



May 2014

Foreign fighters from various countries and regions in Asia, fighting against the Syrian regime, most of them in organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad



Foreign fighters from the Caucasus (mainly Chechens) in Syria against a background of Al-Qaeda flags (<http://fisyria.com>, August 3, 2013).

Characteristics and implications¹

1. This study examines the foreign fighters from various countries and regions in Asia fighting against the Syrian regime. The study shows that **most of the foreign fighters from Asia are fighting in the ranks of organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad**. A small number fight in the ranks of other rebel organizations. This is a follow-on to the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center's in-depth study about foreign fighters in Syria from countries and regions in the Middle East, Asia and the West.²

¹ This is the overview of an in-depth study about foreign fighters from Asia. A full version in English of this study will be available soon.

² See the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center's study (December 2013): "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 terrorist and subversive activities to their countries of origin when they return (the "Afghanistan model")." We are now working on an additional in-depth study about foreign fighters from the Arab world.

2. **The number of non-Arab foreign fighters from Muslim countries and regions in Asia, who joined the ranks of the rebels in Syria, is estimated by us at 600-700 (out of about 7,000 to 8,000 foreign fighters fighting against the Syrian regime). Notable among them are operatives from Chechnya and the North Caucasus and, to a lesser extent, from Pakistan and Turkey.** In addition, there are foreign fighters in Syria from **Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Indonesia and other Muslim countries**, numbering from a few to several dozen. **Muslims from non-Muslim countries in Asia, such as China and India, have also joined the rebels, mainly alongside the jihadi organizations.**

3. Notable among the foreign fighters from Asia who joined in the fighting in Syria are **skilled operatives with military-terrorist experience** from two regions:

A. **Chechnya and the Caucasus – there are some 200-250 Chechen fighters in Syria**, some of them affiliated with the Caucasian Emirate, a Caucasian network that maintains ties with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad. They include highly motivated fighters with combat experience who participated in the uprising against Russia in the 1990s. Most of the Chechen operatives joined the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (hereinafter: “ISIS”). Several of them attained senior command ranks and some senior commanders were killed in battle. A large portion of the Chechen operatives fight in a separate military unit by the name of **the Army of Emigrants and Supporters**, affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front³, comprising mainly foreign fighters. Some of the operatives in this unit left following a rift between ISIS and the Al-Nusra, and joined ISIS.

B. **Pakistan** - in Syria there are many dozen (up to around 100) Pakistani foreign fighters. Prominent among them are members of the **Taliban** who joined Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria. Also prominent are operatives of a Pakistani terrorist organization by the name of **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi** (the Army of Jhangvi), a radical Sunni organization that “specializes” in fighting against Shiites. In addition, there are more than 200 Turkish foreign fighters in Syria, some of Kurdish extraction. Most of them join organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad or Kurdish militia separatists in northern Syria fighting for Kurdish autonomy.

4. The following table summarizes the various estimates of the number of foreign fighters from Muslim countries in Asia:

³ In Arabic, **Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar**, i.e., The Army of Emigrants and Supporters.

Number	Country / Region	Estimated number of foreign fighters	Remarks
1	Chechnya (Russia) and North Caucasus	250-200	According to a Russian source and the commander of the Free Syrian Army, among others
2	Azerbaijan	Scores	
3	Tajikistan	A few individuals	
4	Dagestan	Nearly twenty	
5	Kyrgyzstan	Nearly twenty	
6	Kazakhstan	A few dozen	
7	Pakistan	Between scores and 100	Statements by Taliban leaders that hundreds of Pakistani fighters have been sent to Syria are exaggerated, in our opinion.
8	Afghanistan	A few individuals	In our opinion, statements by spokesmen for the Syrian regime that hundreds of Afghans are fighting in Syria are exaggerated.
9	Indonesia	A few dozen	
10	Turkey	More than 200, some of Kurdish extraction	

5. In addition, **Muslim foreign fighters from non-Muslim Asian countries have joined the ranks of the rebels**: scores (up to 100) of members of the Sunni Muslim minority in **China** (the Uyghurs); a small number of Muslim foreign fighters from **India** and one **Japanese** foreign fighter. Most of these foreign fighters joined organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad.

6. The foreign fighters from Asian countries, fighting in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front and other jihadi organizations, **constitute a potential risk to their Asian countries of origin, the countries and regions bordering on them, and to Western countries as well.** The reason is that these foreign fighters, **having acquired operational experience and combat skills and having undergone processes of jihadization and Islamic radicalization during their stay in Syria,** are expected to return to their countries of origin and **join existing terrorist infrastructures.** Some may even set up **new terrorism and subversion infrastructures,** which will operate locally and internationally, possibly under the guidance of the leadership of Al-Qaeda and the global jihad.

The structure of the study

7. This study presents the distribution of the Asian foreign fighters by countries and regions, as follows:

A. Chechnya and the Caucasus

- 1) Overview
- 2) The Army of Emigrants and Supporters - the Chechen military unit
- 3) Portrait of Umar the Chechen, the senior Chechen commander
- 4) Information about Chechen operatives
- 5) Photographs of Chechen operatives
- 6) The position of Russia and the Chechen leadership

B. Azerbaijan

- 1) Overview
- 2) Information about Azeri foreign fighters
- 3) Photographs of Azeri operatives

C. Dagestan

D. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

- 1) Overview
- 2) Information about foreign fighters from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
- 3) The position of the local authorities

E. Kazakhstan

F. Pakistan

- 1) Overview
- 2) Information about foreign fighters from Pakistan
- 3) The position of the local authorities

G. Afghanistan

H. Indonesia

I. Turkey

- 1) Overview
- 2) The city of Adiyaman as a center for recruiting Turkish foreign fighters
- 3) Information about Turkish foreign fighters
- 4) The position of the local authorities

J. Foreign fighters from non-Muslim countries

1) China

- a) Overview
- b) Information about foreign fighters from China
- c) The position of the local authorities

2) Japan

3) India

Distribution by countries and regions

Chechnya and the Caucasus

Overview

8. The number of foreign fighters from Chechnya and the North Caucasus **was previously estimated by Western and Russian sources at about 200 to 250 operatives**⁴. However, the number may be higher as foreign fighters continue to join the rebels in Syria. For example, **Abu Jihad the Chechen**, a senior commander in the jihadi organization the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (hereinafter: "ISIS"), claimed in an audiotape released in January 2014 that 500 operatives from the Caucasus had been killed in Syria (facebook.com). We believe that this figure is exaggerated. In our assessment, several dozen Chechen operatives have been killed in Syria, most of them in the Aleppo area, which is their main area of activity. Among the foreign fighters in the ranks of the rebels, the **Chechen operatives stand out in terms of their large number and their combat experience**, partly acquired during their fighting against Russia.

9. **There are several categories** of Chechen fighters in Syria (www.rferl.org, June 19, 2013):

A. Fighters with combat experience, who participated in the rebellion in the North Caucasus. In September 2012, The Guardian described a brigade of Chechens together with fighters from Libya, Tajikistan, Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The article described the Chechen fighters as older, taller, more skilled and more robust than their comrades, many of whom had no proven combat experience (www.rferl.org, June 19, 2013).

B. Members of the Chechen minority in Georgia, who live along the border between Chechnya and Georgia. **Umar the Chechen**, the senior Chechen commander in Syria, and other Chechen senior commanders are from this area (see below).

⁴According to **Alexander Bortnikov**, director of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB), **about 200 Russian fighters** are involved in the fighting in Syria under the banner of Al-Qaeda (rbth.ru, June 6, 2013). According to an intelligence report by **Salim Idris**, commander of the Free Syrian Army, quoted in the Washington Post, the number of Chechen foreign fighters is **250**. According to Salim Idris, the Chechen fighters are the most dangerous and barbaric (www.aydinlikdaily.com, December 5, 2013).

C. **Young Chechens who left Chechnya** since the war there broke out in 1994, living in Europe or elsewhere. There are those who claim that most Chechen foreign fighters in Syria fall into this category.

D. **Young people from Chechnya, who interrupted their studies at universities in the Middle East** and went to fight in Syria in the ranks of the rebels. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Chechen students traveled to the Middle East to study Arabic and Islamic studies, which were banned under Soviet rule (www.rferl.org, June 19, 2013).

The Army of Emigrants and Supporters – the Chechen military Unit

10. Unlike most foreign fighters, who are scattered among various military frameworks, most Chechen operatives served in a **single organic unit**. The establishment of the unit began in March 2012 with the arrival of the first Chechen operatives. It was initially known as the Emigrant Battalion (*Katibat al-Muhajirin*⁵) and was closely affiliated with the **Al-Nusra Front**. Foreign fighters from Libya, Tajikistan, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere also served in it, as well as **foreign fighters from the West**. Subsequently, the unit grew and was renamed the **Emigrant Battalions** (*Kataeb al-Muhajirin*) and later the **Army of Emigrants and Supporters**⁶ (*Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar*, hereinafter: the “Army of Emigrants”). The head of this military unit in its various incarnations was **Umar the Chechen**, until he deserted the unit and joined the ranks of ISIS in early 2014 (see below).

⁵ In Islam, the term **Al-Muhajirin** refers to Muslims, who immigrated with the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, and were among his first handful of supporters.

