox and in fact were like the infidels. The implication is that the foreign fighters in Syria are like the first Muslims who blazed the trail for the spread of Islam.

11 Al-Ghurabaa (literally strangers) is another Islamic term used to describe the foreign fighters in Syria. It comes from the Islamic oral tradition (hadiths) and refers to the foreign fighters in Syria as spearheading the renewing Islam (according to the its radical interpretation)
the Al-Muhajiroun. On September 11, 2001 he praised the terrorist operatives who carried out the attacks against the United States, and expressed identification with Al-Qaeda's ideology. In 2005, he fled Britain for Lebanon, fearing the authorities, who suspected him of involvement in terrorist attacks in Britain. He was prohibited from returning to Britain and lives in Lebanon (Wikipedia and MEMRI).

28. On November 27, 2013, **Sheikh Omar Bakri** was interviewed in Tripoli, in northern Lebanon, by the Lebanese TV station LBC-TV. He represented himself as the emir [leader] of the global *muhajiroun* movement seeking to establish an Islamic Caliphate, and claimed that his organization had 16 branches worldwide. **Choudary, he said, was the emir he had appointed to Britain.** During the interview he held a telephone conversation with Choudary (MEMRI, November 27, 2013). The Lebanese interviewer reported that **Choudary was proud of helping Muslims around the world to depart for Syria.** Choudary claimed that there were more than the reported 200 or 300 British foreign fighters in Syria, adding that "We have sent young men to Kashmir, to Bosnia, to Chechnya, to East Turkestan [i.e., the separatist Muslim district in northwest China Xinjiang], to Somalia and even to Palestine." According to Sheikh Omar Bakri, four British foreign fighters carried out suicide bombing attacks in Syria during the week prior to the interview. (Note: Unconfirmed) (MEMRI, November 27, 2013).

Anjem Choudary interviewed by LBC-TV by means of Sheikh Omar Bakri's telephone (MEMRI, November 27, 2013)
29. According to the British media, at least 17 extremist Muslims are suspected of having posted messages on the social media about the experience they gained in the war in Syria. To encourage others to join the fighting in Syria, the messages emphasize the stay in Syria as a worthwhile experience. For example, a British foreign fighter named Ifthekar Jaman (who has since been killed) described the generous amounts of food, the swimming pools and palatial villas the foreign fighters lived in. He called the fighting in Syria a "5-star jihad," and posted pictures of the so-called "good life" the British foreign fighters enjoyed in Syria (Dailymail.co.uk, November 21, 2013).

Information about Individual British Foreign Fighters

30. **Abu Yacoub** – In August 2012 a British correspondent in Aleppo met a British foreign fighter calling himself **Abu Yacoub**. He claimed he had converted to Islam five years previously, been born in Tanzania and brought Britain as a child He went to Syria in May 2012 and joined the **Ahrar al-Sham** movement, an Islamist organization involved in the war (Ctc.usma.edu, February 20, 2013).

31. **Abu Khaled** – Twenty-three years old. He said that when the conflict broke out in Syria in 2011 he began listening to sermons in London about the importance of Syria in the Islamic history, and encouraging Muslims to go there to fight. He went to Syria in January 2013 to join the Al-Nusra Front because he was attracted by its orthodoxy and determination. After enlisting he was sent to the front in Aleppo. There he met other
foreign fighters, among them Britons from London and Birmingham, and foreign fighters from Ireland, Chechnya, China, Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Denmark, France and Sweden. He said he lived in a facility in an abandoned school, along with 40-50 other armed operatives (SANA News Agency, June 19, 2013).

32. **Shajul al-Islam** – Twenty-six years old, of Bangladeshi origin, from Stratford in East London, a doctor. He was intercepted on October 9, 2012, when he returned on a flight from Egypt with his wife and child. He planned to return to work as a trauma consultant (after a two year sabbatical) (Ctc.usma.edu, February 20, 2013). At the beginning of 2013 he was accused of involvement in kidnapping two journalists in Syria but the charges against him were dropped.

33. **Abu Muhadjar** – A young man who told a BBC correspondent that he "grew up in fairly nice area. I come from a decent family, close-knit family, well educated. Everyone in my family is a university graduate. I'd consider it a middle class family. My family do know where I am and what I'm doing... There's many reasons made me leave my life and come here. The first is religious reasons...Second is humanitarian reasons - alongside of my fighting I tend to do aid work as well."\(^\text{12}\)

34. **Ibrahim al-Mazwaghi** (Abu al-Fidaa al-Libi) – In February 2013 a message was posted on the Internet about the death of Ibrahim al-Mazwaghi, 21, a Briton who grew up in London. His picture was posted with the notice stating that he was the first Briton killed in the battles in Syria. The picture showed him wearing the uniform of the Hertfordshire University basketball team. The team coach said that al-Mazwaghi had studied business management. He was killed in Aleppo on February 11, 2013 (Shaghor.com).

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\(^{12}\) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24520762](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24520762)
Ibrahim al-Mazwaghi, the first Briton killed in Syria (Left: Facebook. He is photographed on the background of a poster of Al-Ummah Brigade). Right: Dailymail).

Ibrahim al-Mazwaghi (front row left) on the battlefield in Syria, with a Chechen operative. The picture was posted on the jihad social media (Vice.com).

35. Issa Abd al-Rahman – Twenty-six years old, a doctor, graduate of Imperial College, London. He went to Syria to provide medical treatment for injured civilians. According to reports he was killed when the hospital he worked in was attacked on May 26, 2013 (Independent, Sky News, May 31, 2013). His name appears on the list of foreign fighters killed in Syria (Shaghor.com).
36. **Abu Siaf al-Libi** – A foreign fighter apparently of Libyan extraction (YouTube).

37. **Ifthekar Jaman**, aka **Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Briti** – Twenty-three years old, native of the city of Portsmouth. His family came from Bangladesh; he received a British education. On May 14, 2013, he said he had arrived in Turkey and was planning to cross the border into Syria. He publicly stated he had joined the **Islamic State in Iraq and Syria** (the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq). He used his Twitter account to document his daily life in Syria. He reported that he had met foreign fighters from France, the United States, Canada, Australia and Finland. He said the jihad training he received was like the training
he claimed to have received as a NATO soldier (France 24 TV, December 9, 2013; The Sun, November 14, 2013). On December 17, 2013, it was reported that he had been killed a few days earlier in a battle waged in the Deir al-Zor district in eastern Syria.

38. Ali al-Manasfi – Twenty-two years old, born in London, of Syrian extraction, killed in Syria. He was in Syria for five months before his death. Al-Manasfi was killed in the Idlib region by gunfire aimed at his car by Syrian soldiers. There were two other passengers in the car, an American woman named Nicole Lynn Mansfield from Flint, Michigan, who had converted to Islam, and a third passenger about whom there is no information. Al-Manasfi’s British passport was shown on TV (Guardian.co.uk, May 31, 2013). Al-Manasfi fought in the ranks of the Ahrar al-Sham movement, an Islamic military network that collaborates with the Al-Nusra Front. According to his friends, he was only in Syria for four months at the time of his death, had fought in many battles and was one of their best fighters (Telegraph.co.uk, June 1, 2013).

39. The al-Manasfi family, whose roots are in Damascus, are conservative Sunni Muslims. His father was a bus driver; his parents separated and his father remarried. Ali al-Manasfi grew up in west London. According to a friend, even as a teenager al-Manasfi drifted into trouble, and was involved in street fights with gangs and in petty crime. In 2009 he got drunk and attacked an older man. He was caught, sentenced to four or five years in jail, and initially imprisoned in Feltham young offenders institute. In prison he became interested in religion. Released in 2011 he decided he would travel to his father’s homeland of Syria. He began attending a radical mosque in west London. In January 2013 he went to Syria, despite warnings from MI5. He probably entered Syria from Turkey, possibly legally via the international crossing point at Bab Al-Hawa. Once in Syria he occasionally contacted home via Skype. He fought in Al-Qusayr, Hama and possibly in Latakia (Guardian.co.uk, May 31, 2013).
40. The Guardian published the statements from an unidentified British man in his twenties who had returned to Britain after a number of months in Syria. His parents immigrated to Britain in the 1970s. He said that in April 2013 he had gone to Beirut and from there to Syria against his parents' wishes. He said that he had not received military training and that he spent most of his time distributing food and water (The Guardian, November 4, 2013).

41. Nassim Terreri and Walid Blidi, both of Algerian extraction, were raised in London and died March 26, 2012, at Darkoush, a few miles from the Turkish border. Nassim Terreri dropped out of university and when he was in his early twenties he became religious and reportedly enjoyed videos of the “extremist Australian preacher” Sheikh Feiz Mohammed. He reportedly participated in an aid convoy to Gaza led by the anti-Israeli former MP George Galloway at the end of 2011. In early 2012 he and Walid Blidi went to France on vacation, and two weeks later he called his mother from the Syrian border. Two weeks after that his mother received a phone call informing her that her son was dead, killed along with Walid Blidi in an attack carried out by the Free Syrian Army against a Syrian regime convoy (Ctc.usma.edu, February 20, 2013).

42. Abu Naseiba al-Britani – Killed in Damascus on November 24, 2013. Apparently fought in the ranks of one of the jihadist organizations.
Position of the British Authorities

43. British security and intelligence services are concerned Syria has become a source of attraction for extreme Muslim youngsters from Britain. British intelligence services cite three reasons for their concern [ITIC emphasis]: First, some of the British fighters may have already been inclined to attack their home country, but simply lacked expertise: they will acquire that. Second, they may be exposed to al-Qaeda's ideology in Syria, and perhaps even talent-spotted as potential leaders. Third, the prospect of a large, ungoverned space close to Europe that could be used as a base from which to stage an attack on Britain is troubling (Economist.com, May 4, 2013).

44. The annual report of the British Parliament's Security and Intelligence Community for 2012-2013 mentioned the issue of Syria, noting that the "Agencies and JTAC assess that Al-Qaeda elements and individual jihadists in Syria currently represent the most worrying emerging terrorist threat to the UK and the West... Large numbers of radicalised individuals have been attracted to the country, including significant numbers from the UK and Europe. They are likely to acquire expertise and experience which could significantly increase the threat posed when they return home..." (Page 10). In addition, "There is also an increasing potential for those who travel overseas to train and fight alongside one of the Al-Qaeda affiliate groups to subsequently return to the UK and pose a direct threat to the UK’s national security...Most significant, however, is the growing trend for UK-resident extremists to join Islamist elements of the opposition in

Syria, which is likely to form part of the terrorist threat picture for years to come” (Page 12).

45. Andrew Parker, head of MI5, told a parliamentary hearing the conflict in Syria was attracting al-Qaeda UK sympathizers. He said that hundreds of people had gone to Syria from Britain and returned. One of the reasons, he said, was Syria's geographic proximity and the ease of reaching it, but it was also attractive as a "jihad cause." He added that MI5 had to monitor them after their return to see if they were planning involvement in violence in Britain. In his opinion, most of them would not be involved in violence, but it was reasonable to expect that some of them would. He said that the enlistment of foreign fighters to Syria was being monitored, but he did not elaborate (isc.independent.gov.uk).

46. Sir John Sawers, head of MI6, was asked in Parliament about the steps being taken in Britain to prevent Britons from going to Syria. He said the two intelligence agencies (MI5 and MI6) were working closely together, but that MI6 had no jurisdiction inside Britain and therefore relied on MI5 to report suspicious activity. He said that MI6 was working with partners in south Eastern Europe and the Arab world who could help identify the movement of men from place to place. He also said that MI6 had connections with the Syrian opposition allowing it to know when fighters arrived from Britain (isc.independent.gov.uk).

47. It seems that despite awareness of the dangers, in practical terms the British find it difficult to take effective steps against them. On April 25, 2013, Theresa May, the British home secretary, said that in principle, it was possible for the government to cancel the passport of anyone involved in terrorist activities outside Britain. However, regarding Syria, it was not clear if the foreign fighters were involved in terrorism. She said that most of the British Muslims fighting against the Assad regime were not breaking the law and therefore could return to Britain without being detained. Moreover, it was difficult to monitor them because they hid their final destination, first going to another European county, such as France, before they flew to Turkey or Jordan. Therefore, so far only a limited number of foreign fighters had been detained (Gatestoeinstitute.org, March 21, 2013).
Ireland

Overview

48. The number of Irish foreign fighters in Syria was estimated as between 10 and 26 (IrishTimes.com, May 3, 2013). Apparently the overwhelming majority are Muslims. Some who went to Syria were veterans of the battles in Libya. Four deaths of Irish foreign fighters have been reported in Syria, including that of a 16 year-old boy.

Information about Individual Irish Foreign Fighters

49. Mehdi al-Harati – Resident of Dublin, married to an Irish-born woman, father of four. Taught Arabic and was well known as pro-Palestinian. Participated in the Mavi Marmara flotilla to the Gaza Strip in May 2010. In 2011, while in Libya, he founded the "Tripoli Brigade," one of the first units into the Libyan capital in August 2011. After the fall of Tripoli he was appointed deputy head of the Tripoli Military Council, but last autumn stepped down as commander of the brigade and as council deputy. He made his first trip to Syria shortly after stepping down for what he said was initially humanitarian work in the country's northern flank. Liwaa al-Ummah emerged earlier this year, he said, after several Syrians, aware of his experience as commander of the Tripoli Brigade, approached him about establishing a similar outfit in Syria. He claimed that he and other foreigners
within the brigade’s ranks were there only to “facilitate and train civilian rebels” using lessons from the Libyan revolution.\(^{14}\)

50. It has been reported that in addition to Mehdi al-Harati, some of his followers from Libya and Ireland are also in Syria. One of them is Husam Najjair, 34, aka Irish Sam, al-Harati's brother-in-law.\(^{15}\) He was born in Ireland to a Libyan father and Irish mother; he worked as a contractor. Before he went to Libya he had no military experience. Arriving in Libya, he joined al-Harati's Tripoli Brigade, where he received the nickname "the Dublin sniper." In Syria he used his experience to train rebel forces and fight alongside them (Vice.com, May 2013).