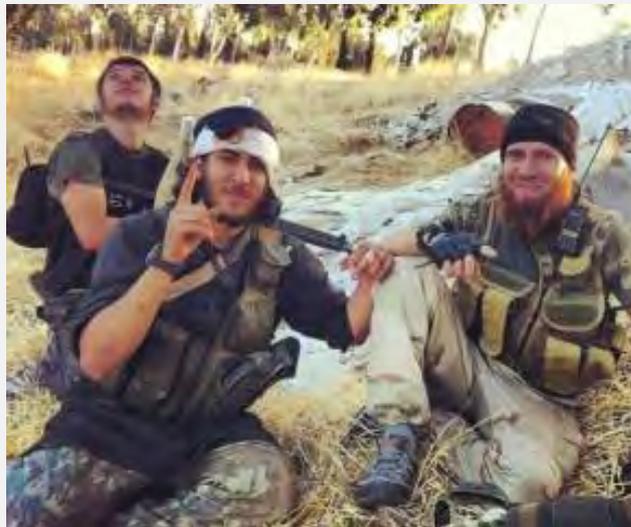
⁶ In Islam, the term **Al-Ansar** refers to supporters of the Prophet Muhammad from the city of Medina, where he arrived with the “immigrants” (Al-Muhajirin). The usual English translation of *Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar* is **the Army of Emigrants and Supporters**.



The insignia of the Army of Emigrants (wikipedia.org): the open Quran alongside a sword, and a finger pointing to the sky under the caption, the Army of Emigrants and Al-Ansar. Below, the caption reads “a book [the Quran] that guides [the believers] and a sword that defeats [the enemies of Islam]”.



The insignia of the Emigrant Battalions (youtube.com), showing a map of Syria. In the center of the map there is a sword and a banner containing the *shahada* (“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger”). In the map: the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, symbols of the long-term goals of the Emigrant Brigades.



Ibrahim al-Mazughi (left), a fighter in the ranks of the Emigrant Battalions, a British citizen of Pakistani descent who was killed in Syria. He is shown alongside his commander, Abu Umar the Chechen, with the red beard (vice.com).

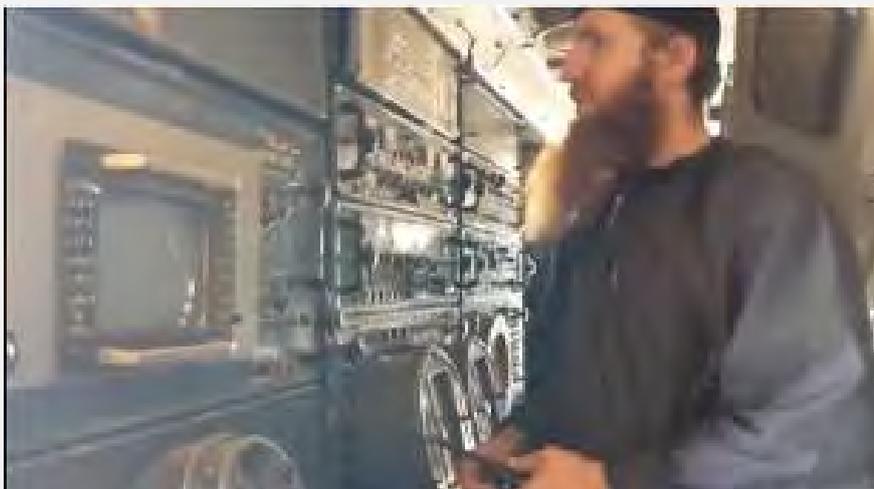
11. In the summer of 2012, Umar the Chechen began to operate the Emigrant Battalion in attacks on Syrian military bases **in the Aleppo region**. In December 2012, the Emigrant Battalion took part in battles over the Sheikh Salman base, west of Aleppo, together with the Al-Nusra Front. In February 2013, the Emigrant Battalions and the Al-Nusra Front occupied the Syrian Air Force Base in Aleppo. In March 2013, the

Emigrant Battalions, along with other jihadi Islamic groups, joined an expanded military unit by the name of the Army of Emigrants. In August 2013, Army of Emigrants operatives took part in a combined attack by Islamic forces on villages in the province of Latakia (a stronghold of the Alawite community) that support the Assad regime.



Video documenting the ceremony for the establishment of the Army of Emigrants (March 2013). At least one hundred operatives appeared in the video, mainly from Chechnya and the Caucasus, in our estimation (youtube.com, March 25, 2013).

12. The Army of Emigrants and its commander Umar the Chechen acquired a reputation among rebel organizations following the rebel takeover of the Menagh military airbase in August 2013. The Army of Emigrants participated in the attack on the airbase alongside other rebel groups, under the command of Umar the Chechen (Note: The success at Menagh paved the way for the subsequent appointment of Umar the Chechen as commander in northern Syria on behalf of ISIS, with which he formed close ties since the initial establishment of the Army of Emigrants). At the end of September 2013, the Army of Emigrants took over two Syrian army bases in the Hama region, seizing a large quantity of weapons and military equipment: armored vehicles, radar systems, aerial defense systems, mortars, small arms and more (kavkazcenter.com.) On December 3-4, 2013, Umar the Chechen commanded an attack against the Syrian army in southwest Aleppo, seizing a large quantity of booty (echokavkaz.blogspot).



Umar the Chechen displaying military equipment that fell into their hands at one of the military bases taken over by the Army of Emigrants in the Hama region (kavkazcenter.com).

13. **In early 2014, the Army of Emigrants found itself caught in the midst of a growing dispute between the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS**, culminating in Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's renunciation of ISIS and his declaration of the Al-Nusra Front as Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria.⁷ Umar the Chechen, who previously forged close ties with ISIS, **joined it along with about half of the Army of Emigrants' operatives** and was appointed as the military commander of ISIS in northern Syria. A senior Chechen commander known as **Saladin the Chechen** was appointed as commander ("Emir") of the Army of Emigrants in his stead. The Army of Emigrants, under the command of Saladin the Chechen, **continued to maintain close ties with the Al-Nusra Front** and carried out joint military operations with it. In March 2014, the Army of Emigrants participated in battles in the region of the city of Aleppo and the province of Latakia, in cooperation with the Al-Nusra Front and other rebel groups.

⁷ See our Information Bulletin from February 17, 2014: "Al-Qaeda's Repudiation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria - Overview and Analysis of Implications."



The Army of Emigrants' announcement of the appointment of Saladin the Chechen as its commander after Umar the Chechen joined ISIS (hanein.info).



Left: Saladin the Chechen, the new commander of the Army of Emigrants, instead of Umar the Chechen (kavkazcenter.com). Right: Umar the Chechen (Right:), who was appointed commander of the northern region on behalf of ISIS (Centerfordocumentation.com)



Picture from the ceremony in which Saladin the Chechen (center) was appointed commander of the Army of Emigrants. Saladin the Chechen was heard speaking in Russian and was surrounded by around one hundred operatives. Al-Qaeda flags were waving in the background (youtube.com).

The media activity of the Chechens

14. The military activity of the Army of Emigrants (and the Emigrant Battalions before it) enjoys extensive media coverage. The insignias of these units appear in the video clips that they post on YouTube and Islamic forums. In addition, **the Kavkaz Center**, the media arm of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus, which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda, **regularly distributes video clips and written material about the Army of Emigrants** (Kavkazcenter.com).



YouTube video with the insignia and flag (right and center) of the Army of Emigrants



The YouTube channel of the Army of Emigrants

Portrait of Umar the Chechen, the senior Chechen commander

15. **Tarkhan Batirashvili, aka Umar the Chechen (or Abu Umar the Chechen)**, is the **most senior Chechen commander in Syria and has the greatest reputation**. He was born in 1986 to a poor family in the village of Birkiani in Georgia. The village of Birkiani is one of the largest villages in the Pankisi Valley on the border between Georgia and Chechnya. Most of the residents of the region are of Chechen descent, and it was a stronghold of Chechen separatists fighting for independence.

16. In 2006-2007, Umar the Chechen did his national service in Georgia's armed forces. In 2007, he joined the Georgian regular army. He participated in the battle between Russia and Georgia (2008) and was discharged from the Georgian Army in 2010. After his discharge, he was arrested several times by the local authorities on charges of purchasing weapons illegally and was sentenced to three years in prison. Due to health problems, he did not serve his full sentence and was released in early 2012 (bbc.co.uk, based on the personal file of Umar the Chechen at the Georgian Ministry of Defense).



**Umar the Chechen during his military service in the Georgian Army in 2008
(the Russian site www.fisyria.com, which covers the fighting in Syria)**

17. In an interview with a jihadi website, Umar the Chechen noted that while in jail, he had a change of mind. According to a jihadi source close to Umar the Chechen, during his prison term he met a religious Muslim who instructed him and put him in touch with a jihadi network. Upon his release from prison, Umar the Chechen went to Turkey, with the assistance of a network that provided him with a temporary residence there. About a year after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, he moved to Syria (March 2012) and has become one of the most prominent commanders of the rebels, thanks to his personal charisma (bbc.co.uk; alkhabar-ts.com, December 11, 2013).

Establishment of Umar the Chechen's status in Syria

18. After his arrival in Syria, Umar the Chechen settled in **Haritan, a town near Aleppo**. He stayed in a luxurious villa that belonged to a Syrian businessman from Aleppo. The villa became his headquarters and he subsequently brought his wife and young son there (alkhabar-ts.com). From his headquarters in Haritan he established and headed the Emigrant Battalion, a military unit composed of foreign fighters, mainly Chechens. This unit began operating in the summer of 2012 against the Syrian army in close affiliation with the Al-Nusra Front. He has acquired a reputation for the military successes of the unit under his command, which expanded and became the Army of Emigrants. The height of these successes was the takeover of the Menagh military airbase in August 2013, which was carried out by several rebel groups under his command.



Left: Umar the Chechen in Aleppo (shaghor.com, August 2013)
 Right: Umar the Chechen, with a red beard, (center) and other Chechen fighters in Syria, against a background of Al-Qaeda flags (<http://www.longwarjournal.org>, February 20, 2013).

19. Thanks to his charisma and military achievements, **Umar the Chechen managed to establish himself among the foreign fighters and locals**, despite his limited command of Arabic (he has a foreign accent and has trouble formulating sentences in Arabic. In several video clips that were released, he spoke in Russian or Chechen and in some cases his comments were simultaneously translated). His followers call him “Sheikh” or “our honorable Sheikh” and the impression is that he is highly respected and admired by his people (youtube.com).

Umar the Chechen joining ISIS

20. In the summer of 2013 and in early 2014, Umar the Chechen found himself in the middle of a serious dispute between the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS. **In this dispute, he took a clear stand alongside ISIS**, in light of his longstanding close ties with Al-Qaeda in Iraq. In August 2013, he ousted one of his senior men, **Emir Seifullah the Chechen**, from the Army of Emigrants, along with 27 other operatives. Umar the Chechen claimed that the operatives who were ousted had accused some of the foreign fighters of heresy. At the end of 2013, Umar the Chechen pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, head of ISIS, and was appointed commander of the northern region of Syria on his behalf. Many of his men refused to join ISIS and pledge allegiance to its commander, since they had pledged allegiance to Dokka Umarov, the head of the Caucasus Emirate, and they continued to serve in the Army of Emigrants.



Seifullah the Chechen, one of the senior Chechen commanders in Syria. He maintained close ties with Umar the Chechen, but avoided joining ISIS. His real name was Ruslan Machaliashvili. He was killed on February 6, 2014. He previously fought against the Russians in Chechnya and Afghanistan (sadaalsham.net).

21. In early March 2014, Umar the Chechen appeared before a large contingent of ISIS fighters at a Syrian military airbase north of Aleppo that his people took over. Below are photographs from his appearance:



Umar the Chechen appearing before a unit of ISIS fighters (The Long War Journal, March 7, 2014)

Umar the Chechen's worldview

22. **Umar the Chechen's worldview** is expressed in a video released on YouTube on January 20, 2014. In the video, he expressed his hope that "Allah will unite the Muslim forces, and this land (Syria) will become the land of a caliphate where the law of Allah [i.e., Islamic *sharia*] will be implemented." He added that he "prays to

Allah to destroy the criminal traitors who want a secular and democratic rule on this land [i.e., Syria].” His other statements vehemently attacked the United States: in a recent interview with a jihadi website, he called the Americans “enemies of Allah” and “enemies of Islam” (liveleak.com). He made other statements expressing his strong objection to a meeting between the representatives of the Syrian opposition and representatives of the United States - “those infidels who fight against Muslims everywhere” (youtube.com).



The video clip in which Umar the Chechen expressed his hope that an Islamic caliphate would be established on Syrian territory (youtube.com, January 20, 2014).

Umar the Chechen’s love of the pleasures of life

23. Despite his vehement rhetoric, Umar the Chechen reportedly knows how to enjoy the pleasures of life, insofar as his position and status in the ranks of the rebels allow. This is reflected in an article entitled “[Umar] the Chechen and fireplace - the story of a jihadi warrior who found paradise in Aleppo.” Following are excerpts from an article on the image of Umar the Chechen (Syrian website **Al-Khabar**, December 11, 2013):

“After his status grew strong, [Umar] the Chechen chose a luxurious villa [to live in] in Haritan, which belongs to a businessman from the city of Aleppo. The villa has a large swimming pool and is furnished luxuriously. [Umar] the Chechen settled in it and made it his headquarters...”

“The [jihadi] source told [the author of the article] that the owner of the villa, whose name is also Umar, once came to visit his villa to make sure everything was in order. He was surprised to find a group of foreign fighters, who prevented him from entering the villa and

moving merchandise that he had stored in the basement. The source said: “when the owner of the villa wanted to leave, one of the armed men told him that the emir [i.e., Umar the Chechen] wanted to meet him. A brief discussion took place between them about the merchandise and [Umar] the Chechen denied its existence. [Umar] the Chechen asked the owner of the villa to treat the villa as charity for Allah and as jihad for raising the banner of Allah.”

The [jihadi] source continued: “During the meeting [Umar] the Chechen asked the owner of the villa why the fireplace doesn’t work and was told that it is a decorative fireplace that is not intended to be used.” When speaking about the details of [Umar] the Chechen’s life in his palace, the source smiled and said: “[Umar] the Chechen spends a lot of time in the hot tub and often stares at the villa where he lives,” adding: “He may be comparing his former life to the paradise where he lives now.”

Additional Chechen operatives

24. **Rustam Gelayev**, aka **Abu Muslim the Chechen** - came from the border between Chechnya and Georgia. His father, Ruslan (Hamzat) Gelayev, was a commander of the Chechen rebel forces who played a significant role in fighting against the Russians and was killed in 2004. Rustam Gelayev, 25, went to Egypt to study Islamic studies (Sharia) and Middle Eastern studies. From there he joined the fighting in Syria, together with a group of Chechen foreign fighters. He was killed in Aleppo in August 2012 in the ranks of rebels affiliated with the global jihad. After his death, his body was returned to Chechnya for burial (www.thenational.ae, May 3, 2013). At the time, his death was the first evidence of the involvement of Chechen operatives in the civil war in Syria.



Rustam Gelayev, the son of one of the leaders of the Chechen rebellion against Russia, who was killed in the fighting in Syria (nationalkuwait.com, Convoy of Martyrs in the Levant June 2013)

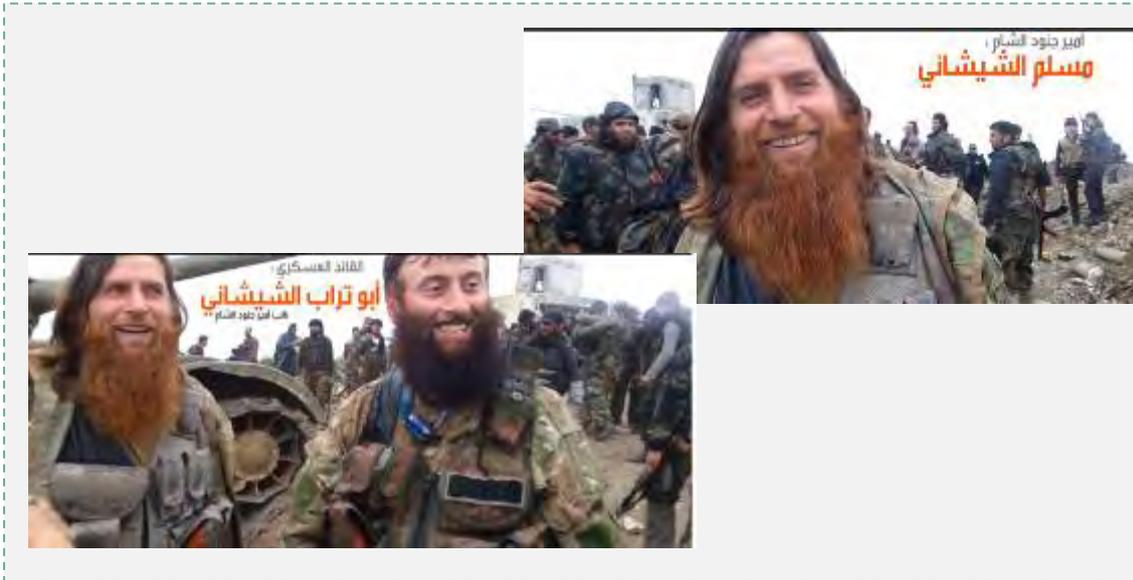
25. **Saladin the Chechen** or **Sheikh Saladin** - one of the senior Chechen commanders in Syria. He was appointed commander (“Emir”) of the Army of Emigrants in early 2014 in place of Umar the Chechen, who joined ISIS. The Army of Emigrants continued to maintain close ties with the Al-Nusra Front after the appointment of Saladin the Chechen as its commander. **Before that he served as the official representative of the Caucasus Emirate in Syria.**

26. **Ruslan Machaliashvili**, aka **Seifullah Meslikaev** or **Seifullah the Chechen** or **Al-Sheikh Seifullah** - one of the senior Chechen commanders in Syria, who died during the takeover of the Aleppo prison in early February 2014. He came from the border between Chechnya and Georgia, the same region as Umar the Chechen. He previously fought in Chechnya and Afghanistan against the Russians (Sadaalsham.net). He joined the Emigrant Battalion in December 2012 or early 2013 and established a military unit under his command (serving as its “Emir”) by the name of the Army of the Islamic Caliphate, which was affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front. He was close to Umar the Chechen, the commander the Army of Emigrants. In early 2014, it was reported that he and 400 of his men had emulated Umar the Chechen and joined ISIS. He then rejoined the Al-Nusra Front and pledged allegiance to its commander, Muhammad al-Julani. He died fighting in the ranks of **Ahrar al-Sham**, a jihadi military unit affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front. On February 6, 2014, the Al-Nusra Front issued an official statement on his death (MEMRI, February 15, 2014; The Long War Journal, February 10, 2014; MEMRI, December 18, 2013).