52. **Adel** – Student, 22, son of a surgeon, went to Ireland from a Middle Eastern country. Joined the rebels and fought in Idlib (Irishtimes.com, September 22, 2012). Fought in al-Harati's unit (i.e., Al-Ummah Brigade). Said his plan to fight in Syria worried his family (Foreignpolicy.com, August 9, 2012).

53. **Alaa Ciymeh** – Irish, 26, Jordanian of Palestinian extraction. When he was very young his family moved to Ireland. His father lives in Dublin. Alaa Ciymeh was killed in Syria; the circumstances of his death are unknown. Notice of his death was received in May 2013, and his mourning family held a memorial service at the Islamic Centre in

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\(^{15}\) http://www.newsweek.com/portrait-irish-jihadist-young-man-1063
Dublin. He went to a Muslim school and later attended the local college. In 2008 he returned to Jordan where he opened a small business (IrishTimes.com, May 3, 2013).

54. Hazifa Abd al-Baset al-Sayyid – Born in Egypt, 22 years old, killed by the Assad forces in Idlib on December 22, 2012. Moved to Ireland with his family as a young child after his father, a surgeon, found work there. He was well known in the local Muslim community for his involvement in work with youth (Liveleak.com).

55. Hisham Habash – Born in Libya, lived in Ireland, graduated from Dublin University. Killed in June 2013 in a confrontation between rebels and Assad forces in northeast Syria.
Position of the Irish Authorities

56. The Irish authorities were and are concerned about Irish citizens' joining the fighting in Syria, despite the fact that there are relatively few of them. In Ireland, as in the other European countries, there is concern about the influence the foreign fighters will have when they return to their country of origin (Irishtimes.com, May 3, 2013).

France

Overview

57. The French media published estimates attributed to French security and intelligence sources, according to which between 200 and 220 French foreign fighters have enlisted in the ranks of the jihad organizations in Syria. According to previous estimates (the second half of 2013) their number was 120. In our assessment, the discrepancy between the numbers reflects the sharp rise in foreign fighters, among them French citizens, who joined the fighting during the second half of 2013. French President François Hollande noted that 700 young Frenchmen and young foreigners living in France had gone to Syria to fight, calling it a "worrying trend." He added that some of them had been killed (Agence France-Presse, January 14, 2014). In our assessment the number is quite exaggerated.

58. Most of the French foreign fighters who went to Syria were between 20 and 30 years old. According to the daily French newspaper Libération, 30 have already returned to France and are being closely monitored by the French security services. According to the French minister of the interior, the number of French foreign fighters in Syria is higher than the number who fought in Bosnia, Iran or Afghanistan.

Information about Individual French Foreign Fighters

59. Raphael Gendron, aka Abd al-Rauf or Abu Muruwa – French national who lived in Belgium for several years, 38, activist in the Assabyle Islamic Center in Belgium (CIB). Detained in Italy when illegal immigrants were found in his vehicle. Accused of belonging to Al-Qaeda and sentenced to four years in prison, returning to Belgium upon release. Killed in the fighting in Syria in April 2013 (English.alarabia.net, April 15, 2013).
60. Ibrahim B. – From the city of Cannes, 22, joined the fighting in Aleppo (Libération, July 22, 2013).

61. Abu Suhaib (or Abu Shuhaib) al-Faransi – At the end of September 2013, Jihad forums and the social networks of the fighters in Syria posted praise for a man named Abu Suhaib al-Faransi. Al-Faransi, 63 is a French businessman who converted to Islam, became a foreign fighter and was in Syria. [Note: Al-Faransi means "the Frenchman"].

Left: Abu Suhaib al-Faransi (MEMRI, September 21, 2013).

63. **Jacques Abu Abdallah al-Faransi** – Went to Syria from Marseilles. His organizational affiliation is unknown (YouTube).

64. **Abd al-Qader T.** – Resident of Cannes, 25, a chef. Joined the fighting in Aleppo. His younger brother was interrogated about him on June 21, 2013. According to suspicions, a soldier in the French army provided him with logistic support to go to Syria. The soldier gave him military equipment, shoes, and night vision goggles (Libération, July 22, 2013).

65. **Hamza Mandhouj** – French citizen of Tunisian extraction. According to his wife, he joined an Islamist network outlawed in 2012. She said that on December 20, 2013, he told her he was going to cross the border from Turkey into Syria to join the Al-Nusra Front. She claimed he had previously abducted their young daughter (France 24 TV, December 23, 2013).

66. **Abu Al-Qaqa'a al-Faransi** – Killed in Aleppo on October 6, 2013. His death was reported by a correspondent for the Syrian Al-Alam, who said a Frenchman named Abu Al-Qaqa'a al-Faransi was among those killed in a Syrian army attack on Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in the region of Aleppo (En.alalam.ir, October 11, 2013).

69. Husam al-Sham – Of Algerian extraction. Had previously fought in the ranks of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and in Chechnya. Shot and killed by the Syrian army (Documents.sy)
Position on the French Authorities

70. The French authorities are concerned that young men who fought in Syria will return to France as trained jihadists who may become involved in terrorist activities. They regard them as a risk even if in they did not actually fight in Syria (Libération, July 22, 2013). However, it is difficult for the French authorities to act against its foreign fighters because of its formal support for the effort to topple the Assad regime.

71. According to Libération (July 22, 2013), foreign fighters who returned to France are being closely monitored. In June 2013 the French minister of the interior reported that the police had detained three suspects. They were part of a group of French citizens who had been in Syria and returned to France (Reuters, June 25, 2013). France also asked the security services of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco for information about the presence of French citizens of Moroccan extraction in Syria, after the men in question had disappeared under suspicious circumstances. They were suspected of having gone to Syria (Al-Akhbar, Lebanon). At the time it was suspected that at least ten French citizens of Tunisian, Algerian and Moroccan extraction were in Syria. A joint investigation carried out by Algerian and French security services revealed that 21 Algerians and five French citizens of Moroccan extraction were fighting in the ranks of Al-Qaeda in Syria. They had infiltrated into Syria along with foreign fighters from Libya (Al-Manar, May 23, 2012). In July 2013 it was reported that the French security and intelligence services had exposed cells of foreign fighters planning to depart for Syria. Except for one, they had all converted to Islam and had criminal records (Libération, July 22, 2013).

72. On January 3, 2014, Libération wrote that the French authorities had contacted Syrian General Ali Mamlouk, a high-ranking member of security in the Syrian army (according to the All4Syria website, he is head of the National Security Bureau). One of the objectives of the contacts is to receive information about French jihadists fighting in Syria in the ranks of Al-Qaeda and the global jihad (most of them in the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State).
Holland

Overview

73. Holland is an importance Salafist-jihadi foreign fighters who join the fighting in Syria. The first one of them was identified on February 16, 2012. **Most estimates place their number at between 100 and 200.** According to a report on a Dutch TV station, in March 2013 there were about 100 foreign fighters from Holland in Syria, most of them in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. **Abu Fidaa,** a prominent figure among the Dutch foreign fighters, said he had fought against the Syrian regime alongside about **100-150 Dutch Muslims.** An American study **estimated their number at 200, considerably more than the number who fought in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Iraq and Somalia.**

74. According to reports in the Dutch media, and according to a study carried out by the US-based Kronos Advisory company (March 13, 2013), the profile of the Dutch foreign fighters is the following:

1) **Age**: Most are in their **early twenties** (23-26), but some of them are almost thirty and older.

2) **Family status**: Most are single, but some left wives and children behind.

3) **Extraction**: Most are of **Moroccan extraction**, but there are also some of **Somali, Turkish and Kurdish extraction, as well as Dutch-born fighters who converted to Islam.**

4) **Place of residence**: Most come from the cities of Zeist, Delft, Zoetermeer, Rotterdam and The Hague.

5) **Travel Syria**: Most reach Syria **through Turkey**. They arrive in Turkey having flown from Holland, Belgium (Brussels) or Germany (Frankfurt and Dusseldorf).

6) **Recruitment**: Most are recruited by **local Muslim networks or by local clerics**. A small number go to Syria independently. Prominent local networks are Behind Bars, Sharia4Holland and **Hizb al-Tahrir**, which encourage or encouraged Dutch foreign fighters to go to Syria.

7) **Military training**: Foreign fighters receive basic military training lasting 45 days in Syria, and most of them join organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Most of them operate in northern Syria, especially in the regions around Aleppo, Idlib and Latakia.

75. Some groups of Dutch foreign fighters **have already finished fighting in Syria** and returned to Holland (and to other Western countries). Such groups are liable to engage in
jihadist activities within their communities. A Dutch foreign fighter named Jordi de Jong who returned to Holland told a journalist about what motivated the fighters. He said the potential for achieving either martyrdom or victory over the Assad regime were key factors in their considerations. Abu Fidaa, the leader of the Dutch foreign fighters and their spokesman, said that they were not afraid to die and had gone to Syria for the "noble cause" to die. It would be "great," he said, to die for a noble cause (Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013).

76. The Dutch foreign fighters receive support from the local Muslim communities. According to a study carried out in Holland and updated in May 2013, 71% of young Muslims interviewed regarded their friends who had gone to fight in Syria as heroes defending Muslims and fighting against the brutal regime of Bashar Assad. In addition, 50% of the general population regards them as fighting for justice, and not as having joined extremist Islamic organizations. They are also of the opinion that the Dutch government should not prevent them from departing for Syria (Rnw.nl, June 22, 2013; Newsmail.com, December 9, 2013).

Support for Recruiting Dutch Foreign Fighters

77. Holland has a network of Salafist mosques serving mainly the Moroccan community. There are also Salafist imams and a branch of the Ahl al-Sunnah Foundation, a European Salafist network operated from Saudi Arabia. In addition, Salafist groups exist which do not meet in the mosques but rather operate in private houses, coffee houses and other locations. The networks recruit young men and dispatch them to wage jihad in Syria by offering money and other incentives. There are also young men who go to Syria independently without aid or support (For further information see the Kronos Agency report, "Dutch Fighters in Syria," March 13, 2013).

78. The groups that deal (or dealt) with recruiting foreign fighters for the war in Syria include Shariah4Holland, Behind Bars, Straat Mallmr and its affiliated Waarheid (truth") (Ctc.usma.com, October 24, 2013; Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013). Some of the central leaders and activists of the groups went to Syria at the beginning of 2013, and therefore the volume of their activity in Holland decreased (Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013). For example, a 19 year-old woman nicknamed Umm Osama was suspected of recruiting foreign fighters for Syria. Her detention in 2013 led to a campaign launched by
Islamic organizations demanding her release. In August 2013, according to her Facebook page, she left Holland and went to Syria (Ctc.usma.com, October 24, 2013).

79. One of the groups, Shariah4Holland, was the local offshoot of the Sharia4 organizations established in Belgium and other countries, as noted above. Its spokesman is nicknamed Abu Qassem. The organization previously had ties to a similar organization in Britain. Anjem Choudary, the moving spirit behind the British organization, visited Holland in May 2012 to promote Shariah4Holland. He participated in a small demonstration in Amsterdam where Abu Qassem gave a speech.

80. Abu Fidaa, the leader and official spokesman of the Dutch foreign fighters, gave interviews where he revealed information about the preparation made by the Dutch foreign fighters and how they were received in Syria. His main points were the following (according to the Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013; Cct.usma.edu, October 24, 2013):

1) The potential foreign fighters in Holland participate in initial preparations, including physical training, in which they risk being exposed by the Dutch security services. Some of them attend survival-training courses at Ardennes in Belgium in groups of two and three so as not to attract the attention of the Dutch authorities.

2) When a new foreign fighter arrives in Syria he receives additional military training of at least six weeks. Only after that does he have “the right to search for
martyrdom." According to Abu Fidaa, meetings of the Dutch foreign fighters are held every day and they receive news and updates from their Arabic-speaking comrades.

3) The Dutch foreign fighters intermingle with foreign fighters from other countries. The Dutch group apparently stays in Aleppo, although its operatives also fight in other locations. There are at least three Dutch women in Syria who joined their husbands when they departed to wage jihad.

81. A Dutch broadcasting network received travel instructions for recruited fighters leaving for Syria to fight in the ranks of the jihad organizations [by implication Dutch fighters]. According to the instructions, they were to fly to Turkey from an airport in Germany. Once in Turkey they were to proceed to the Syrian border. The document included several telephone numbers, some of which were used by jihad fighters who had previously gone to Syria to join the Al-Nusra Front. In interviews the foreign fighters said that when they arrived in Syria they received weapons and clothing. They received both military and religious training, after which they joined the fighting (Newsmax.com, December 9, 2013).

Foreign Fighters Who Returned to Holland

82. An investigative report carried out by the Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant exposed the existence of a large group of veterans of the fighting in Syria who had already returned to Holland and Belgium. There were between 25 and 30 veterans in the Dutch group. Some of them were disillusioned, saying that the situation was far more complex than they had expected. Others, however, returned fully in agreement with the jihadi ideology, and want to continue fighting their jihad in the West (Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013).

Information about Individual Dutch Foreign Fighters

83. Saddik Sbaa', aka Abu Adam al-Tazi – From Morocco, 26, granted permanent resident status in Holland but in 2011, he was extradited to Morocco. There, he was put in jail for nearly a year. Upon his release we went to Syria, where he was killed (Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013).
84. **Turgay Yaşar** – A Kurd who left Zoetermeer at the beginning of 2013. Arrested by Syrian troops in the Latakia province and exploited for propaganda purposes. The media published pictures of him, including a picture of his Dutch passport and a Turkish ID card in his name (Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013).