27. **Muslim the Chechen** or **Abu Muslim the Chechen** or **Abu al-Walid Muslim the Chechen** or **Muslim Abu al-Walid the Chechen** - a senior Chechen commander in the Al-Nusra Front, probably in his forties. He took part in the battles in the province of Latakia at the end of March 2014. In one report, he was described as the commander of a Salafist military unit by the name of the **Ansar al-Sham Brigade**, which took part in the attack on the city of Kessab (baladnaonline.net). According to a video clip released in November 2013, he is a veteran jihadi fighter who served in his youth in the Soviet Army in Moldova and joined the jihadi fighters in Chechnya after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He fought against the Russians in Chechnya under the command of **Al-Khattab**, who headed a unit of jihadi foreign fighters, mostly Arabs, who fought against the Russians. Al-Khattab’s successor, Abu al-Walid, sent him to open a new front against the Russians in the Sunzhensky District, where he established a large group of fighters under his command (MEMRI, December 18, 2013). In 2012, he went to Syria, where he headed a military unit (served as its “Emir”) by the name of **Jund al-Sham**,

which merged with the Al-Nusra Front. According to jihadi websites, he “specialized” in cutting throats and is considered a record-holder in this regard.

28. **Abu Turab the Chechen** - deputy commander of a military unit by the name of **Jund al-Sham**, which is affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front, under the command of Muslim the Chechen.



Left: Abu Turab the Chechen (right), deputy commander of Jund al-Sham, with Muslim the Chechen on his left (The Long War Journal). Right: video circulated on the Internet showing Muslim the Chechen, commander of Jund al-Sham (The Long War Journal website).



Dr. Abdullah Muhamed al-Mohisni - a Saudi cleric close to Al-Qaeda who came to Syria in 2013, embracing Muslim the Chechen (The Long War Journal website)

29. **Muhammad the Chechen** or **Muhammad the Caucasian** - a senior commander in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. He was killed on March 19, 2014, during an attack on the Syrian army in the city of Lermom in northern Syria. Until his death, he was the head of a unit in the Army of Emigrants, whose previous commander was Seifullah the Chechen, who was killed in early February 2014 (this might refer to **Ahrar al-Sham**).



Muhammad the Chechen, a senior commander in the Al-Nusra Front, (center) who was killed in Syria in March 2014 (The Long War Journal, March 22, 2014)

30. **Abu Aisha al-Albani the Chechen** - an Albanian of Chechen descent. He served as commander (Emir) of an elite unit (commando) of the Al-Nusra Front. He previously fought in Kosovo. He was killed in rural Aleppo on April 20, 2013 (centerfordocumentation.com).



**Left: Abu Ahmed the Chechen (www.youtube.com)
Right: Abu Aisha al-Albani the Chechen (centerfordocumentation.com).**

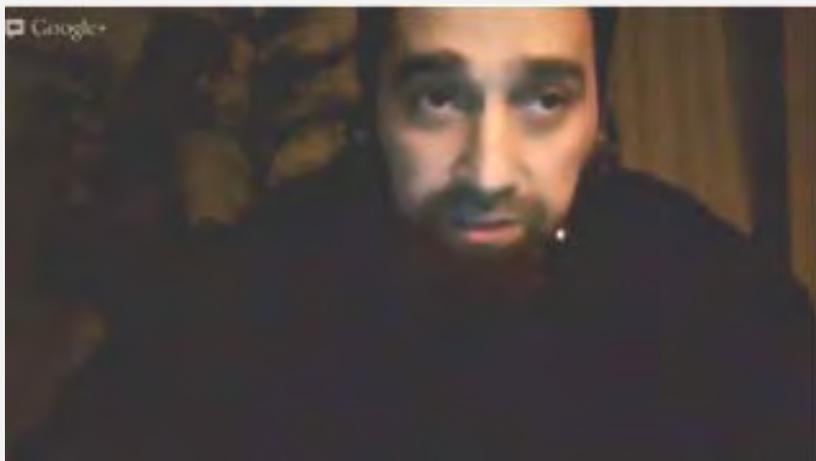
31. **Rostam the Chechen** – he fought in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. He was apparently killed in the fighting (saqeralasad2.files.wordpress.com).

32. **Abdullah the Chechen** – he joined the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front. He was killed in the rural area of Latakia while planting a landmine (centerfordocumentation.com).

33. **Abu al-Baraa the Chechen** - he served as commander of an Islamist military unit by the name of the Army of the Ummah (*Liwa' al-Ummah*). He was killed in Idlib, in northern Syria, on October 25, 2012 (shaghor.com).

34. **Abu Abd al-Rahman the Chechen** - he served as the commander (Emir) of foreign fighters from the Caucasus in the Aleppo region, apparently as part the Al-Nusra Front. He was killed in Aleppo in April 2013.

35. **Murad Mazaev** - a Chechen filmmaker who apparently joined the Army of Emigrants. He previously lived in Sweden for some time as a refugee. He was killed in Aleppo in May 2013.



Film producer Murad Mazaev, who joined the ranks of the rebels, apparently the Army of Emigrants (the-war-diaries.com)

36. **Abu Jihad the Chechen** – a commander in the Army of Emigrants. He joined the ranks of ISIS together with Umar the Chechen and became his deputy. In a video clip the two men were seen talking about the oath of allegiance to ISIS.



Abu Jihad the Chechen (right), in a video posted on YouTube, sitting next to Umar the Chechen (youtube.com)



Abu Jihad the Chechen (first on the right), the deputy of Umar the Chechen (second on the left), with ISIS in northern Syria (facebook.com)

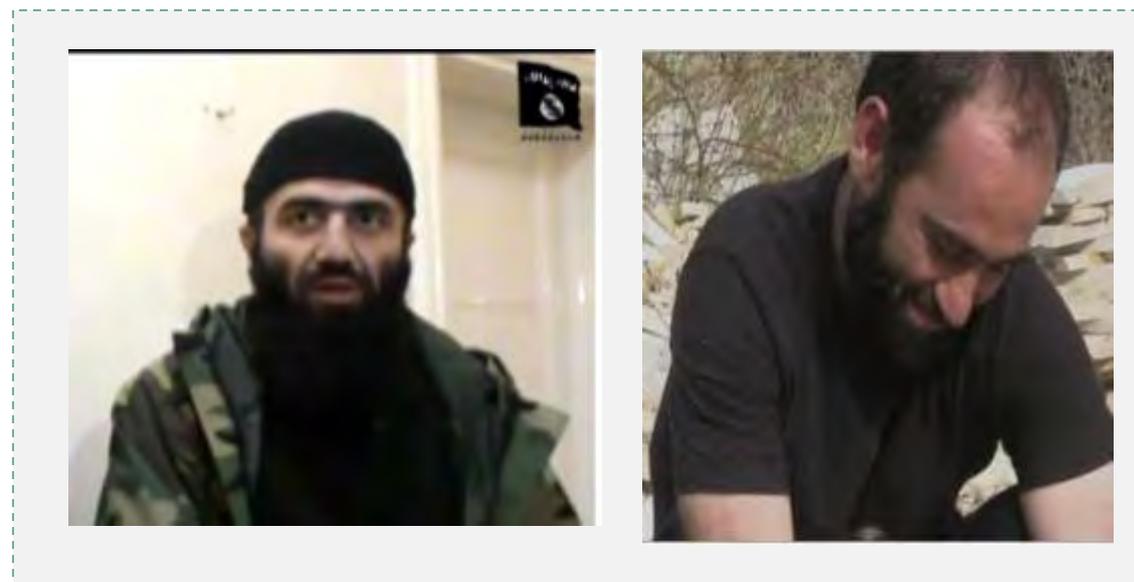
37. **Sheikh Abdullah Pashtuna** - one of the senior commanders in the Army of Emigrants. He might be a Chechen who fought in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is also possible that he is from Pakistan or Afghanistan, as his name implies (February 28, 2014, The Long War Journal).

38. **Mohannad the Chechen** - served as deputy military commander in Aleppo. The Army of Emigrants announced on April 2, 2014 via Twitter that he was killed by shrapnel in the chest as a result of an explosive barrel thrown by the Syrian Air Force.

39. **Abu Musa the Chechen** - appeared wearing a mask in a video clip on YouTube. He spoke Arabic with a foreign accent and was heard threatening Bashar Assad (YouTube, April 2, 2014).



Left: Abu Abd al-Rahman (shaghor.com). Right: Abu al-Baraa the Chechen (shaghor.com).



Abdullah the Chechen, who was killed in the rural area of Latakia (centerfordocumentation.com).
Left: Seifullah the Chechen (sadaalsham.net)

Russia's position

40. **The Russian authorities are concerned about foreign fighters from Muslim regions in Russia** (especially Chechnya and the Caucasus) joining the ranks of the rebels in Syria. This is because they are well aware of the potential for terrorism and subversion inherent in the return of jihadi operatives with military experience to their native countries. According to Alexander Bortnikov, director of Russia's Federal

Security Service (FSB), Russia is concerned about the involvement of foreign fighters from the Caucasus fighting under the banner of Al-Qaeda and similar entities (rbth.ru, June 5, 2013). According to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, **Syria and the Russian special services exchange information regarding reports of the presence of foreign fighters in Syria, including those who came from Russia.**

The position of the leadership of the Caucasus Emirate

41. The presence of Chechen foreign fighters in Syria **gave rise (at least in its early stages) to concern** among the leadership of the Caucasus Emirate (IK), headed at the time by Emir Dokka Umarov, who is affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad⁸. This is because the leadership feared that Chechen involvement in Syria **would have a negative impact on the Chechen struggle in the Caucasus**. Its responses to the first reports of the involvement of fighters from Chechnya in Syria reflect this concern. When foreign fighters first began leaving for Syria, Dokka Umarov (who died in early 2014) denied the presence of North Caucasian operatives in Syria. Subsequently (October 2012), he published a statement reprimanding the Chechens fighting in Syria. He said he considered Assad an enemy and a dictator and wished that the Syrian rebels would win, but noted that he couldn't pray for those who want to replace the Assad regime with a Western oriented regime. He also protested the fact that some Chechens fighting in Syria do not identify with the jihad that is taking place in Chechnya (Chechen.org, November 30, 2013).

42. However, despite these concerns, many Chechen commanders and operatives have joined in the fighting against the Syrian regime and have become a significant factor among groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad. They have a prominent presence among the Al-Nusra Front, ISIS and other Muslim and jihadi military units. **It seems that the leadership of the Caucasus Emirate has accepted their presence and is apparently supporting it.** On the other hand, Chechen operatives fighting in Syria **make no effort to conceal their connection to it** (see photo). This was also reflected in a report that Saladin the Chechen served as the official representative of the

⁸ On March 18, 2014, Kavkaz Center website, which is affiliated with the Caucasus Emirate, confirmed the death of Emir Dokka Umarov. The Caucasus Emirate announced in a video that **Ali Abu Muhammad al-Dagestani**, who served as the chief qadi of the Caucasus Emirate since 2010, was appointed to replace Dokka Umarov (MEMRI, March 22, 2014; The Long War Journal, March 18, 2014). On April 3, 2014, ISIS spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani expressed his condolences to the Caucasus Emirate and promised to support it (YouTube, April 3, 2014).

Caucasus Emirate in Syria until his appointment as commander of the Army of Emigrants in place of Umar the Chechen⁹.



Saladin the Chechen, commander of the Army of Emigrants (left) and a Ukrainian commander known as Abdul Karim the Ukrainian (center), facing the flag of the Caucasus Emirate. The photograph was taken in Syria (The Long War Journal, April 3, 2014)

Azerbaijan¹⁰

Overview

43. Reports of Azeri participation in the fighting in Syria began appearing online and in the Azeri media in August 2012. The estimated number of Azeri foreign fighters who joined the ranks of the rebels in Syria is **many dozen**. These foreign fighters serve for about six months and then return to their home country (as is customary for foreign fighters from the West). It seems that most of the Azeri foreign fighters serve in the Army of Emigrants, a military unit affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front, which includes many foreigners (some of them transferred to ISIS in early 2014, together with their commander Umar the Chechen).

44. In August 2012, a French journalist in Aleppo made the first report about a fighter from Azerbaijan in Syria. He reported that he had spoken with a young Azeri at a clinic who told him that he had decided to go to Syria after seeing TV broadcasts about the war there (northcaucasuscaucus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013). **In April 2013, it was**

⁹ For information about the risks facing Russia and the homeland security of the United States due to the Caucasus Emirate and the Caucasian operatives in Syria, see the testimony of Bill Roggio, editor of The Long War Journal, before a subcommittee of the US House Committee for Homeland Security (The Long War Journal, April 3, 2014).

¹⁰ For this chapter on Azerbaijan we used an article that appeared in **Jihadology: Azerbaijani foreign fighters in Syria**, by North Caucasus Caucas (January 28, 2014).

reported that around thirty Azeris were killed in battle in Syria. A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan said that they would make efforts to identify the dead, allegedly citizens of Azerbaijan (en.apa.az, April 3, 2013).

45. According to media reports, 41 **Azeri fighters in Syria have been identified, thirty of whom have been killed** (jihadology.net, January 28, 2014). At the beginning of April 2014, the Azeri media reported that there were rumors that 12 Azeri jihadis were killed in Syria. One of those killed, an Azeri named **Nijat Ashurli**, was a senior commander in the Army of Emigrants (The Long War Journal, April 2, 2014).

46. Although Azerbaijan is a country with a Shiite majority, and although religious extremism in this country is marginal, there is a considerable presence of Azeri operatives in jihadi combat zones in Afghanistan, the North Caucasus and now Syria. The operatives who joined the fighting in Syria come from the same cities that jihadi fighters who fought in Chechnya or Afghanistan came from, or from regions where counter-terrorist activity was carried out by the Azeri authorities. According to the Jihadology website (January 28, 2014) the Azeri fighters in Syria are from Baku, Sumqayit and small towns in northern Azerbaijan.

Information about Azeri foreign fighters

47. **Hussein Kazali (?)** - on October 19, 2012, it was reported that Hussein Kazali, an Azeri national, was killed in battle in Aleppo. His name appears on the list of foreign casualties that Syria submitted to the UN Security Council. There is no certainty that Kazali is Azeri, and he might be a Turk who was not identified. The report about him also appeared in the Azeri media but did not receive much attention (northcaucasuscaucus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013).

48. **Araz Kangerli (?)** - On November 30, 2012, the Azeri news agency reported that Kangerli was killed in September 2012. Kangerli's mother said that she received a phone call informing her that her son had been killed. She reported that her son had left for Syria in mid-2012, along with a group of young people. Insofar as is known, in 2008, the Azeri border patrol arrested Kangerli and a few other Azeris on the border between Azerbaijan and Iran, upon their return from Afghanistan/Pakistan. After the members of the group served sentences of several years in prison, Kangerli was released in early 2009 and went to Syria, where he was killed (Note: It may be that Kazali and Kangerli are

the same person, whose name has been garbled due to incorrect transliteration into Arabic) (northcaucasuscaucus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013).

49. **Ibrahim al-Azeri** - on October 22, 2012, a jihadi social network published a picture of a fighter allegedly killed in Idlib in October 2012. This was apparently Ibrahim al-Azeri (northcaucasuscaucus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013).

50. **Abu al-Harith** – on January 11, 2013, a reporter from Aleppo interviewed foreign fighters. One of those interviewed was a man who identified himself as Abu al-Harith, 27, from Azerbaijan. He wore a ski mask during the interview, covering his face, and his forehead was adorned with a black jihadi ribbon. He said that this was the first time that he took part in fighting (northcaucasuscaucus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013).

51. **Abu Rizq (?) al-Azeri** - on February 25, 2013, the Al-Nusra Front's Turkish language Facebook page uploaded two pictures of a person identified as Abu Rizq al-Azeri, who was allegedly killed in Syria. The comments on the page included additional details. It was stated that he came from the **city of Sumqayit**, the third largest city in Azerbaijan. Other comments stated that he had fought in Afghanistan. According to a local news website, a few fighters who fought in the North Caucasus and Afghanistan/Pakistan came from the same city (northcaucasuscaucus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013).

52. **Zaur Islamov** - 37, a father of three from the city of Qusar in northern Azerbaijan. His driver's license was photocopied and distributed on social networks. His name also appeared on the list of "foreign terrorists" killed in battle that was uploaded to Facebook by groups that support Assad. He told his family that he was going to work in Turkey. Two years previously, he served time in prison in Afghanistan (or Pakistan) when he tried to join the fighting forces there. After serving his sentence, he was deported to Russia but managed to make his way to Syria instead. On September 9, 2012, an online jihadi forum posted a picture of an Azeri fighter allegedly killed in Aleppo. This might be Islamov.



Zaur Islamov, who was killed in Aleppo on November 9, 2012 (twicsy.com)



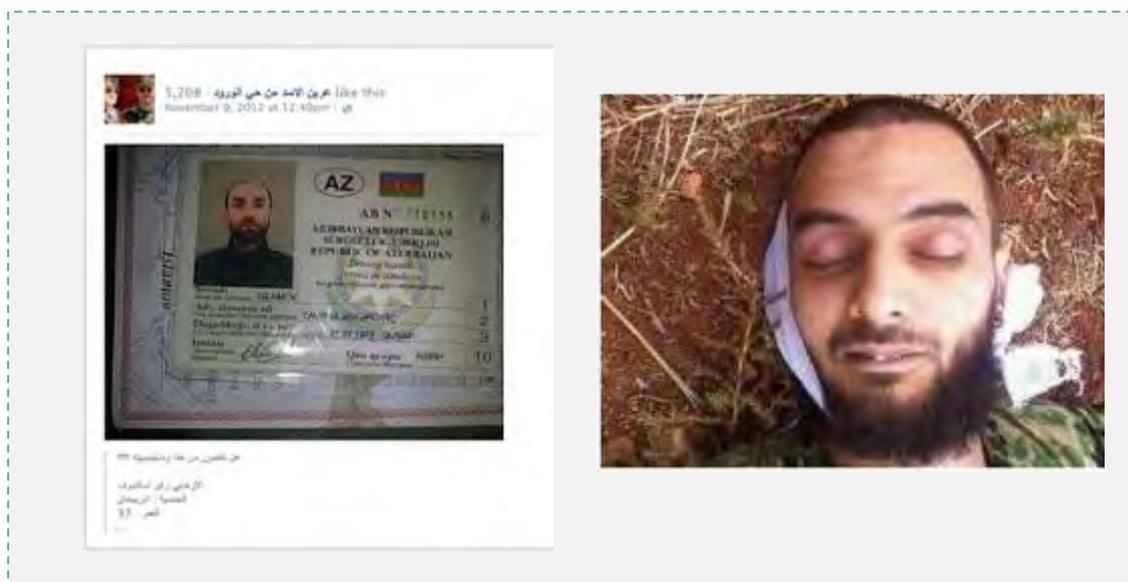
The casualty known as Abd al-Razeq al-Azeri (northcaucasuscaucus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013)

53. **Abu Yahya al-Azeri** - killed in Syria fighting in the ranks of the Army of Emigrants under the command of Umar the Chechen. According to sources from the Army of Emigrants, it included **an Azeri unit** commanded by **Abu Yahya**. According to a jihadi website, Abu Yahya was killed in a Syrian Air Force attack in Homs on September 13, 2013 (APA TV, September 16, 2013).



Umar the Chechen, commander of the Army of Emigrants, (left) with Abu Yahya the Azeri, who was killed in September 2013 in Hama (Twitter).

54. **Abu Zubair** - killed in battle in Idlib (en.apa.az, April 3, 2013).