85. **Abu Fidaa** – Abu Fidaa is the nickname of a Dutch Muslim. He was the leader and spokesman of the Dutch foreign fighters in Syria. Sent a series of emails to a Dutch newspaper saying he was fighting against the Assad regime in Syria. Interviewed a number of times by the Dutch media (Onislam.net, June 16, 2013).
86. **Mourad Massali**, aka **Abu Baseer** – From the city of Delft, 21, of Moroccan extraction. Killed in battle fighting alongside jihadist rebels. According to friends and family, the death of his father radicalized him. He belonged to a group of twenty, most of them with criminal records. Was active in recruiting in Holland until he enlisted. Jerusalem was killed in March 2013. His mother, who lives in Rotterdam, was told of his death by his older brother, who had also gone to fight in Syria. His brother **Choukri Massali** was killed on July 28, 2013. According to his eulogy, his contribution to jihad included executing Syrian prisoners of war after the battle at Khan Assal (Dutchnew.nl, March 20, 2013; Morocconewtribune.com, March 23, 2013; Cct.usma.edu, October 24, 2013; Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013).

87. **Soufian el-Fassi** – Dutch citizen of Moroccan extraction, 21, lived in Zeist (or Delft, according to another report). Joined the fighting in Syria with a friend (Morocconewtribune.com, March 23, 2013). Played for the local soccer team. In December 2012 told his friends he was leaving to study at a university in Egypt. Went to Syria and was killed in March 2013 (Ctc.usma.edu, October 24, 2013).

88. **Jordi de Jong** – Dutch citizen, 21, lived in Delft. Went to Syria, returned to Holland and told the Dutch media about the motivations of the Dutch foreign fighters.

89. **Murat Öfkeli**, aka **Ibrahim the Turk, Abu Jarrah or Abu Zer** – Killed in Syria. Lived near The Hague. Had been under Dutch intelligence service surveillance since 2001. Was suspected of recruiting Muslims to fight in jihadist conflicts zones. Cleared of charges in
2003. Parents of young Muslims reported that he continued his activities in the Turkish mosque in The Hague. Some of them reported having heard him talk about the jihad struggle. He was banned from the mosque because of his controversial behavior (Ctc.usma.edu, October 24, 2013).

90. **Abu Abd al-Rahman** – From The Hague, killed in July 2013 while fighting alongside Muslim rebels in northern Syria. Another Dutch citizen was killed with him (Ctc.usma.edu, October 24, 2013; Kronos Advisory report, March 13, 2013).

91. **Yilmaz** – Dutch citizen of Turkish extraction, wounded in battle in Syria. Served in the Dutch army and joined "jihadist groups in Syria" in about 2012 (Newsmax.com, December 9, 2013).

92. **Robbin van Dolderan** – Dutch foreign fighter, 18, went to Syria via Turkey and joined a jihadist group. His mother said he had been influenced by pictures of children injured in a nerve gas attack. Converted to Islam several years previously (Newsmax.com, December 9, 2013).

93. **Khaled K.** – Muslim of Iraqi extraction, resident of Almere. Detained for two weeks in 2011 on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activities. After his release he went to Syria to join the Al-Nusra Front. According to various sources he went to Aleppo (Worldmathaba.net, October 5, 2013).

**Position of the Dutch Authorities**

94. The Dutch security services began investigating Dutch foreign fighters after a video from Syria was posted on the Internet on February 16, 2013 and Dutch was heard being spoken. The local Dutch media reported that the security services in Holland, like those in other countries, were concerned about foreign fighters returning from Syria after having acquired military experience, undergone ideological indoctrination, and possibly having been exposed to traumatic experiences during the fighting.

95. In the summer of 2013 it was reported that the Dutch parliament had asked for an investigation of the young men in Syria. It was also reported that ideas were proposed for preventive steps that could be taken against the foreign fighters. Most of the members of the government supported confiscating the passports of those planning to go to Syria, and some demanded they be stripped of their citizenship (Thedailybeast, June 11, 2013). However, it was also reported that the Dutch ministry of justice did not have the means to prevent foreign fighters from leaving for Syria and that the judicial system had so far not been able to bring returnees to trial.
Belgium

Overview

96. According to Minister of the Interior Joëlle Milquet, between 100 and 150 Belgian jihadists are participating in the fighting against the Assad regime. Others estimate the number at between 200 and 300. Various reports noted Belgian foreign fighters who were killed or wounded in battle. In April 2013 it was reported that about 20 Belgians were killed in battle (Breakingnews.sg, April 12, 2013).

97. Recruiting foreign fighters to fight in Syria began in 2012 in the area around Antwerp and from there spread to Brussels. Shariah4Belgium was the moving spirit behind recruitment. In Brussels recruitment was conducted by groups of Salafists operating in various neighborhoods, especially within the Moroccan Belgian community. Prominent among recruiters were those from the city of Vilvorde, where the organization is active (Lalibre.ie).

98. The presence of Belgian foreign fighters in Syria was initially verified by three YouTube videos posted on March 15, 2013, where a young man was clearly heard speaking Flemish. Parents of two foreign fighters immediately identified their children from the video. One of the fathers even went to Syria to look for his son (Pieter van Ostaeyen, "Belgian Jihadis in Syria," jihadology.net). The media reported that most of the Belgian foreign fighters were young Muslims between the ages of 17 and 25 who had grown up in Belgium. The majority of them had had no military training and some had criminal records. They went to Syria from Antwerp, Brussels, Mechelen and Vilvorde (Gatestoneinstitute.org, March 21, 2013).

99. A reporter who works for a Belgian TV channel interviewed a Belgian foreign fighter in Syria (who remained anonymous). He said that most of the foreign fighters did not have previous military experience. They go to Turkey and from there cross the border into Syria. Once they arrive their telephones and all their documents are taken so they cannot leave Syria (Breakingnews.sy, April 12, 2013). Most of the Belgians fight in the regions of Aleppo and Idlib. Some of them join the Al-Nusra Front. Most of them initially state that they will join the muhajiroun unit, which is composed mainly of foreign fighters and headed by the Chechen Abu Omar (Pieter van Ostaeyen, "Belgian Jihadis in Syria," jihadology.net).
Shariah4Belgium

100. In our assessment, one of the reasons for the relatively large number of Belgian foreign fighters was the intensive activity of the Salafist-jihadi organization Shariah4Belgium, which dispatched young Belgians to Syria and provided them with logistic support. The organization was founded in 2010 and was active until at least 2012. Its stated objective was instituting Muslim religious law (Sharia) in Belgium. On March 11, 2013, the Belgian daily newspaper De Standart reported that at least 70 of the foreign fighters dispatched to Syria belonged to the organization. After its founding similar organizations were established in Europe (and beyond), and turned into a kind of international network for spreading its jihadist ideology by means of the Internet (sites, blogs, videos on YouTube, etc.).

101. The founder and spokesman of Shariah4Belgium is Fouad Belkacem, a Belgian of Moroccan extraction, who became more religious several years ago and changed his name to Abu Imran. Fouad Belkacem preached the death penalty for homosexuals and lesbians and has said that he says prayers for Osama bin Laden. Belkacem has a long criminal record which includes convictions for robbery in 2002, 2004 and 2007. In Morocco he was sentenced to prison for drug dealing. In June 2012 he was indicted in Belgium for incitement to hatred against non-Muslims and sentenced to two years in prison. He was paroled in February 2013 but arrested again and returned to prison to finish serving his sentence because according to the police, he had violated the terms of his parole (Gatestoneinstitute.org, April 19, 2013).

Fouad Belkacem in front of the Al-Qaeda flag (Assdae.com)
102. In April 2012 the Belgian foreign minister ordered following the website, to which the provider of the site responded by taking it offline. It went back online and then offline again. In October 2012 the organization and its website were outlawed. It then announced it no longer existed. During the investigation carried out by the Belgian police of Belgian foreign fighters in Syria, on April 16, 2013 the organization's offices in Antwerp were raided and Fouad Belkacem was detained (Liveleak.com, May 14, 2013).

Video posted by Shariah4Belgium. The organization is headed by Fouad Belkacem. According to the video, the Al-Qaeda flag will soon fly over the palaces of Europe and the White House (MEMRI, December 11, 2014).

Information about Individual Belgian Foreign Fighters

103. Brian De Mulder, aka Abu Qasem Brazili – Student from Antwerp. First identified in Syria by his family who saw him in a video on YouTube. Raised a Catholic, mother is Brazilian. Became friends with a group of young Moroccan Muslims and began hanging around their mosque. They nicknamed him Ibrahim. Shortly thereafter he converted to Islam and changed his name to Abu Qasem Brazili. His parents were surprised by the sudden transformation but tolerated it, thinking he was going through a phase (World.time.com, May 22, 2013).
104. **Jejoen Bontinck** – From Antwerp, 18. First identified in Syria by his family who saw him in a video on YouTube. Belonged to Shariah 4Belgium. According to his Dimitri Bontinck father, Jejoen grew a beard, started wearing "different" clothes, and got into the habit of praying five times a day. His friends, said his father, influenced him to go to Syria. The father went to Aleppo to look for his son but failed to find him (Rt.com, April 26, 2013).

105. **Abd al-Rahman Ayashi**, aka **Abu Muhajer** – French of Syrian extraction, 38. His mother was French, his father was **Sheikh Bassem Ayashi**, a Syrian living in Brussels. He was a computer expert and owned a company that operated in France, Syria and Belgium. In 2009 he was sentenced to prison for founding a website defined by the Belgian government as anti-Semitic. In 2012 he left Belgium, where he had been sentenced to eight years in prison, and apparently went to live in France. He was a friend of **Raphael Gendron**, a French foreign fighter affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Abd al-Rahman Ayashi became a battalion commander in Syria and commanded many battles. In June 2013 his death was announced. He was possibly the first Belgian foreign fighter killed in Syria (Pieter van Ostaeyen, "Belgian Jihadis in Syria, jihadology.net and the globalpost.com, March 4, 2013). He was killed in Idlib on June 19, 2013, while fighting as one of the commanders of the Shuqur al-Sham unit (Deredactie.be, June 20, 2013).
Abd al-Rahman Ayashi, aka Abu Muhajer (Shaghor.com and globalpost.com s)

Left: Abd al-Rahman Ayashi. Right: Abd al-Rahman Ayashi (left) and Raphael Gendron (right) in Syria (Jihadology.net).

106. **Tarek Taketloune** – Lived in a Brussels suburb, in his twenties, auto mechanic. Fought in the ranks of jihadist elements. Shot in the head and killed in a house where foreign fighters were living. On June 3, 2013, his brother **Elias**, 23, was detained when he returned to Belgium with a group of Belgian Muslims suspected of war crimes in Syria (Al-Ayam, June 11, 2013).
107. **Hussein al-Ouassaki**, aka **Abu Fallujah** – From a family of Moroccan extraction, 22. According to reports, headed a group of Belgian foreign fighters. Suspected of war crimes in Syria (Al-Ayam, June 11, 2013). May have been a member of the Flemish-speaking group documented in a YouTube video (Emmejihad.worldpress.com, May 24, 2013).

108. **Hakem al-Ouassaki** – Brother of Hussein al-Ouassaki, 21. Critically wounded fighting in Syria in March 2013. Returned to Belgium where he was detained by the authorities on suspicion of having recruited foreign fighters for Syria (Al-Akhbar, June 10, 2013).

109. **Nourredine A.** – Belgian of Moroccan extraction. Married to a Flemish woman named Tatiana who converted to Islam; father of one child. Went to Syria in the fall of 2012. When his wife had not heard from him for half a year she went to Syria to look for him. When her family discovered she had gone they reported her missing. The police told the family Tatiana was wanted for questioning because of her connections with Shariah4Belgium, where her husband held an important position. It was the police that informed her family that she had apparently gone to Syria (De Standaard, October 15, 2013).

110. Other **Belgian foreign fighters**:

1) **Sean Pidgeon** – From Brussels (Pieter van Ostaeyen, "Belgian Jihadis in Syria, jihadology.net).
2) **Nourredine Abdallah, aka Abu Mujahed** – Killed in Syria on or about July 25, 2013 (Pieter van Ostaeyen, "Belgian Jihadis in Syria, jihadology.net)

![Nourredine Abdallah](image1.png)

3) **Ismail Amgroud** – From Maasseik, 22. Went to Syria at the beginning of April 2013. Killed at the end of June. He was the youngest of three brothers who went to Syria as foreign fighters.

4) **Younes Assad al-Rahman al-Belgiki** [i.e., the Belgian] – Killed in Latakia on August 6, 2013.

![Younes Assad al-Rahman al-Belgiki](image2.png)
Position of the Belgian Authorities

111. The Belgian authorities are concerned about the potential danger of Belgian foreign fighters who return after having acquired experience in battle in Syria. However, it is difficult to bring them to trial because their activity against the Assad regime is considered legitimate by the Belgian authorities (Gatestoneinstitute.org, March 21, 2013).

112. During the first half of 2013 it was reported that the Belgian ministry of the interior had appointed a team to examine the issue of Belgians who joined the ranks of the rebels in Syria. The taskforce included individuals from the counterterrorism unit, the intelligence services, the judicial authorities and the police. They were supposed to find ways to prevent young Belgian men from joining the fighting in Syria and to return those who are already there (Kuna.net.kw, March 24, 2013).

113. In addition, on a number of occasions the Belgian police raided Islamic centers and the homes of activists suspected of recruiting foreign fighters for Syria. The raids were carried out in Brussels, Antwerp and other cities. On April 16, 2013 the Belgian police raided 46 houses in Antwerp, and detained Fouad Belkacem, the leader of Shariah4Belgium (Syrianews.cc, April 17, 2013; Gatestoneinstitute.org, April 19, 2013).