Left: the driver's license of a casualty from Azerbaijan (northcaucasuscavcus.blogspot.com, March 5, 2013). Right: the man known as Abu Zubair, killed in battle in Idlib (<http://en.apa.az>, April 3, 2013).

55. **Nijat Hacizade** - an 18-year-old boy who interrupted his university studies in Cyprus, went to Syria and was killed in January 2014.

56. **Rhman Shikhaliyev** - a semi-professional boxer from Sumqayit, who was killed in the battles between ISIS and the Free Syrian Army.

57. **Najaf Karimov** - a 14-year-old boy whose father had adopted the Salafist movement. In the summer of 2013, his father went to Syria along with his entire family (Jihadology.net).

58. **Anar Mahmudov** - he spent six months fighting in Syria and returned home (Jihadology.net).



An Azeri fighter named Rashad Mammedov, who was killed in Syria in September 2013, at the ceremony marking the establishment of the Army of Emigrants (circled; he was identified by his father, who saw the video clip). Other Azeris appeared in the video, near Umar the Chechen, commander of the Army of Emigrants, including Abu Yahya al-Azeri (jihadology.net).



Rauf Khalilov, who fought in Syria and was killed in late 2013 (youtube.com)

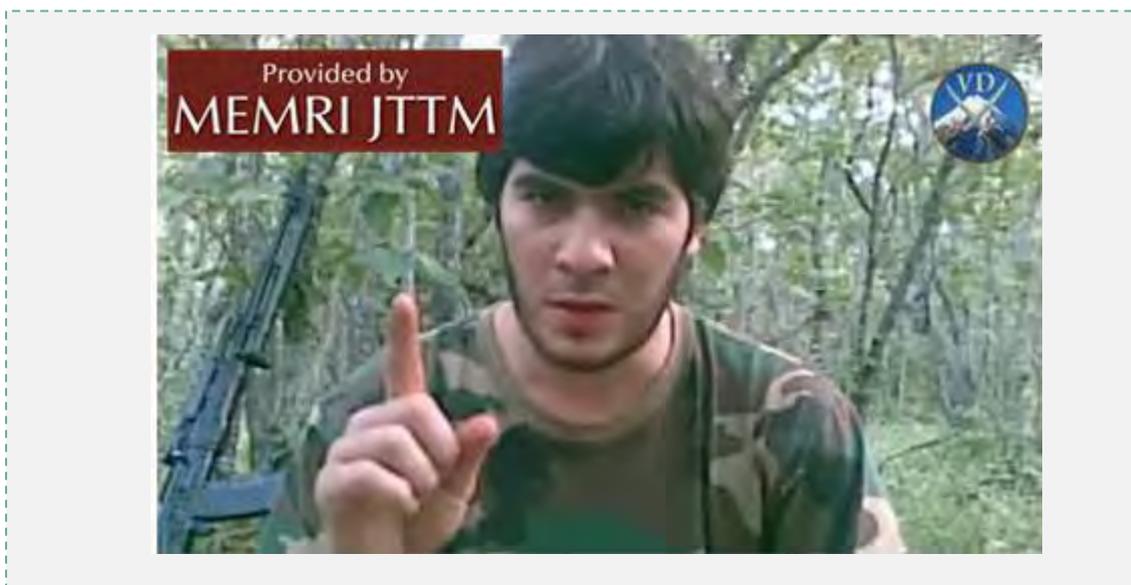
Dagestan

59. We believe there are **close to twenty operatives** from Dagestan in Syria.

60. A video clip uploaded to the Internet on January 6, 2014, includes a statement by **Rajab Abu Yusuf**, apparently an operative from Dagestan, who previously fought in the Caucasus. In his statement, Abu Yusuf asks his parents not to regret or be angry that he chose to become a jihad fighter, because that is how he will get to paradise. At the end of

the video clip a body is shown, apparently that of the speaker, lying on a table (MEMRI, January 22, 2013).

61. In his statement, Abu Yusuf noted that “our enemies,” the leaders of Russia and Dagestan, lie when they pretend that they want to impose law and order. He added that these leaders are liars and that the society that they head is a “sick society.” He said he was finally free on the battlefield of jihad because he was no longer dependent on the “enemies of Allah,” which he likens to beasts of prey (MEMRI, January 22, 2013).



Rajab Abu Yusuf (MEMRI, January 22, 2013)

62. **Akhbar Sham**, a Russian-language website that supports the Army of Emigrants, reported that three foreign fighters led by officers from the Caucasus were killed in the fighting in Syria. The three are **Abu Huria the Kazakh**, **Abu Ahmed the Tajik**, and **Ismail the Dagestani**. The date of their death was not disclosed. The three men fought in the Army of Emigrants. Abu Ahmed the Tajik fought in a unit called the Caucasus Emirate Brigade (The Long War Journal, April 4, 2014).



Three commanders, whose death was reported in early April 2014: Abu Huria the Kazakh, Abu Ahmed the Tajik, and Ismail the Dagestani (The Long War Journal, April 4, 2014)



Salman al-Bulghari from Dagestan, killed in Syria (<http://www.muslim.net>, February 27, 2013)



Abd al-Rahman the Dagestani, killed in Syria (alplatformmedia.com).



An operative known as Murad, from southern Dagestan, killed in Syria (alplatformmedia.com)



A person who beheaded two Christians in Syria in the village of al-Ghasaniya on June 23, 2013 (documented in the video). This was apparently an operative known as Abu al-Banat from Dagestan. He was policeman in his country but got in trouble with the regime due to his connections with jihadi elements (kavkazcenter.com).

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Overview

63. **The number of foreign fighters from Kyrgyzstan is at least 17.** A small number of foreign fighters from Tajikistan also went to Syria. Most of them apparently returned to their home countries but some of them were killed in Syria. The head of the National Security Agency of Tajikistan announced on May 23, 2013, that three of the country's citizens were killed in the fighting in Syria. He did not elaborate on the circumstances of their deaths, but spoke in general about the danger of young people who undergo a process of radicalization while attending Muslim schools abroad.

64. In the first half of 2013, a group of young people left Kyrgyzstan for Turkey in order to cross the border to Syria and join the rebels. According to a Muslim leader who knows the members of the group, they used to pray at the mosque that he heads. He said they had lied to their families and said they were going to Russia. He also claimed that Syria or the jihad had never been discussed at the mosque and that their decision to leave for Syria was independent (iwpr.net, June 28, 2013).

65. A group of residents from Kyrgyzstan who went to Syria returned from Syria in May 2013. According to experts, 17 people left for Syria in March and April 2013. The group was apparently recruited by a friend from Russia, who used the Internet to send them

information about events in Syria. They apparently paid their own travel expenses and were motivated by idealism and not by money (iwpr.net, June 28, 2013).

66. In May 2013, the State Committee for National Security in Tajikistan reported that religious extremist Tajik civilians were fighting in Syria alongside Syrian opposition groups, but their exact number was not known. These Tajiks were given special training outside the country and were sent to Syria through a third country (pewssa.tj, May 28, 2013). The Tajik foreign minister also confirmed the information (the Asia-Plus news agency, October 26, 2013).

Information about foreign fighters from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

67. **A Dzhahalov** - a 35-year-old resident of Kyrgyzstan. He went to fight in Syria and returned to his country (eng.24.kg, May 24, 2013).

68. **Tashbaltayev** - a 29-year-old resident of Kyrgyzstan. He went to fight in Syria and returned to his country (eng.24.kg, May 24, 2013).

69. **Abu Ahmed the Tajik** - His death in the ranks of the Army of Emigrants was reported in early April 2014. He commanded a unit of foreign fighters from the Caucasus (see photo in the chapter on Dagestan).

70. On June 26, 2013, the government of Tajikistan announced that three Tajik students had been killed fighting alongside the rebels in Syria. No details were given about the circumstances of their deaths (www.lignet.com, June 27, 2013).

The position of the local authorities

71. The authorities in **Tajikistan** are concerned that Tajik teenagers attending radical Muslim schools in other countries are influenced by their teachers' Muslim preaching and indoctrination and are recruited by terrorist groups to fight in Syria and elsewhere (www.lignet.com, June 27, 2013). A spokesman for the National Security Committee of Tajikistan said that in recent years they have managed to bring back some 2,000 young people from Muslim schools around the world (www.rferl.org, May 24, 2013).

72. In neighboring **Kyrgyzstan**, steps have been taken to prevent citizens from taking part in the fighting in Syria. According to the officials, two Kyrgyz citizens who had been

fighting alongside the rebels were brought back from Syria by the Kyrgyz security services. The authorities are trying to monitor their recruitment process and the country has warned its residents about extremist religious propagandists (eng.24.kg, 24 May 2013). The spiritual leader of the Muslims in the country was asked to concentrate on preventing radical Islamic propaganda among young people (www.rferl.org, May 24, 2013).

73. In September 2013, it was reported that Kyrgyzstan's security forces had arrested three operatives who were sent to Kyrgyzstan from Syria to carry out a terrorist act. The group includes one civilian from Kazakhstan and two civilians from Kyrgyzstan. The three men **had taken part in the fighting in Syria**. During their interrogation, it became known that the group was sent from Syria to Kyrgyzstan to prepare and carry out terrorist attacks (the Kyrgyz TV channel Ala Too, September 16, 2013).

Kazakhstan

74. The local television channel aired a documentary whereby **more than forty young people** from the city of Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, including prominent businessmen, went to fight in Syria. The film documents the process of their recruitment and their departure for Syria (Khabar Television, Kazakhstan, October 24, 2013).

75. In early April 2014, the death of **Abu Huria the Kazakh**, a commander in the Army of Emigrants, was reported (see photo in the chapter on Dagestan).

Pakistan

Overview

76. Pakistani Taliban operatives went to Syria to fight the Syrian regime. There are conflicting reports about the extent of their involvement. **Estimates of the number of foreign fighters from Pakistan range from many dozen to 100-150**. In September 2013, the Pakistani media reported that **about thirty bodies of Pakistani fighters killed in Syria were returned to Pakistan** (ctcu.usma.edu). In our assessment, claims by Pakistani **Taliban** leaders that they have sent hundreds of fighters to Syria who are about to release the Sunnis from the Alawite oppression are exaggerated and are designed for propaganda purposes. In addition, operatives have been sent to Syria on behalf of a Pakistani anti-Shiite terrorist organization by the name of **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi**, in cooperation with the Taliban.

77. According to some reports, the first group of Pakistani Taliban fighters came to Syria in the first half of 2013 and **established a command and control center there**, designed to coordinate the Pakistani operational activities alongside the Syrian rebels (dawn.com, July 16, 2013). A senior Taliban operative confirmed at the time the establishment of a base in Syria, saying that the fighters were sent **at the request of Al-Qaeda's operational commander in Syria, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi** (Note: This apparently refers to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of ISIS). He claims that Al-Baghdadi asked the Pakistani Taliban to be part of the global jihad fighters (dawn.com, July 16, 2013).

78. A Taliban operative named **Muhammad Amin**, who introduced himself as a coordinator on behalf of the Syrian base of the organization, said the office **was established in Syria in January 2013 with the approval of the Taliban**. It was established with the help of fighters from Afghanistan of Middle Eastern origin, who had moved to Syria in recent years. According to him, the office (after its establishment) was staffed with at least 12 experts on warfare and information technology, whose job was to assess the needs of the Syrian jihad. The office provided Pakistan with information about the conflict in Syria (BBC, July 12, 2013). He said the base was designed to coordinate joint operations with the Syrian troops (ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).

79. According to Taliban commander Abd al-Rashid Abbasi, **there were (July 2013) already 120 fighters in Syria**. He said that another **group of 150 fighters was expected to reach Syria**. He also said he that asked local leaders in the various districts of Pakistan to recruit operatives who are willing to go to Syria, and many young people registered (CNN, July 25, 2013)¹¹. On the other hand, **Mula Omar**, the Afghani Taliban leader, claimed that the participation of Taliban fighters in battles in Syria has not been approved. This is because the organization has more pressing priorities, since infidel forces from 34 countries, led by the US, are in Afghanistan. Another commander, from Miranshah in northern Waziristan (an important power center of the Pakistani Taliban), claimed that the Taliban fighters arrived in Syria on their own. Another commander claimed that these are mainly Chechen, Uzbek and Arab Taliban fighters (AFP, July 16, 2013).

¹¹The Pakistani Urdu-language newspaper **Roznama Ummat** reported on March 22, 2014, that some 4,000 Pakistanis belonging to the Taliban, including the Punjab Taliban, had reached Syria (according to a MEMRI report from March 29, 2014). We believe that this figure is extremely exaggerated.

80. Pakistani operatives come to Syria in different ways. Many of them come to the Persian Gulf by sea and then by land to Syria. Others fly from Pakistan to various countries (including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates and Sudan) and from there to Syria. Their travel expenses are paid from various sources in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Several families of foreign fighters who went to Syria are currently in Sudan (www.timesofisrael.com, July 14, 2013).

81. It was reported at the time that **about seventy fighters were sent to Syria in the summer of 2013** by a network operating in cooperation with **the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi**. Another report spoke of **100-150 operatives** sent by this network. The report stated that these fighters come from various parts of Pakistan, including the city of Karachi. It was reported that the network sending the fighters to Syria is headed by a former Lashkar-e-Jhangvi operative by the name of **Osama Othman Ghani** (www.timesofisrael.com, July 14, 2013; ctc.usma.edu, September 24, 2013).

82. The meaning of the name **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi** in Urdu is the **Jhangvi Army**. It is a Pakistani extremist Sunni-Muslim organization established in 1996 by a few radical operatives who left the Pakistani organization **Sipah-e-Sahaba** (i.e., **the Army of the Sahaba**, the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad). The Army of the Sahaba is an organization established in 1985 by a senior Pakistani cleric by the name of Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, **as a local political party with a blatantly anti-Shiite slant**.

83. Since its establishment, **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has employed violence against the Shiites in Pakistan**. It has also **carried out targeted terrorist attacks against Pakistani officials**, claiming that they are protecting the Shiites and are not promoting the goal of turning Pakistan into an Islamic caliphate. These acts have caused the deaths of several hundred Pakistanis. In 1999, the organization tried to assassinate Pakistan's prime minister at the time, Nawaz Sharif (the attempt failed). The Pakistani government also claimed that it was involved in the (successful) attempt on the life of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, on December 27, 2007. The organization is now headed by **Malik Ishag** and numbers some 300 activists. It has been designated as a terrorist organization by the government of Pakistan since August 2001 and by the US since 2003. The organization maintains ties with various Islamic terrorist groups such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (the Movement of Mujahideen), which operates in Kashmir against the Indian Army.

Information about Pakistani foreign fighters

84. A fighter who identifies himself as **Suleiman** - previously fought against the Shiite minority in Pakistan. He went to Syria to join the rebels. He said that the fighting there would help him get to paradise. He said that he is one of a growing number of fighters who left Pakistan to fight in Syria in the first half of 2013 (www.timesofisrael.com, July 14, 2013).

85. In late 2013, a Pakistani jihad operative by the name of **Ustad Salah** aka **Abdul al-Bakistani** (?) was killed in Syria. The casualty was the technical director of a jihadi website that had ceased operations (Jihadpakistan.TK) (MEMRI, December 14, 2013).

The position of the local authorities

86. Omar Hamid Khan, spokesman for the Pakistani Ministry of the Interior, **said that the authorities in Pakistan have denied the reports that Pakistani fighters left the country for Syria**. Conversely, three Pakistani intelligence officers serving on the border with Afghanistan said that the fighters who left for Syria belong to Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (www.timesofisrael.com, July 14, 2013).

Afghanistan

87. In our assessment, there are **only a few Afghans** fighting in Syria. To the foreign fighters of Afghan descent one can add Arab/Muslim operatives who fought in Afghanistan (Afghanistan veterans), who are not of Afghan descent, whose number is not known. The Syrian regime's claim that hundreds of fighters from Afghanistan have been killed in Syria appears to us to be exaggerated and biased and may be intended for propaganda purposes (presenting the rebels as terrorists)¹².

88. At a press conference in February 2013, a spokesman for Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry said that three Afghans have been killed in Syria. According to the spokesman, the Embassy of Afghanistan in Jordan is handling the matter (www.bakhtarnews.com.af, February 4, 2013).

¹² Syrian officials claim at least 500 fighters from Afghanistan were killed in clashes with Syrian forces in the first week of August 2013. They say many of the fighters now fighting in Syria previously fought against the US in Afghanistan (kleinonline.wnd.com, August 2, 2013).

89. The Lebanese newspaper **Al-Safir** reported that several months after the Syrian crisis broke out, a group of **Arab Afghans** arrived in Syria. The most senior of them was **Sheikh Abd al-Wahed**, aka the **Hawk of Jihad**, who was based in Latakia Mountains and established a military unit that was used for recruiting senior prominent leading jihadis in Afghanistan. These operatives included some with more than 25 years of experience fighting in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Iraq. One prominent jihadi operative who joined this group was **Adel al-Otaibi**, aka **Najm al-Din Azad**, who fought in Afghanistan alongside Osama Bin Laden. Another was **Faiz al-Mut'ab**, a close friend of Bin Laden (Al-Safir, December 3, 2013).

Indonesia

90. Radical Muslim organizations carry out activity in Indonesia to express their solidarity with the Muslim insurgents in Syria. On June 9, 2013, a demonstration of solidarity was held in the city of Solo with the participation of around one hundred people. An **Ansar Allah** operative said that the demonstration was **in response to a call by Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to help topple Bashar Assad's regime**. In speeches made during the demonstration, the organizers claimed that **they are willing to send 50 young people to fight in Syria against the Assad regime** (prisonerofjoy.blogspot.com, June 9, 2013).

91. On January 31, 2014, a New York Times reporter in Jakarta reported on Indonesians who joined the fighters in Syria. Sidney Jones, director of the Institute for Policy Analysis in Jakarta, relying on information from the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, estimated that the number of operatives **who have reached Syria via Turkey since 2012 was at least fifty**. This was only a guesstimate, but the assessment was that this number was liable to grow.

92. According to Sidney Jones, the Indonesian authorities were concerned that these operatives would return to Indonesia and give renewed impetus to the weak leadership of the local jihadi movement. Another concern was that collecting donations and sending foreign fighters to Syria might strengthen local radical groups such as **Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)**. She was referring to a South Asian terrorist group, affiliated with Al-Qaeda, which carried out the terrorist attack on the island of Bali in 2002, as part of a wave of terrorist attacks carried out in 2002-2009. She added that **Jemaah Islamiyah, which was weakened after the exposure of the terrorist**

attacks in 2007, took advantage of its infrastructure to send fighters to Syria, thereby enhancing its prestige in Indonesia. This, she said, was liable to have long-term implications.