The detention of Fouad Belkacem (Standaard.be, April 16, 2013).
Spain

Overview

114. The estimated number of Spanish foreign fighters in Syria is between a few dozen and as many as 100. According to investigator Aaron Zelin, there are between 34 and 95 (ISCR Insight, December 17, 2013). Apparently most of them come from Spanish Morocco where Al-Qaeda undertakes broad recruiting activities.

Information about Individual Spanish Foreign Fighters

115. Rashid Wahbi, aka Rashid Muhammad – From a slum in Spanish Morocco, 33, married and father of one child, truck driver (or taxi driver, according to a different report). On June 1, 2012, he drove a truck full of explosives into an army base in northern Syria, and blew himself up along with 130 others (Psmag.com, August 2, 2013). In an interview held before his death, he spoke Arabic with a north African accent. He wished “the glory of martyrdom for his fellow fighters in the al-Nusrah Front.” He praised the glory of death for the sake of Allah and thanked his mother for inspiring him (Philly.com, July 24, 2013).

116. Muhammad al-Kutibi Abu Adam al-Mughrab – Spanish citizen of Moroccan extraction, went from Barcelona to Aleppo where he joined the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. Killed in the fighting in Aleppo on April 7, 2013 (Centerfordocumentation.com).
Position of the Spanish Authorities

117. In June 2013 the Spanish minister of the interior announced that eight men had been detained in the Spanish enclave in North Africa on suspicion of having recruited foreign fighters for a branch of Al-Qaeda operating in Syria. The eight were brought before a court in Spain. The operation was carried out by the intelligence services of the police and the Spanish Civil Guard. The Spanish Moroccan network was based in the city of Ceuta in Spanish Morocco (south of Gibraltar, see map) and in the nearby city of Fnideq. The network was in charge of recruitment, indoctrination and financing the voyage of foreign fighters to Syria.

118. According to the Spanish police, the network dispatched about 50 foreign fighters to Syria from Spanish Morocco and other locations in the country. At least five of them died in suicide bombing attacks (Reuters, June 21, 2013; L'Express, June 23, 2013; Agence France-Presse, June 24, 2013. Ten extremist Muslims who belonged to the Ceuta network were sentenced to jail, including the network leader. In June 2013 he escaped from jail but was apprehended on September 17, 2013 (CNN, January 5, 2014).

119. On January 5, 2014, Abd al-Wahid Sadik Mohamed was arrested at the airport in Malaga on a flight from Istanbul. Sadik Mohamed is a Spanish citizen born in Ceuta, who was involved in terrorist training camps in Syria and Iraq. He was sent to Syria by the network exposed in the summer of 2013 by the Spanish authorities and described by the Spanish minister of the interior as a potential "threat to national security" (CNN, January 5, 2014).
The city of Ceuta in Spanish Morocco (south of Gibraltar) where the network for dispatching foreign fighters to Syria was uncovered.

Italy

Overview

120. The number of foreign fighters from Italy is estimated at several dozen. According to information from the Muslim community in Italy, some 40-45 Italian men and women have joined the ranks of the rebels. Most of them come from local Arab/Muslim communities. At least seven are Italians who converted to Islam (Presseurop.eu, June 19, 2013). According to another estimate, the number of Italians is 50-60.

121. About 45-50 Italian civilians, mainly Muslim immigrants from North Africa but also some converts, went to Syria at least once to fight in the ranks of the rebel forces. Foreign fighters who returned to Italy use the internet to spread jihad propaganda and maintain contact with other radical Muslims. Some jihadists in Italy are affiliated with the Belgian organization Sharia4belgium (Giornalettismo.com, May 19, 2012).

122. The foreign fighters from Italy, most of them from northern Italy and Rome, are located primarily in eastern and northern Syria, especially in the areas of Deir al-Zor and Aleppo (MEMRI, June 28, 2013). Most of the Italian foreign fighters (as well as other Europeans) travel to Syria via Turkey and make their way to Istanbul. From there they go to safe houses in southern Turkey and are then sent to Syria.
123. Like other countries, a Sharia4Italy organization has also been established in Italy. In June 2013, Italian authorities arrested a young man of Moroccan extraction who goes by the name of Anas Abu Daqur. According to police, he is suspected of setting up the Italian branch of Sharia4 through his blog. He said he wanted to go to Syria to join the rebels. He also used his blog to publish instructions on using explosives and weapons and disseminating combat techniques. Abu Daqur was charged with terrorism but was released by the court.

124. **Giuliano Ibrahim Delnevo** – a 23-year-old from Genoa. In June 2013, he was reported killed in Syria, probably in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. His brother Martino is a shipping engineer and lives in Germany. His parents are teachers and both of them are Catholic. He studied history at the University of Genoa but dropped out. In his senior year in high school, during the summer vacation, he met a group of Muslim exiles headed by a doctor of Syrian extraction. In 2008 he converted to Islam took the additional name of Ibrahim. He married a Moroccan woman in a Muslim ceremony in Casablanca. Despite his conversion to Islam, he did not join the Muslim community in Genoa.

125. There are several versions about how Giuliano joined the ranks of the rebels. According to his mother, he joined independently. According to a friend, he decided to join the rebels during a trip to Chechnya, where he met a group of fighters (MEMRI, June 28, 2013). In September 2012 he posted a quote from bin Laden’s ideologue Abdullah Azzam on his Facebook page (Azzam’s ideology is based on the concept of jihad as the personal obligation of every Muslim). Giuliano went to **Syria through Turkey in late November 2012**. His father was informed of his death on June 13, 2013 in a phone call.
from Syria (AFP, June 18, 2013; MEMRI, June 28, 2013; Gatestoneinstitute.org, June 9, 2013).

126. Four foreign fighters of Syrian extraction from Colongo (near Milan) are fighting in the ranks of the rebels in Syria. A photo of one of them shooting at Alawite prisoners appeared in the US media. They are Omar Basha, Haitham Sahana (photographed shooting at Alawite prisoners), Manaf and Antar Shadad.

**Position of the Italian authorities**

127. The authorities in the war on terrorism in Italy monitor a few Muslims from Italy who acquired combat experience in Syria and are now promoting jihad propaganda in Italy (Giornalettismo.com, May 19, 2012).
Germany

Overview

128. According to a report issued by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BFV), whose highlights were published in Der Spiegel (October 21, 2013), in the second half of 2013 there was a sharp increase in the number of German foreign fighters who went to Syria to participate in the fighting. The report estimated that their number exceeded 200; about 80%-85% are from Muslim immigrant families and the rest are German converts to Islam (www.spiegel.de, October 21, 2013). According to another report, there are some 230 German Muslim fighters in Syria (Long War Journal, December 19, 2013). A more modest estimate claims that around 120 foreign fighters left Germany; it is unclear how many of them actually made their way to Syria (Die Welt, September 13, 2013). A few of the German foreign fighters were killed or wounded in battle.

129. The report of the BFV shed light on the assistance provided to the rebels in Syria by the Muslim community in Germany. It includes hundreds of thousands of euros sent to the rebels through charitable funds. In addition, imams deliver sermons in mosques calling on young people to join the jihad and money is collected to purchase weapons. According to the report, a German camp was set up in northern Syria. It is used as a gathering point and apparently also as a training camp for the foreign fighters who come from Germany, mainly from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (where one-third of the population is of Muslim extraction). Other foreign fighters come from the states of Hesse, Berlin, Bavaria and Hamburg. According to another report, there is concern that a media center has been built in Syria, which recruits Germans of Muslim extraction through media campaigns in German (Spiegel.de, October 21, 2013).

130. German foreign fighters are recruited by preachers in mosques and via appeals on the Internet in German. Hajan M., who came from the city of Kassel, said he had produced a German-language video and uploaded it to YouTube, inviting everyone to carry out jihad (Foreignpolicy.com, July 9, 2013).

Information about individual German foreign fighters

131. Burak Karan, son of an immigrant family from Turkey, was a promising football player in Germany’s youth team. He was killed in Syria on October 11, 2013, fighting against the Assad regime, probably alongside a rebel group affiliated with radical Islam.
Burak Karan, former football player and jihad warrior, killed in Syria
(Website of the Lebanese channel Al-Mayadeen, November 18, 2013)

132. Burak Karan grew up in Wuppertal, in northwest Germany. In 2008 he left the world of football and began associating with a radical Islamic organization affiliated with the mosque in Wuppertal. One of its members was Emrah Erdogan, a German of Turkish extraction, who was arrested this year in Tanzania for involvement in the deadly terror attack at a shopping center in Nairobi, Kenya (September 21, 2013). When Burak Karan became a Muslim extremist, the German authorities added his name to its wanted list (Ibtimes.co.uk, November 18, 2013). He trained at an Al-Qaeda training camp in Pakistan. His sister said that after his return he frequently spoke about jihad (Wikipedia). In 2013, Burak Karan went to Syria accompanied by his 23-year-old wife and two small children, and joined the rebels. He was killed on October 11, 2013.

133. Denis Mamadou Cuspert, aka the German Abu Talha – Born in Berlin. He spent several years as a musician (rapper), performing under the stage name of Deso Dogg. When he finished his musical career he converted to Islam and became a radical. In the early summer of 2012 he left Germany, went to Egypt and from there to Libya. A photo uploaded to Facebook, showing him sitting on the floor next to an assault rifle, was allegedly taken in Syria (Die Welt, June 22, 2013). According to an article published in the German press, he underwent training in the region of Mersa Matruh, Egypt, along with a few other Germans. From there he traveled to Syria several times, fighting in the area of Aleppo in the ranks of an organization called Ansar al-Sharia (Die Seite Drei, February 7, 2013). On December 8, 2013, a global jihad forum (GIMF) uploaded a video of an interview with Abu Talha, in which he admitted that he had joined the ranks of the jihad fighters (the mujahideen) but did not mention exactly which organization he had joined. In the interview he described his daily life in Syria (MEMRI, December 16, 2013).
134. **Nihad Kushik, aka Abd al-Rahman** – Born in Germany in 1977, a Muslim whose family came from Bosnia. He said he fought in Bosnia in the 1990s and later in Chechnya. He lived in Germany for several years and in late 2005 he left and joined the ranks of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. He was arrested in January 2007 by the Pakistani police, released for lack of evidence and flew to Sarajevo (Globaljihad.net).

135. **Reda Siyam** – Egyptian, born in Germany, apparently involved in financing the Al-Qaeda terrorist attack in Bali (October 12, 2002). He moved to Cairo in 2012 (Die Welt, June 6, 2013).

136. **Sabri Ben A.** – German of Tunisian extraction. He and a few foreign fighters from North Rhine-Westphalia went to Syria with the stated objective of providing humanitarian aid. In practice, he was located in the combat zone, wearing camouflage fatigues and a bulletproof vest (Die Welt, June 23, 2013). In the spring of 2012 he uploaded a video on the Internet in which he threatened journalists who had reported on the Salafist project to distribute free Qurans.

137. **Abu Handala al-Maghribi** – From Frankfurt. He translated articles about the life of the Prophet Muhammad into German and uploaded them to the Internet. The texts were written by Anwar al-Awlaqi, a member of Al-Qaeda who until his death was an eminent ideologue in Al-Qaeda whose preaching influenced Muslims and converts to Islam in the West. Abu Handala was apparently killed in Syria on August 15, 2013. The German security services assume he was born in North Africa (Die Welt, September 13, 2013).

138. A journalist in northern Syria met two German fighters, both bearded young men, who spoke excellent German. One of them identified himself as “**Yussuf**.” They told him they were war correspondents from Switzerland and had come from Germany as part of humanitarian missions (according to the reporter, that is an excuse used by many foreigners in Syria to conceal the fact that they are fighters). The German fighters did not give the journalist their names or the city they came from, for fear of problems with the German security services on their return (Dw.de, May 1; Der Spiegel, April 30, 2013).

139. **Mustafa** – Twenty-four, of Moroccan extraction, fought in Syria and returned to Germany. In an interview he said that dying for Islam was the best way to die and the desire of every Muslim (ZDF TV, October 18, 2013).

140. **Pero** – German of Macedonian extraction, joined a group of 22 other young men who volunteered to fight against the Assad regime. He joined Al-Qaeda in Syria but was persuaded to return to his family in Germany (The Independent, November 14, 2013).
141. **The German Abu Osama (Abu Osama al-Almani)** – On November 30, 2013, a video was uploaded showing a German convert to Islam, a member of a group of Germans fighting in the ranks of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. He said he came to Syria to “spread the word of Allah and justice” and called on Germans, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to join the jihad in Syria. He called on the non-Muslim Germans to convert to Islam (MEMRI, December 11, 2013).

142. A video uploaded to the Internet showed a fighter, *probably German, who lost his leg* and continued to fight in the ranks of the rebels in Syria (Thesun.co.uk, March 11, 2013). According to Der Spiegel, his name is **Hajan**, married to a German woman, a former commander of a neighborhood in Homs. He was wounded in battle and his right leg was amputated (Foreignpolicy.com, July 9, 2013).

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143. **Abu Ahmad al-Almani** – Killed on March 5, 2013. According to his Facebook page he was originally from Lebanon and had recently lived in Germany. On his Facebook page he also called – in German – on all German Muslims to join the fighting in Syria.
Position of the German authorities

144. German Interior Minister Hans Peter Dietrich admitted on April 26, 2013 that young German Muslims go to Syria in order to fight in the ranks of the jihad operatives. These young people are, in his opinion, “ticking time bombs” when they return to their countries of extraction and they constitute a genuine threat (Thelocal.de, June 13, 2013).

145. The German interior minister is aware that foreign fighters cannot be prevented from leaving Germany. Even if their passports are confiscated, they can travel from Turkey to Syria with just an identity card (Thelocal.de, June 13, 2013). Accordingly, it was reported that the Germans intended to take other steps, such as introducing a process in the European Union which would revoke the citizenship of any European who took part in the fighting in Syria. It was also reported that the German authorities intended to take steps against religious institutions that convert young Europeans to Islam and send them to Syria (Press TV, April 26, 2013; Ma’ariv, May 20, 2013).

146. The German interior ministry banned the activities of three Salafist organizations (Thelocal.de, June 13, 2013). Police officers visited the homes of Muslims to inform them they were under surveillance (Die Welt, June 22, 2013). However, the German authorities are aware that it is difficult to ban fundraising events at mosques because the fundraisers claim the funds are donated for humanitarian assistance in Syria, although security agencies are convinced that they are intended for jihadists. For example, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia found
bulletproof vests and binoculars in humanitarian equipment intended to be sent to Syria (1.wdr.de, October 3, 2013).

Denmark

Overview

147. According to the Danish security services, around 65 Danes are fighting in Syria. At least six of them have apparently been killed (Cphpost.dk, June 20, 2013, The Copenhagen Post, August 16, 2013).

148. A large number of videos have been posted on jihad forums showing foreign fighters from Denmark fighting in Syria. One of the films, apparently shot in Syria, showed a Danish Muslim known as Abu Khattab addressing Muslims in the West and calling on them to join the jihad in Syria. Abu Khattab said that they intended to fight against infidels in Denmark and other Western countries. According to the video, there is a significant group of foreign fighters from Denmark in Syria, headed by a man known as Abu Muss (The Copenhagen Post, August 16, 2013; MEMRI, September 16, 2013).

Information about individual Danish foreign fighters

149. Slimane Hadj Abderrahmane – Danish citizen, 39, father of two, killed in Syria in February 2013. Born in Denmark to a Danish mother and an Algerian father. At the age of seven he went to live with his grandmother in Algeria, where his religious faith grew stronger. In 1993 he returned to Denmark and became a musician and a disc jockey at
nightclubs. He continued to be a devout Muslim. He studied mathematics in the university and wanted to become a teacher but dropped out in 1998. In 1999 he decided to join the fighting in Chechnya, but the mosque where he prayed was unable to make arrangements for him to travel to the front. He began to attend a different mosque, headed by an Algerian who had been granted political asylum in Denmark. He lost interest in music and began working on behalf of the mosque. He transferred money from the head of the mosque to organizations in Algeria and went to London to visit a radical mosque headed by Abu Hamza.

150. During his visit to London, Abderrahmane was told that the best way to get to Chechnya was via Afghanistan. He flew to Tehran and drove to the Afghan border where he made contact with the Taliban and reached Kabul. There he met an Al-Qaeda operative who informed him that training at the camp had already started and suggested that he join a madrasa (religious education institute) and study. He was in Afghanistan during the September 11 attacks and fled to Pakistan where he was caught and imprisoned. He was handed over to the Americans, who sent him to Guantanamo, where he was held for two years. He was released in 2004 and returned to Denmark. In 2007, while working as a mailman in Copenhagen, he was charged with stealing money and credit cards. He spent ten months in jail. In 2011, he sued the government of Denmark for not having prevented his incarceration in the US detention camp. In a newspaper interview he said he was not afraid to die for Islam. He traveled to Syria, leaving his wife and children in Denmark. He was joined by another Dane, who was killed (Cphpost.dk, Independent.co.uk, February 19 and March 25, 2013). He was in Syria for around four months (Politiken, March 13, 2013).

151. Abdel Maliki – On March 13, 2013, the daily newspaper Politiken reported that a 30-year-old Dane known as Abdel Maliki was killed in battle near Homs. He had converted to Islam about 10 years previously and married a woman who had also converted to Islam. He was known to the authorities because of his ties with radical Islamic elements. He was arrested in Yemen and Lebanon, but was released and subsequently returned to Denmark. The Muslim immigrant community in Denmark established a fund to help his family (Cphpost.dk, March 7, 2013; Gatestoneinstitute.org, March 21, 2013).
152. **Kenneth Sorenson**, aka the Danish Abu Aisha or the Danish Abdul Malik – a Danish foreign fighter who was killed in Jabal al-Turkman, in the area of Latakia, on March 3, 2013. According to a video, he went to Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt and Libya before joining the rebels in Syria. In Yemen he attended Al-Iman University, a radical university in Sana’a run by Abdul-Majid al-Zindani, who is on the US list of wanted terrorists because of his ties with Osama bin Laden and his support for Al-Qaeda. He lived in Egypt for three years, then moved to Libya with his family. When the fighting broke out in Syria, he left his wife and four children in Libya, moved to Syria and joined the *muhajiroun* unit (Defenddemocracy.org, May 7, 2013). The *muhajiroun* unit announced his death in a video issued on the Al-Nusra Front’s forum (Longwarjournal.org, May 7, 2013).

**Position of the Danish authorities**

153. The Danish Justice Ministry has expressed concern that the military experience and radicalization that foreign fighters undergo in Syria **will turn them into a national risk when they return to Denmark** (Cphpost.dk, Independence.co.uk, February 19 and March 25, 2013). Therefore the government and the intelligence and security services have begun to take steps designed to prevent Danish citizens from going to Syria. It was decided that the intelligence services would report to the authorities about any trip to Syria by a Danish citizen in order to discover the source of funds for financing the trip.

154. With regard to Danes returning from Syria, it was reported that the government was considering imposing sanctions against them, ranging from revoking their welfare benefits to charging them with terrorism (Presseeurop.eu, June 20, 2013). According to police,
those who joined the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front can be prosecuted under the Danish anti-terrorism law (Cphpost.dk, June 20, 2013). On the other hand, legal experts have argued it is very difficult to prove that these foreign fighters have committed an offense under Danish law (Politiken, September 27, 2013).

155. According to Danish media reports, the Copenhagen police and Danish intelligence services are secretly investigating Muslim organizations that have ties with Syria. A controversial imam known as Abu Ahmed was interrogated about his mosque in Copenhagen and about the Hjaelp4Syrien (Aid to Syria) organization. The investigation focused on allegations that Abu Ahmed and his supporters encouraged activists to travel to Syria to take part in the fighting and that donations collected for charitable funds were used to finance terrorism. In August 2013, police reported that the investigation was progressing and that there were indications that the Al-Nusra Front was also receiving support (The Copenhagen Post, August 12, 2013). However, in September 2013 the Copenhagen Police announced the investigation of the case had been terminated since there was no basis for filing charges (Politiken, September 27, 2013).

Sweden

Overview

156. According to the annual report of the Swedish secret police (SAPO), in the first half of 2013 at least 30 Muslims went from Sweden to Syria to train or fight in the ranks of organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Since then their number has increased. According to the report, only a few of those who went to Syria had a direct connection with Syria, and that reinforces the hypothesis that the primary reason for their departure is ideological. According to the report, the majority of Swedes who went to Syria are still there (SR International Website, April 15, 2013). According to investigator Aaron Y. Zelin, the number of Swedish foreign fighters is between 39 and 87 (ICSR insight, December 17, 2013).

157. The Swedish group in Syria apparently conducts its own recruitment activity. For example, in March 2013 a group calling itself The Swedish Jihad Fighters in Syria posted a video on social networks calling for volunteers from Sweden to join in the fighting in Syria (Longwarjournal.org, March 20, 2013). According to Facebook, several foreign fighters from Sweden clearly identified themselves with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).
An article by Per Gudmundson quotes a Swedish researcher who put together a profile of the Swedish foreign fighters\(^\text{17}\), based on information about 18 (of 30) foreign fighters who went to Syria from Sweden. The main findings were the following (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013):

- They are all male, average age of 23.3. The youngest was born in 1994 and the oldest was born in 1976.
- They are all from large families. Three of them have children.
- All of them come from immigrant families, but only one of them has a direct connection with Syria. Most of them were born in Sweden to parents from Iraq, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco and even the Philippines, and came to Sweden at a very early age. Ten of them are of Lebanese extraction. One of them comes from a Scandinavian family.
- They are all graduates of the Swedish education system.
- Most of them are from southern Sweden. Eleven of the 18 came from two neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city of Gothenburg (Sweden’s second largest city). That might indicate extensive recruitment activity in the city.
- Most of them are from relatively poor families. Most of them have low incomes. Only four of them have an income indicating regular employment.
- At least eight of them have criminal records. Most of the charges are for misdemeanors (including drug possession and abuse).
- Half of them were formerly associated with terrorism or were active in the global jihad movement.
- All the foreign fighters (except two) had Swedish passports. The remaining two were Lebanese nationals who had lived in Sweden for many years.

### Information about individual Swedish foreign fighters

159. **Haitham Rahma**– Born in 1960 of Syrian extraction from Homs, was an imam at a mosque in Stockholm. Went to Syria and established a military framework by the name of the Civil Protection Authority, which is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood but cooperates with jihadist organizations. He reportedly helped smuggle weapons into Syria in violation of Swedish law. He was also engaged in global fundraising (Sverigesradio.se, October 31 and November 1, 2013).

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\(^{17}\) Eight of the volunteers that the study was based on were killed or wounded in Syria. The wounded were sent to Turkey for treatment.

161. **Kamal Balbaker Ibrahim Badri aka Abu Kamal** – 22, Muslim born and raised in Sweden. His mother is a Finn who converted to Islam and his father is Sudanese. Both live in Sweden (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013). He went to Syria through Turkey and initially joined the Free Syrian Army. It displeased him that the fighters would smoke and listen to music and did not pray, and therefore he joined the Al-Nusra Front. He was killed in Aleppo on January 25, 2013 (Rightsidenews.com, April 24, 2013). His death was reported on a video posted in English on a jihad network, Facebook and Twitter (Longwarjournal.org, March 20, 2013).

162. **Mark Abu Osama** – From Stockholm, a foreign fighter in the Al-Nusra Front. He converted to Islam after the September 11 attacks. He went to Syria to fight the regime, leaving his sons and two wives in Sweden. He said that after the Assad regime had been toppled an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria would be established in Syria, and then the rebels would direct their efforts at Palestine (the Al-Nusra forum, January 9, 2013).

163. **Abo Isa** – A Palestinian born in Homs in 1984. He immigrated to Sweden at the age of eight and became a citizen in July 1992. He went to Syria in mid-June, 2013, apparently through Turkey. In Sweden he was charged with 15 offenses and jailed three times (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).
164. Abu Dharar Filibbino – Thirty-five, with previous military experience. Claimed to have received training in the Lashkar-e-Taiba, a terrorist organization in Pakistan, in the spring of 2001.\textsuperscript{18} His presence in Syria first became known on his Facebook page in late October 2012.

165. Isa al-Suedi – Married with two children. His wife is a Swede who converted to Islam. The family reportedly moved to Aleppo. His brother was sentenced to 12 years in prison in Denmark for conspiring to carry out a terrorist attack at the offices of a Danish newspaper, along with three other people who lived in Sweden (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).

166. Abu Omar – Born October 1991 and killed early April 2013. Son of an Albanian jihadist from Kosovo who was sentenced in 2000 to seven years imprisonment by a court in Serbia for terrorist activities (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).


168. Abu Abdurrahman – Born July 1989 and killed in Idlib early June 2013. The circumstances of his death are unclear. He apparently fought in the ranks of the Kataib al-Muhajirin unit (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Abu_Abdurrahman_Saghanor_com.png}
\end{center}

Abu Abdurrahman (Shaghanor.com)

\textsuperscript{18} Lashkar-e-Taiba is a terrorist Pakistani organization that collaborates with Al-Qaeda. This organization carried out the terrorist attack in Mumbai (November 26-28, 2008), among others, in which around 170 people were killed and several hundred injured.
169. **Abu Maaz** – Born May 1994. His family was originally from Lebanon. He entered Syria in March 2013 and was killed while carrying out a suicide bombing attack (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013). It is not clear what attack this was and we have no verification of this.

170. **Abu Osama** – Brother of Abu Maaz, born 1993. His family was originally from Lebanon. He entered Syria through Lebanon in early January 2013 and was killed in a Syrian army attack near Homs. **Rabih**, another brother of Abu Maaz, was killed in Tripoli, Lebanon in 2012. Their uncle, **Yussuf al-Hajj Dib**, is imprisoned in Germany for attempting to kill a German civilian using an explosive device planted in a suitcase. Another uncle, **Saddam al-Hajj Dib**, a Fatah al-Islam leader in Lebanon, was killed in a clash with the Lebanese army in May 2007 (www.ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).

171. **Abu Omar Kurdi** – Born 1976, killed August 2013 in an attack on an air base near Aleppo. He ran a website called www.tawhid.islam.se, which for years was the only Swedish-language website openly preaching jihad. In 2003 the Swedish security services reported that he was a jihadist (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).

172. **Khaled SigSauer** – Born July 1990, a cousin of the aforementioned **Abu Abdurrahman**. Once questioned on suspicion of attempting to murder a Swedish citizen.


174. **Abu Mohammad al-Baghdadi** – Killed in Syria. No details about the circumstances of his death were provided (Ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).


176. **Junas Aref al–Hassan** – Reportedly killed in Syria.

**Position of the Swedish authorities**

177. The Swedish authorities are concerned about Swedish foreign fighters who are liable to return to Sweden as trained fighters imbued with jihad ideology. However, the authorities believe they cannot control the foreign fighters who leave Sweden. A high-ranking Swedish intelligence official said that only rarely could a Swedish citizen be prevented from leaving for Syria (Longwarjournal.org, June 17, 2013).
Finland

Overview

178. According to a number of reports, several dozen foreign fighters of Finnish origin are involved in the fighting in Syria. A Finnish interior ministry report claimed that over 20 foreign fighters from Finland went to Syria, most of them with the intention of joining radical Islamic groups (Jihadology.net, December 21, 2013).

179. The civil war in Syria is the first Islamic conflict zone involving a significant number of Finns. According to a report from August 2012, a group of Finnish converts to Islam left for northern Syria to fight in the ranks of the rebels. According to a March 2013 report, 10-20 foreign fighters have gone to Syria. In August 2013 the first Finn was killed in battle. That month around 20 more foreign fighters left for Syria in order to join radical Islamic organizations, some of them accompanied by their families (Jihadology.net, November 21, 2013).

180. Little is known about the Finnish foreign fighters and their reasons for going to Syria. Most of them are apparently young people. According to the Finnish intelligence services (FSIS), several women have also left for Syria, primarily for to provide humanitarian assistance. In the opinion of the Finnish intelligence services, the most powerful motives for their involvement are nationalistic, jihadist or humanitarian. (Jihadology.net, November 21, 2013).

Information about individual Finnish foreign fighters

181. The first Finnish foreign fighter mentioned in the media was “Muhammad,” 22, of Somali extraction, from the city of Espoo. He moved to Finland from Somalia with his family in 1992 when he was two years old. He grew up in Finland and studied in its school system but failed to integrate into Finnish society. In December 2012 he went to Syria via Turkey and joined an extremist organization in northern Syria. Since November 2012 he has been disseminating jihad propaganda, especially that of Anwar al-Awlqi. In early October 2013, he posted pictures on his Facebook page of an attack carried out by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in the city of Hama.

19 There is a Somali immigrant community in Finland. The Somali Al-Shabab organization, which is affiliated with the global jihad, also operates in Finland. In October 2013, the Finnish intelligence and security services announced the completion of an investigation of six residents of Somali extraction who are associated with al-Shabab. They are expected to stand trial on charges of financing terrorism, recruiting operatives for terrorist purposes and making preparations for acts of terrorism (Jihadology.net, November 21, 2013).

20 Anwar Al-Awlqi – Of American extraction, a senior Al-Qaeda operative in Yemen. He was engaged in preaching, recruiting operatives and planning terrorist attacks. He was killed in a targeted killing by the US on September 30, 2011.
182. The first Finnish fighter whose death was reported in August 2013 was a young Finn, a convert to Islam from Turku. He was killed in battle in Aleppo in June 2013. His mother is Finnish and his father is from Namibia. He went to Syria with his Finnish wife and joined a rebel unit (apparently with other Finnish nationals). Shortly before his departure for Syria, he completed his military service in Finland and expressed a desire to study Islam outside the country (Jihadology.net, November 21, 2013).

183. “Rami” – Twenty-one, Finnish mother, and father from an Arab country. He was raised and educated in Finland and converted to Islam at the age of ten. Before converting to Islam, he had difficulties at school. He drank alcohol and committed a number of crimes. According to his mother, he became devout after his conversion. He graduated and distanced himself from Western culture. In July 2013, he went to Turkey. Although he has since made contact with his family and claimed that he is not in Syria, his family is certain he is there (Jihadology.net, November 21, 2013).

184. In March 2013, a young man born in 1990 was killed in a military attack against the Syrian Army. His mother is Finnish and his father is Sudanese. He fought in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front (Yle.fi, March 5, 2013).

185. Abu Mansour – the alias of a Finnish foreign fighter in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. The following is a quote from a video he uploaded to the Internet (MEMRI, December 11, 2013). "I came from my country in order to establish the Caliphate in the Levant, because under the caliphate, there will be justice for all – Muslims, Jews, Christians and all other beliefs, because there is nothing more just than the Shariah of God."
**Norway**

186. According to Thomas Hegghammer, a researcher at the Defense Research Establishment, **at least 40 Norwegian Muslims have gone to fight in Syria** (Washingtonpost.com, November 27, 2013). **Norway’s security services believe that they number around 30-40.** According to the head of the Norwegian intelligence service, there are no organized records and therefore the figure might be higher, since the number of Muslims leaving for Syria from Norway is increasing (Vg.no, October 19, 2013).

187. The father of two daughters, aged 19 and 16, a Norwegian of Somali extraction, said that both of them have left for Syria. The father said that when he heard about their plan, he hurried to Turkish-Syrian border, hoping to stop them, but apparently he was too late. They were seen in Syrian territory getting into cars and heading for Aleppo. According to the father, in recent months his elder daughter had become extremely devout. She began wearing a black niqab and covering her head and eyes (Telegraph.co.uk, October 27, 2013).

**Austria**

188. According to a newspaper in Vienna, **around 40 foreign fighters who fought in Syria have returned to Austria.** At least ten of them are affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Those returning to Austria also include Bosnian nationals (Glas Srpske, Serbia, September 6, 2013).

189. In September 2013, the annual report of the Federal Agency for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism was published in Austria. The report pointed out the potential threat posed by jihad organizations, presenting two scenarios: the active scenario, according to which the returnees would become terrorists in Austria and carry out terror attacks (the report mentioned 19 operatives who were known to the police) and the passive scenario, according to which the returnees would spread the “bacteria of jihadism” using the religious indoctrination they received in Syria (Die Presse, September 10, 2013).

190. The report recommended a long period of supervision for returnees from Syria. However, Austrian law permits a maximum supervision period of nine months. The period may be extended only if there is proof of participation in a concrete terrorist act. Nevertheless, to hamper the dissemination of the ideology of Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups, the Austrian ministry of the interior intends to establish a central office of de-radicalization in mid 2014. The goal is to forge ties with NGOs and religious
organizations and private individuals, to study the radical impact of operatives (who returned from Syria) and to employ countermeasures (Die Presse, September 10, 2013).

**Romania**

191. One foreign fighter from Romania is known, Abu Muhammad al-Rumani, who was killed in Syria on March 5, 2013.

![Abu Muhammad al-Rumani](image)

**Hungary**

192. According to information from the Hungarian Counter-Terrorism Center, Hungarians may be fighting in Syria. The Hungarian intelligence services have information about approximately a dozen Hungarians who may have participated in a training camp in Syria (Magyar Nemzet, June 13, 2013).

**Bulgaria**

193. According to a report written in the US, the fighters killed in Syria in the ranks of the rebels included a Bulgarian civilian (Paper.standartnews.com, June 6, 2013).

**Switzerland**

194. A young man named Abu Saad from the vicinity of Bern used to attend the Arrahman Mosque. The authorities claim that he became a radical after watching
propaganda material online. He then went to Syria where he was recruited, apparently by an organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda (Swissinfo.ch, July 4, 2012).

**Luxembourg**

195. A picture of an 18-year-old known as Abu Hudheifa from Luxembourg appeared on a Facebook page. He came to Syria via Turkey and was killed there.

![Foreign fighters from Luxembourg killed in Syria (Facebook)](image)

**Russia**

**Overview**

196. According to Sergei Smirnov, deputy head of the Russian Federal Security Agency, the number of Russians fighting on Syrian soil in the ranks of the rebels is estimated at around 300-400 (Themoscowtimes.com, September 23, 2013). Most of them are from Chechnya or the North Caucasus, but a small number are from Russia (the fighters from Chechnya and the North Caucasus will be analyzed in an ITIC study in the near future). To date, three Russians are known to have been killed fighting in the ranks of jihad organizations in Syria. Beyond the fact that they died nothing is known about them.
Information about individual Russian foreign fighters

197. **Abu Abdurrahman** – killed on May 22, 2013.


Position of the Russian authorities

200. In an interview with The New York Times, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed deep concern about the hundreds of fighters from Western countries and Russia who return with combat experience. Sergei Smirnov, deputy head of the Federal Security Agency, said that the Russian legal system had no guidelines for stopping the activity of the foreign fighters (Themoscowtimes.com, September 23, 2013).

Ukraine

201. The Syrian ambassador to Ukraine said that there are foreign fighters from 83 countries in Syria, including Ukraine. Mustafa Dzhemilyev, leader of the Muslim Tatars, said that some Tatars from Ukraine are indeed taking part in the fighting in Syria as volunteers. One of them was killed (Channel 5, Ukraine, September 13, 2013).
The Balkans

Overview

202. The number of foreign fighters from the Balkans is estimated at several hundred at most. They are Muslim foreign fighters who have adopted Salafi Islam in their countries of origin. However, Salafi leaders in the Balkans have denied accusations that they are recruiting or sending fighters to Syria. They claim that the foreign fighters fighting in Syria do so as individuals and not in an organized fashion. On the other hand, it is believed that some Salafi organizations and operatives are indeed recruiting people in the Balkans (www.rferl.org, June 8, 2013).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Overview

203. On May 18, 2013, a Bosnian newspaper reported that the number of Bosnian foreign fighters in Syria was estimated at 52. Of them, 32 have returned to Bosnia (Quoted in Al-Hayat, May 24, 2013). According to the statement of one of the foreign fighters, he went to Syria with a group of about 30 Muslim Serbian foreign fighters (Rferl.org, June 8, 2013). According to researcher Aaron Zelin, their number is estimated at 18-60 (ISCR, December 17, 2013). According to other estimates, about 300 Bosnian fighters have departed for Syria (Glas Srpske, Serbia, September 19, 2013). Most of the Bosnian foreign fighters have apparently joined the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front.

Notice announcing the death of a foreign fighter from Bosnia, who was killed in Syria on May 14, 2013 (Sandzakhaber.net, May 17, 2013).
204. The Bosnian media reported that the Bosnian foreign fighters went to Turkey and crossed the border into Syria at the Bab al-Hawa crossing. They then gathered in Syrian territory, underwent brief military training and joined the ranks of the fighters. The foreign fighters from Bosnia and Herzegovina spent three to six months in Syria. Subsequently, some of them were given command positions (in the organization that they belong to) but most went home.

205. Security forces in Sarajevo have reportedly identified a mechanism that provides logistical and financial assistance to operatives who go to Syria. It is associated with the leader of the Salafi community, Nusret Imamovic, who is engaged in fundraising in Jordan and Egypt (Glas Srpske, May 22, 2013). According to a news report, some of the foreign fighters came to Syria with the financial assistance of the leader of the Salafi community in Bosnia (B92.net, May 21, 2013). The Serbian media also reported that foreign fighters from Bosnia and Herzegovina were recruited and sent to Syria in an organized fashion, including by a group from the Wahhabi community and by the Sarajevo office of the Turkish organization IHH (Glas Srpske, June 4, 2013).

Information about individual Bosnian foreign fighters

206. Bajro Ikanovic – Established and headed the Islamic Wahhabi movement in Bosnia. Recruited operatives to fight in Syria, and went there himself in February 2013 to fight in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front (Balkaninsight.com, July 4, 2013). Previously spent four years in prison for terrorist activity. In an interview, he said he went to Syria because of the similarities between the war in Syria and the war in Bosnia. He said that the foreign fighters went to Syria to establish an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, adding that their role would not end after the fall of Assad, since their efforts were aimed at Jerusalem and war against the Jews. Bajro Ikanovic was wounded in Syria in a battle in May 2013 (Elderofziyon.blogspot.com, July 11, 2013).

207. Armen Dzelko – Identified by the security services after his picture appeared in a video with fighters from Bosnia. Twenty-two, lives in a village near Sarajevo. Known to the authorities as a supporter of the Wahhabi Islamic movement, which he joined about a year ago (balkaninsight.com, July 4, 2013).

208. Jasmin Muhamed Keserovic – Appeared in a video filmed in Hama, identified by the security services after returning from Syria. Was active in the recruitment of foreign fighters in the Wahhabi community (Balkaninsight.com, July 4, 2013; Bosnian public TV, July 2, 2013).
209. **Senad Hasanovic** – Went to Syria after being released from prison. Extradited to Bosnia and arrested there (Elderofziyon.blogspot.com, July 11, 2013).

210. **Muaz Sabic** – Left Bosnia and joined the jihad fighters in Syria in early March 2013. Before he went, his dispatchers gave him 3,000 Bosnian marks. That later became the sum that nearly every foreign fighter received from an “anonymous” donor. The year before he went he often visited his hometown, where he participated in religious studies. He was promoted to the position of religious teacher and began giving lessons throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Around January 2013 he was invited to join the foreign fighters in Syria, and joined the Al-Nusra Front. He was killed in battle near Aleppo on April 29, 2013 (The Bosnian weekly Slobodna Bosna, June 13, 2013).

211. **Kenan Bijedic** – Went to Syria several times and served as an instructor because of his combat experience. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina he received commando training at camps run by Arab fighters (Slobodna Bosna, June 13, 2013).

212. **Dravis Halilovic**, aka **Abu Omar** – Forty-one, killed in an attack in the region of Damascus on September 16, 2013. He had divorced his wife a year earlier. His three children stayed with her and were subsequently sent to institutions by the welfare services. His niqab-clad wife refused to comment (the Dnevni Avaz website, Sarajevo, September 19, 2013).

213. **Fikret Hadzic** – Truck driver, left on the pretext of going to Germany but went to Syria. Fought for eight months in the Ahrar al-Sham movement (Slobodna Bosna, June 13, 2013).


215. **Imad al-Din Filitsh** – Killed on September 26, 2013.
216. **Senad Kobash (Kovacs)** – Killed in Aleppo on November 17, 2013.

217. Two other Bosnians who were killed in Syria were **Edin Alijev** and **Alevedin Memic** (Balkaninsight.com, July 4, 2013). It was also reported that **Enver Lilic** and **Bajro Ikanovic** were wounded in Syria (Dnevni Avaz, May 18, 2013).

**Position of the Bosnian authorities**

218. Bosnia's security forces launched an investigation into foreign fighters going to Syria after video of armed masked men planning an attack on the city of Homs was posted. According to the Bosnian TV channel FTV, the investigation found that some of the people in the film came from Bosnia (Balkaninsight.com, July 4, 2013). Some fighters with
criminal records who went to Syria were handed over to the Bosnian authorities and arrested. Those who were arrested led to a wave of additional arrests


220. According to security sources, some of those who returned from Syria are extremists and pose a danger not only to Bosnia and Herzegovina but also to the entire region. The same sources added that many of them became official Al-Qaeda instructors and preached religious extremism (Glas Srpske, September 6, 2013).

221. The Bosnian media reported that in talks held by American and Western European representatives with the security agencies and government of Bosnia Herzegovina, concern was expressed over the large number of fighters from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the ranks of organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The Americans and Europeans expressed concern that those foreign fighters would carry out terrorist attacks, since citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are allowed to move freely throughout Europe without a visa (Slobodna Bosna, Bosnia, June 13, 2013).

The Republic of Kosovo

Overview

222. The intelligence services in Kosovo reportedly believe that the number of foreign fighters from Kosovo is around 100 (Express, October 18, 2013). A Serbian newspaper reported that many foreign fighters from Kosovo were going to Syria to join the rebels. According to the newspaper, the investigation by the Kosovo security services focused on
two mosques considered gathering places for Albanians who want to fight in Syria (See the section on Albania below).

**Information about individual foreign fighters from Kosovo**

223. **Eldar Kundakovic**, aka **Abu Bara** – Fought in the ranks of the Free Syrian Army and was killed on May 15, 2013. The news of his death was posted online by the rebels in an article Balkan Muslims fighting in Syria. His father said he had last spoken with him when he crossed the border from Turkey to Syria at the end of March 2013. The father said that his son joined the fighters in Syria with a group of about 30 people who came with him from the same area. According to his friends, he became an extremist even before traveling to Syria (www.rferl.org, June 8, 2013). He possessed combat experience and was killed during the takeover of a prison where members of the opposition were detained (vnnforum.com, May 17, 2013).

224. **Nu'man Demoli**, aka **Abu Aaesha** – Killed in Homs on November 8, 2012. Apparently of Albanian extraction. He was apparently a resident of Pristina. In 1999 he fought with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), at the time considered a radical Islamic entity. Killed in combat in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front on August 12, 2012. Reportedly the head of a commando unit. The Kosovo media reported he was killed while carrying out a suicide bombing attack in Hama, but that was apparently untrue (Vedatxhymshiti.blogspot.com, December 9, 2012).

![Nu'man Demoli (Shaghor.com)](image)

Position of the Kosovo authorities

227. The leader of the Muslims in Kosovo, Naim Ternava, told Kosovo’s RTK radio station that the Muslim community in Kosovo has made efforts to prevent operatives from joining in the fighting. However, he was apparently unable to prevent his son, Haris Ternava, from expressing a desire to fight in Syria, although he had not yet done so (Express, October 18, 2013).

Albania and Macedonia

Overview

228. In 2013, the press in Kosovo and Albania revealed that a number of young Albanians were fighting in Syria in the ranks of Islamic groups, especially the Al-Nusra Front (quoted by Al-Hayat, May 24, 2013). According to one estimate, the total number of Albanians fighting in Syria is about 140 (Balkaneu.com, May 30, 2013). It is not clear whether all of them are from Albania or whether they are foreign fighters of Albanian extraction living abroad. Some of them acquired military experience in the Balkan War. In our assessment, there have been a few dozen Albanian fatalities.

229. The Macedonian police are reportedly aware that around 100 Macedonians, who were influenced by the sermons of radical imams, are now in Syria, Afghanistan and Dagestan (Macedoniaonline.eu, May 28, 2013). Researcher Aaron Zelin estimated the number of Macedonians who went to Syria at between 3 and 20 (ISCSR, December 17, 2013).

230. Macedonian security sources said that all the foreign fighters who went to Syria are Muslims, most of them had joined the rebels and were fighting mainly in northern Syria. The same sources said some of them were paid €3,000-5,000 per month during the fighting (Balkaneu.com, May 30, 2013). One of the fighters from Macedonia said that he had been recruited through a contact in Vienna (Rferl.org, June 8, 2013). According to an unverified report, the Turkish organization IHH is actively recruiting Albanian foreign fighters to send to Syria (Axisoflogic.com, August 19, 2013).

231. According to a source at the Macedonian ministry of the interior, there is no central recruiting activity. Most of the Macedonians who join in the fighting spend prolonged periods in Western Europe. He said that the main motive for recruiting the Macedonians was religious solidarity with the fighters in Syria (Dnevik, August 31, 2013).
Information about individual foreign fighters from Albania and Macedonia

232. **Rasim Zekiri** – Twenty-eight, killed in the war in Damascus and apparently buried in Syria. His death was reported in a Macedonian newspaper on May 30, 2013. He was of Albanian extraction, but was born in Macedonia. His family lived in Austria for about two decades, where he was influenced by the Wahhabis and recruited by a local imam. It was also reported that he came to Syria via Turkey and joined the Al-Nusra Front (macedoniaonline.eu, May 28, 2013, www.accessmylibrary.com, May 31, 2013).

233. **Muhamet Koprova** – Twenty-two, killed in Syria on March 13, 2013. He was declared the tenth Albanian fatality in battle in Syria. He immigrated with his family to Sweden and grew up in a liberal European environment; however, he was influenced by radical Islam and recruited to fight in Syria along with several dozen other Albanians.


235. **Nu‘man Demoli**, aka **Abu Aaesha** – Albanian from Pristina. He fought with the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1999. Joined in the fighting in Syria and was killed in combat in Homs on August 12, 2012, in the ranks the Al-Nusra Front. He reportedly headed a commando unit of the Al-Nusra Front (For additional details see section on the Republic of Kosovo, above).


239. **Omar Ni’mat Allah**, aka **Abu Ziad al-Almani** – Killed in a village on the outskirts of Latakia, August 10, 2013. Had German citizenship and served as the commander of a force. Appeared on the casualty list from Macedonia, although his name may indicate that he resided in Germany.
Position of the Albanian and the Macedonian authorities

240. Macedonia’s interior minister said there was no recruitment center in Macedonia for foreign fighters in Syria. He added that no Macedonian organization or individual recruiting fighters had been identified to date. He noted that the principal motive for volunteering was religious identification with the fighters against the regime. He said that most of the Macedonians who left for Syria spent extended periods working abroad, mainly in Western Europe, and that they left for Syria from those countries (Dnevnik Skopje, August 13, 2013).

Serbia

241. Researcher Aaron Zelin estimated there were three Serbian foreign fighters in Syria (ICSR, December 17, 2013).
Armenia


Other Western Countries

Overview

243. In our assessment the number of foreign fighters from North America and Australia is around two hundred. This number is significantly smaller than the number of foreign fighters from Europe. The estimates are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated number of foreign fighters</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The United States</td>
<td>Around 70</td>
<td>According to the US media, based on intelligence and security agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Canada</td>
<td>A few dozen</td>
<td>According to a Canadian &quot;government source&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Australia</td>
<td>Between a few dozen and around 100</td>
<td>According to Australian police and intelligence agencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The United States

Overview

244. According to a recent estimate issued by American intelligence and security sources, since the beginning of the civil war at least 70 Americans had either gone to Syria or attempted to do so (The New York Times, January 9, 2014). This estimate is significantly higher than previous estimates published in 2013 (which referred to 12-15 American foreign fighters). In our assessment, it reflects the sharp increase in the number of foreign fighters in the second half of 2013 (and possibly also the increasing attention paid to the phenomenon by US intelligence and security agencies).

The case of Eric Harroun

245. On March 11, 2013, the American Fox News Network revealed the case of Eric Harroun, of Phoenix Arizona, who converted to Islam and was fighting in the ranks of the rebels in Syria. He became attracted to Islam after meeting two brothers of Iraqi extraction in college. He previously served as a soldier in the US Army. Eric Harroun went to Syria to fight against the Assad regime, and uploaded pictures and videos to the Internet. He was also mentioned on Facebook under the name of Eric Omar Harroun, and a picture from March 2, 2013, shows him holding an RPG in his left hand and a rifle in his right hand. In another picture, uploaded on March 19, 2013, he was wearing a uniform. Harroun was in trouble with the law in the US even before going to Syria (Foreignpolicy.com, March 22, 2013).

246. On March 29, 2013, CNN reported that the FBI had arrested Eric Harroun in a hotel near the airport in Virginia. He was charged with illegal use of weapons in the Al-Nusra Front, which has been declared a terrorist organization by the US. Eric Harroun told FBI investigators that he shot at 10 people during his military activity in Syria between January and March 2013, but he was not sure if he killed any of them. According to one of the FBI interrogators, Harroun joined the Free Syrian army in January 2013 after crossing the border from Turkey. Within a few days of his arrival in Syria he found himself in a battle with the rebels, after which he joined the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front (Timesofisrael.com, April 8, 2013). The members of the Al-Nusra Front called him “the American.” At first they treated him like a prisoner, but after he had fought in their ranks they treated him like an ally. They even suggested that he become their English-language spokesman (Nytimes.com, April 8, 2013).
247. Eric Harroun was indicted in the US on charges of fighting in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front, which has been designated as a terrorist organization by the US administration. He denied membership in the Al-Nusra Front, claiming that he belonged to the Omar Ibn al-Aas Brigade, a unit of the Free Syrian Army. A brigade spokesman confirmed that he had in fact fought with them near Aleppo, in September 2013. However, he pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and was released (The New York Times, January 9, 2014). The affair illustrated the lack of clarity regarding the nature of the activities of foreign fighters in Syria and the difficulties experienced by law enforcement agencies in the US and other Western countries in dealing with the problem.

Left: Eric Harroun with Free Syrian Army soldiers (YouTube, March 2013).
Right: Eric Harroun on the Facebook page (MEMRI, March 29, 2013).

Right: Eric Harroun (YouTube). Left: Eric Harroun in Syria (Facebook).
Information about individual American foreign fighters

248. **Abu Dujana al-Amriki** (the American Abu Dujana) – A foreign fighter apparently of American extraction, who belonged to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. He was killed by the Free Syrian Army in Hama. A video was uploaded to the Internet on his behalf after his death (the cover page includes a segment in which he threatens jihad on the West).

![Abu Dujana al-Amriki in the beginning of the video (Weaselzippers.us)](image1)

![A photograph of the body of Abu Dujana after he was killed by the Free Syrian Army (Weaselzippers.us).](image2)

249. **Matthew VanDyke** – Film producer and former journalist from Baltimore. Holds a BA in political science from the University of Maryland and an MA in security studies from Georgetown University. From 2007 to 2011 he motorcycled around the Middle East and
North Africa. Finding himself in the civil war in Libya, he joined the rebel forces fighting the Gaddafi regime. Captured in 2011 and spent five months in jail before managing to escape (Wikipedia in English, November 20, 2013). Opened a Twitter account which he uses to report on the fighting in Syria, and has also made a movie costing $30,000 called “Not Anymore: A Story of Revolution.” He also uses his Twitter account for fundraising. According to The Guardian (September 18, 2013), he serves as advisor to the rebel forces in Syria, apparently the Free Syrian Army. A Libyan media website published a video of him in uniform, posing with an operative in the rebel forces.

250. Nicole Lynn Mansfield – Thirty-three, from Flint, Michigan, killed in May 2013 in the Idlib Governorate (The Investigative Project on Terrorism, July 29, 2013). According to her family she was killed fighting in the ranks of the rebels. According to her aunt, she married an Arab a few years ago, converted to Islam, divorced and moved to Dubai two years ago (Guardian.co.uk, May 31, 2013). She was apparently the first American killed in the war in Syria. Nicole Mansfield’s body was found along with the bodies of two other westerners in a car which also contained a hand-drawn map of Syrian government sites, weapons, a computer and an Al-Nusra Front flag (CNN, May 31, 2013; The New York Times, January 9, 2014).

251. Amir Farouk Ibrahim – Thirty-two, from Pittsburgh. He fought in the ranks of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. He died in a battle between his organization and the Kurdish militias on July 22, 2013 (Wpxi.com, July 26, 2013). His family moved to Saudi Arabia and from there to Cairo. In 2003 he returned to the US and went to college in Ohio and to California for graduate studies. In 2008 he received an MBA. He met two people of
Turkish extraction who suggested he join their software business, and moved to Turkey in early 2013. From there he went to Syria and reported to his family that he was engaged in humanitarian issues, helping people escape from the fighting (Wpxi.com, July 26, 2013). The Syria Observatory for Human Rights, a Syrian human rights organization based in Britain, uploaded a picture of Ibrahim and his Egyptian passport to its Facebook page. His passport was found along with 12 passports belonging to other foreign fighters from across the Muslim world (Wpxi.com, July 26, 2013).

252. **Basit Javed Sheikh**, aka **Abdul Basit** – Resident of North Carolina, 29, of Pakistani extraction. He was tried on charges of assisting the Al-Nusra Front, which is on the US list of designated terrorist organizations. He admitted to an undercover FBI agent whom he met through Facebook that he had gone to Turkey in October 2012 to “help his suffering Syrian brethren.” He noted that while in Syria, he met with fighters of the Free Syrian Army who were only interested in money. He was reportedly arrested in early November 2013 on his way to join the Al-Nusra Front (The Investigative Project on Terrorism, November 13, 2013; AP, December 4, 2013).

253. In April 2013, at an airport near Chicago, an FBI agent arrested **Abdullah Ahmad Tunisi**, 18, who was about to fly to Turkey to join the Al-Nusra Front (Wpxi.com, July 26, 2013).

254. **Abu Abdullah al-Masri** – Egyptian-born American citizen killed in Syria in late 2013. According to Facebook, he fought in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front and was killed in battle against Kurdish militias in Ras al-Ayn, in northern Syria. Al-Masri was in his mid-thirties, the son of a wealthy family. He reportedly had a college degree and a good job during his stay in the US. When he left for Syria he told his family he was going on a business trip (MEMRI, December 14, 2013).

255. **Mohamad Abu Qara’a**, aka **Al-Zaytuna** – A Libyan who studied in Virginia. After the revolution broke out he returned to Libya to fight against the Qaddafi regime. After the revolution, he returned to the United States from where he joined the rebels in Syria. He was killed in Aleppo on April 2, 2013.

**Position of the US authorities**

256. The head of the FBI, **James B. Comey**, and the outgoing head, **Robert Mueller**, told journalists that they were concerned about the phenomenon of Americans fighting in Syria. That is because of the connections that they might make [with Al-Qaeda operatives] and the [military] skills that they are liable to acquire during their stay in Syria. According to Comey and Mueller, they are liable to use their connections and skills
to carry out attacks when they return. According to James Comey, that is what happened in Afghanistan in the 1980s (AP, December 4, 2013).

257. In early December 2013 the US Senate Homeland Security Committee held a hearing about “threats to the homeland.” Committee Secretary Senator Tom Carper said, “We are now dealing with a number of splinter groups, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which was responsible for the Christmas Day attack in 2009 and which continues its efforts to attack us to this day. And we know that American citizens, as well as Canadian and European nationals, have taken up arms in Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. The threat that these individuals could return home to carry out attacks is real, and troubling” (Carper.senate.gov).

258. According to an article in The New York Times (January 9, 2014), the head of the FBI said that monitoring Americans who returned from Syria had become one of the highest priorities of the war on terror. American intelligence officials said that the FBI closely monitored a small group of Americans who had already returned from Syria. A senior official dealing with the war on terror told a New York Times reporter that “We know Al-Qaeda is using Syria to identify individuals they can recruit, provide them additional indoctrination so they’re further radicalized, and leverage them into future soldiers, possibly in the US.”

259. Handling the phenomenon of foreign fighters in the US is supposedly easier than in Europe because its scale is smaller and since the Al-Nusra Front has been designated by the Americans as a terrorist organization. However, the United States supports the Free Syrian Army and other rebel organizations and is hostile to the Assad regime and therefore joining them should not be a crime. That poses legal and practical difficulties for the US government in dealing with the issue, as was illustrated by the case of Eric Harroun, above.

Canada

Overview

260. There are conflicting versions about the number of Canadians fighting in Syria. The previous estimate was around 24 (News.nationalpost.com). An estimate from the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation claims that they number between nine and 100. A “government source” commenting on these figures said that dozens of Canadians had gone to fight in Syria (News.nationalpost.com, December 17, 2013).
Information about individual Canadian foreign fighters

261. Jamal Mohamed Abd al-Kader, aka Abu Dujana – Twenty-four, Canadian citizen, was killed fighting in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front in the city of Azaz in northern Syria. He was born and raised in Montreal, to a Kurdish family from northeastern Syria. College student and only child. In 2012, he decided to join the rebels in Syria against his parents’ wishes. In July 2012, he went to Turkey and entered Syria through the Bab al-Salamah crossing. Joined a Free Syrian Army brigade and participated in the fighting in the Aleppo region (Blazingcatfur.blogspot.com). At the end of 2012, he apparently began to fight in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. He was killed in the Mazraa area near Damascus on February 21, 2013. He apparently died as a result of a “work accident” in a complex suicide bombing attack that went wrong.

262. Thwaiba Kanafani – Canadian resident of Toronto, engineer, mother of two. Originally from the island of Arwad, situated three kilometers off the Syrian coast. Left Syria in 1999 to work in the Persian Gulf and immigrated to Canada four years later. Opened a construction-consulting firm in Toronto. Married to an Egyptian and has two children. Received Canadian citizenship in 2012. Has been following the clashes with great interest since they broke out. In early 2012 she decided to increase her involvement. In May 2012, she flew with her husband and children to Egypt, where she met several Syrian activists, and then decided to go to Turkey on her own to make direct contact with members of the Free Syrian Army (Theglobeandmail.com, July 13, 2013). Spent several months in Syria, returned to Canada and was involved in supporting the struggle of the Syrian rebels.

263. Ali Muhammad Dirie – Of Somali extraction. Joined one of the organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda in Syria and was killed in battle. Convicted in 2006 of smuggling arms to a terrorist network planning to blow up the offices of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Canadian intelligence headquarters and the House of Parliament in Ottawa. Sentenced to seven years in prison and released in 2011. In 2012 he left Canada for Syria on a false passport because he was considered a risk and was on Canada’s no-fly list. His death became known to the members of the Somali community in Canada (Israeli Channel 7, September 26, 2013; News.nationalpost.com September 26, 2013; Ctvnews.ca, September 25, 2013).

264. Abu Muslim – Canadian national who converted to Islam. Appeared in a documentary broadcast on the British Channel 4 TV. In a broadcast from Aleppo he appeared armed with an assault rifle in the muhajiroun unit, which includes foreign fighters (news.nationalpost.com, June 20, 2013).
265. **Damian Clairmont**, aka **Mustafa al-Gharib** – High school student from Calgary, Alberta, who converted to Islam and went to fight in Syria in the ranks of one of the jihadi organizations (News.nationalpost.com, September 26, 2013).

266. **Abu Abd al-Rahman** – Canadian who joined the *muhajiroun* unit. Killed in March 2013 on the outskirts of Aleppo (Centerfordocumentation.com).

267. **Canadians whose names and aliases are not known:**

- A Syrian website by the name of **Zaman al-Wasel** posted a report about a Canadian citizen who joined the Al-Nusra Front and fought in the region of Aleppo. Earlier, a man identifying himself as a Canadian Muslim uploaded a request to join the forces fighting against Assad on one of the Free Syrian Army websites. He expressed his desire to travel to Istanbul on short notice and from there to join the rebels. He described himself as a Canadian, the son of Lebanese parents and claimed that he could bring supplies and military equipment with him (Blazingcatfur.blogspot.com).

- A 21-year-old Canadian citizen from Calgary, Alberta, who converted to Islam, left Canada in November 2012. Apparently he was killed on May 31, 2013, along with a British and an American fighter (News.nationalpost.com, June 20, 2013). His mother said she thought her son had gone to attend a university in Egypt. However, he actually flew to Turkey and from there he apparently entered Syria and joined one of the extremist groups. According to his mother, he was apparently recruited by an Islamic leader from Calgary (news.nationalpost.com, June 20, 2013).

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Left: Thwaiba Kanafani, a Syrian-born Canadian who joined the Free Syrian Army (News.nationalpost.com, April 26, 2013). Right: Jamal Mohamed Abd al-Kader, who was killed in battle in Syria (Blazingcatfur.blogspot.com).
Left: Abu Abd al-Rahman (Centerfordocumentation.com).
Right: A Canadian fighter who converted to Islam and calls himself Abu Muslim (News.nationalpost.com, June 20, 2013).

Position of the Canadian authorities

268. According to the Canadian minister of public security, a number of Canadian nationals are known to have fought in Syria, some of whom died in battle. However, the government does not have the ability to supervise and monitor those going to Syria (News.nationalpost.com, June 20, 2013). Tahera Mufti, spokeswoman for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, noted that the phenomenon of Canadians participating in extremist activities abroad is serious and added that Syria has become a major destination for them (news.nationalpost.com, December 17, 2013).

269. On November 7, 2013, the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda’s branch in Syria, was put on the Canadian list of terrorist organizations. That may make it easier for law enforcement agencies in Canada to deal with Canadian foreign fighters who join the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front.
Australia

Overview

270. In our estimation, the number of foreign fighters from Australia ranges from many dozen to 100. According to another estimate, there are several hundred Australians. According to Peter Drennan, a senior officer in the Australian Federal Police (AFP), their number is estimated at around 100 (The Guardian, December 3, 2013). According to estimates by the head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), there are several hundred Australians in Syria, and about 100 of them are operatives in the Al-Nusra Front. Most of them are apparently Australians, members of the local Lebanese community.

271. The number of Australian foreign fighters increased significantly in the first half of 2013. According to David Irving, head of the ASIO, most of those who went to Syria are young men who were born in Australia or came to Australia in their youth. Most of them, he said, are from families with close connections to northern Lebanon, and particularly the area around Tripoli. Many families have businesses in the area and ties that enable them to cross the border relatively easily (ABC.net.au, April 16, 2013). The increase persisted during the second half of 2013.

272. Australian foreign fighters (like those from other Western countries) often claimed that their activity in Syria was intended for humanitarian purposes. However, various indications have shown that at least some of them were involved in the fighting and were affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front (Amh.com.au, May 12, 2013).

Information about individual Australian foreign fighters

A suicide bomber from Australia

273. The Australian Abu Osama, aka Osama al-Muhajir – A video was uploaded to the internet showing a suicide bomber who carried out an attack against a Syrian army checkpoint near the airport in Deir al-Zor. The Al-Nusra Front announced that the suicide bombing attack was carried out on September 11, 2013, and killed 35 Syrian soldiers. The suicide bomber appears with his face blurred, reading his will, which says, “Jihad is a personal duty (fard 'ayn) imposed on us.” He added, “You in the West or in other [non-Muslim] countries think you are successful people living a good life, but the best people are those who are in the land of jihad and defending the religion of Allah” (Alplatformmedia.com, September 13, 2013).
274. Australian police have apparently identified the man who carried out the attack as a resident of Brisbane, 27, known as “Ahmad.” His family denied the identification and claimed that it is a mistake and that their relative is alive and in Turkey. However, they refused French News Agency’s request to fly to Turkey and meet with him (www.abc.net.au, November 12, 2013).

Abu Osama al-Muhajir reading his will over the truck bomb. “Jihad is a personal duty (fard ‘ayn) imposed on us.” He added, “You in the West or in other [non-Muslim] countries think you are successful people living a good life, but the best people are those who are in the land of jihad and defending the religion of Allah” (Alplatformmedia.com)

The Australian Abu Osama in a video photographed before the suicide bombing attack, and uploaded to YouTube.
Additional Australian foreign fighters

275. Yusuf Toprakkaya al-Turki, aka the Australian Abu al-Walid – A builder from Melbourne, 30, joined the Syrian rebels. Killed in battle on December 30, 2012, around nine months after arriving in Syria. On arrival in Syria he announced his wish to sacrifice his life for Islam and the rebels. According to WikiLeaks, he was previously associated with Anwar Al-Awlqi, leader of Al-Qaeda in Yemen, who was killed in attack by the US in 2012. Interviewed in Melbourne, his mother said her son was not a terrorist and had gone to Syria in order to help innocent people who were oppressed. He went to Turkey and joined a group of rebels that smuggled him into Syria. In Syria, he joined a military framework by the name of Sariyat al-Ansar, and was one of the few foreigners who fought in its ranks. During the fighting, he soon became a bomb-planting expert and a sniper, despite the fact that previously he did not know how to shoot a rifle (www.globalspot.com, March 4, 2013).

276. Sammy Salma – From Melbourne, arrived in Syria in 2012 and killed in Aleppo on April 17, 2013 (Rightsidenews.com, April 24, 2013). According to his family, he was killed while praying at a mosque that came under attack. His name was mentioned in jihad forums but no details about him were provided beyond his name, origin and the place where he was killed (www.amh.com.au, May 12, 2013).
277. **Sheikh Mustafa al-Majzoub** – Religious teacher from Sydney, led a group of rebels from the Al-Nusra Front hit by a rocket near Aleppo on August 19, 2012. His name was mentioned on jihad forums, but no information has been released about him except his name, origin and the place where he was killed (Amh.com.au, May 12, 2013). His family claimed that he was staying in Syria in order to perform humanitarian activity (www.abc.net.au, November 2013).

278. **Roger Abbas** – fought in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. His name was mentioned in jihadi forums, but no details about him were published except his name, origin and the place where he was killed (www.amh.com.au, May 12, 2013).
279. **Sonya Abbas** – Sister of Roger Abbas, Sunni Muslim from Australia, nurse. Said she had been to Syria twice and intended to go again. Said she participated in surgical procedures and briefed nurses in Syria. Her husband, Halil Soubjaku, fought in the ranks of the Free Syrian Army (Abc.net.au, July 3, 2013).

280. **Yahya al-Khaled** – Australian foreign fighter, 25, a student of economics from Brisbane, went with his family to Lebanon in November 2012 and from there to Syria (Theaustralian.com.au, November 7, 2012).


Osama Rajah Abbas Tartusi (Shaghor.com)
Position of the Australian authorities

282. The Australian intelligence agencies are aware of the security risk inherent in the phenomenon of Australian foreign fighters who go to fight in Syria. David Irving, the head of the ASIO, said that they may become extremists and pose a security risk when they return to Australia (Abc.net.au, April 16, 2013). According to the Australian media, counterterrorism authorities were able to identify about 70% of the Australians who went to fight in Syria.

283. The Australian government has warned its citizens not to travel to Syria. A spokesman for the Australian department of foreign affairs said that under Australian law, a person who enters into a foreign country to take part in hostilities shall be subject to imprisonment. In addition, it is forbidden to finance a trip or recruit someone to fight or provide financing for arms to one of the parties to hostilities. The Australian government has also announced that Australian fighters who fight in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front are liable to be considered terrorists on their return to Australia. That is because, according to the attorney general, the Al-Nusra Front has been put on the list of terrorist organizations, since it has a history of carrying out terrorist attacks (Theaustralian.com.au, June 29, 2013).

284. On December 3, 2013, two Australians from Sydney were arrested after a four-month investigation. One of them, a 39-year-old man, was accused of recruiting six people and helping them go to Syria to fight in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front and other Al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations. The other, a 23-year-old man, was preparing to leave for Syria to fight in the ranks of the rebels. Following the arrests, Australian Attorney General George Brandis expressed his concern over the “radicalization of Australians.” Peter Drennan, a senior officer in the Australian Federal Police (AFP), said that traveling to fight in another country, training there, or being involved in hostilities was illegal, and it was also illegal to recruit or arrange for people to go fight in other countries (The Guardian, December 3, 2013).