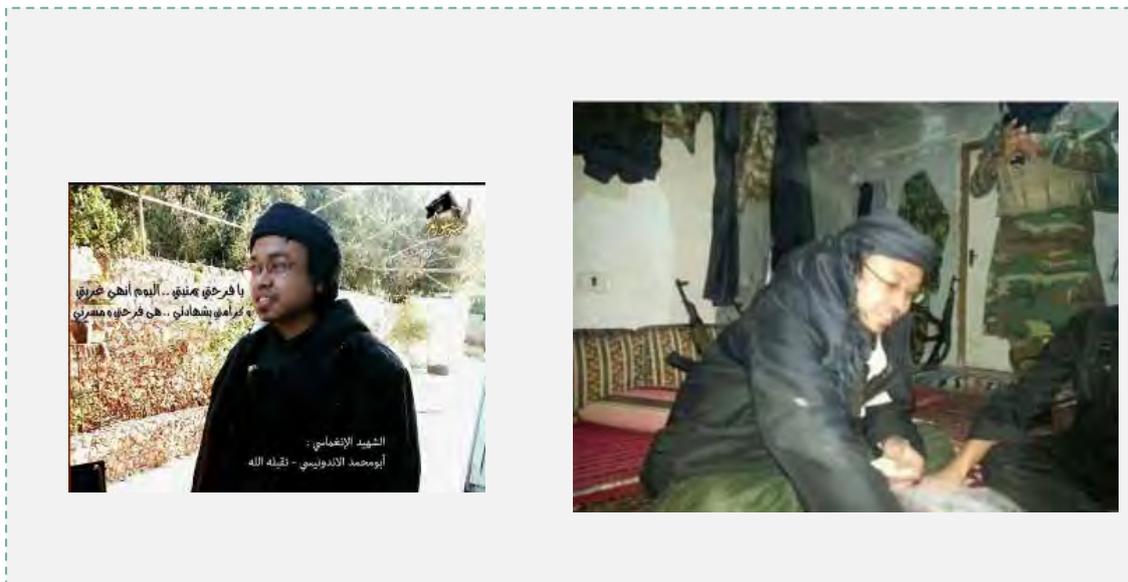
93. According to the report by the Institute of Policy Analysis, the involvement of Indonesian fighters in the fighting in Syria took place mainly after an Indonesian from the island of Borneo, by the name of **Riza Fardi**, was killed in Syria in 2013 (see photographs below). The report added that Riza Fardi graduated from an educational institution that has produced many terrorists. The founder of the institution is a radical cleric by the name of **Abu Bakr Basheer**, who is in prison after being convicted of terrorism. Abu Bakr Basheer is the leader (“Emir”) of an Islamic jihadi organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda by the name of **Ansar al-Tawhid**. The organization is affiliated with the **Jemaah Islamiyah**, another Al-Qaeda affiliated organization based in Indonesia.

94. On April 2, 2014, Abu Bakr Basheer issued a statement from prison, expressing his identification with the jihad fighters in Syria and calling to support them. In his statement he noted: “We are doing everything we can to support you. I am in the Indonesian prison, and Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi [one of the leading ideologues of radical Islam, who is imprisoned in Jordan], and Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, who is wanted by the enemy along with all the Muslims, will not forget you. You are our brothers and you will be in our constant supplication and support” (jihadology.net).



Abu Bakr Basheer, leader of Ansar al-Tawhid in Indonesia (jihadology.net)

95. **Riza Fardi**, aka **Abu Muhammad the Indonesian**, operated in Syria in a jihadi military unit affiliated with Al-Qaeda by the name of Katibat Suqur al-Izz. In 2007, he went to study at Al-Emam University in Yemen, and remained there at least until 2010. In 2012, he went to Syria, and was killed on November 28, 2013 (understandingconflict.org).



Riza Fardi, aka Abu Muhammad the Indonesian an Indonesian operative who was killed in Syria (fimadani.com, islamtimes.org)

Turkey

Overview

96. **We estimate** the number of Turkish foreign fighters in the ranks of the rebels at **several hundred**. According to an estimate, published in the Turkish newspaper Radikal (September 30, 2013), **there are around 200 Turks aged 18-30 fighting in Syria**. Most of them are fighting in the service of organizations **affiliated with the global jihad** and a small number alongside the Assad regime. **According to another estimate, they number almost 500** (www.haler.gazetevatan.com)

97. **The Turkish foreign fighters also include Turks of Kurdish descent, who joined the Kurdish militias fighting in northern Syria** in an attempt to establish a local Kurdish autonomy. **Salih Muslim**, leader of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian branch of the Turkish PKK, said that Turkish civilians have begun to join the ranks of the Kurds who are fighting against the Syrian regime. He said that three

Turkish civilians have been killed in the fighting and their bodies have been sent to Turkey (Today's Zaman, quoting the newspaper Radikal, September 29, 2013).

98. According to the Turkish media, **recruitment and training centers** for Turkish foreign fighters traveling to Syria have been set up in several cities in Turkey. Their recruitment was not always carried out with the consent of their families. Some of the fighters' families went to these camps and released their sons for a ransom. Some of the families even went to Syria to find their children and bring them back (Radikal, September 29, 2013). **The Turkish foreign fighters tend to cross the border to Syria in small groups in the area of Hatay (Alexandretta) or in the area of Urfa** (Radikal, September 29, 2013).

99. Foreign fighters who join organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad **use safe houses throughout southern Turkey as bases for their departure for Syria**. The person in charge of one of these safe houses told a BBC reporter that over 150 people had stayed at his home between early September 2013 and early December 2013. Of these 150, 15-20 were British foreign fighters. He said that **the foreign fighters who cross the border stay at these safe houses for a day or two. They also stay there on their return, waiting for flights to their home countries.**

The city of Adiyaman as a center for recruiting Turkish fighters

100. According to the Turkish media, the city of **Adiyaman** in southeastern Turkey, serves as a recruitment center for Turkish foreign fighters. It was reported that from this city alone, **some two hundred young Turks joined the ranks of the jihad fighters in Turkey**. According to the reports, families in Adiyaman were worried about their sons being recruited to fight in Syria.

101. **The city of Adiyaman** is located in southeastern Turkey **in an economically poor region**, populated mainly by **Turks of Kurdish descent**. Its population in 2011 numbered approximately 594,000 inhabitants. It is a city **with a religious character** and contains religious institutions, mosques, religious schools and Muslim orders. In this city, like in several other cities in Turkish Kurdistan, there is a **radical Islamist** influence that is reflected in the external appearance of newly religious young men who **grow beards and become Muslim extremists. In the wake of the war in Syria, a camp was set up for Syrian refugees** (Facebook.com). Local residents are being used as a recruitment pool for Al-Qaeda and global jihad operatives, and the

refugee camp that was set up there probably serves as a **base for operatives making their way to Syria.**

Information about Turkish foreign fighters

102. **Mehmet Yilmaz** - according to his father, he joined one of the jihad organizations, has been in and out of Syria three times, and was wounded in his hand. When his father failed to hear from him, he went to the police and was told that his son had joined an organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda. After a while, his son called him and told him that he was in Aleppo (Radikal, September 30, 2013).

103. **Ahmed Zorlu** - killed in Aleppo on April 8, 2012. He was associated with Al-Qaeda and was apparently killed in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front (<http://www.alkhabar-ts.com>).



Ahmed Zorlu (alkhabar-ts.com)

104. Twin brothers identified by the initials **O. D. and M. D.** left their homes on September 2, 2013 with the declared intention of attending university. They actually went to Aleppo. According to their father, some time before their departure, he noticed a change in their behavior. They grew beards and when they talked about the war in Syria, they would say that it is a holy war that everyone should fight in. The father went to look for them in Aleppo with a guide. He managed to find them in training camp, but the camp commander refused to release them (Radikal, September 29, 2013).

105. **Y. A.** - according to his father, his son left Turkey for Syria with 500 pounds in his pocket, claiming that he was going to work in Istanbul. Only later did he discover that his son had left for Syria and joined **the Ahrar al-Sham movement**, where he received military training so he could go and fight. His name was changed to **Abu Musa**. The father turned to the authorities for assistance and even tried to pay a ransom for his son's release (Radikal, September 29, 2013).

The position of the local authorities

106. The Turkish government, led by Prime Minister Erdogan, is hostile to Bashar Assad's regime and supports the various rebel groups, often without examining them too closely. Allowing foreign fighters to cross the border into Syria is an important part of this assistance. These foreign fighters include those who join the Al-Nusra Front and other organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad. **Thus, during the Syrian civil war, Turkey has become the main transit country for foreign fighters, who enter and exit from Syria virtually unimpededly.** The fact that rebel groups control border crossings between Syria and Turkey further eases the passage of the foreign fighters.

107. **As a result, Turkey has been accused, both domestically and internationally, of collaborating with organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad by allowing operatives and weapons to pass through its territory to Syria.** For example, the leader of the secular opposition CHP, who spoke at his party's convention, accused the authorities of delivering weapons to Al-Qaeda under the supervision of the Turkish Gendarmerie. This accusation was based on the testimony of a truck driver from the city of Konya, who delivered a shipment of 120mm mortar shells intended for an Al-Qaeda base in Syria (taraf.com.tr, November 27, 2013).

108. In addition, **the Turkish government is subject to internal pressure in this regard.** Many residents whose sons joined the ranks of the rebels demonstrated against the Turkish authorities, claiming that they are doing nothing to prevent them from fighting in Syria. According to the police, they are unable to prevent the departure of Turkish foreign fighters, since they do so voluntarily (Radikal, September 30, 2013). Two families, whose children went to Syria, turned to an MP from the opposition party CHP, who submitted a query about "organizations that operate in Turkey and recruit young people for the war in Syria" (Radikal, September 30, 2013). Dr. Ahmet Faruk

Unsal, Secretary General of the Mazlumder organization, called on the Turkish authorities to take steps to bring the young people who left for Syria back to Turkey (Radikal, September 30, 2013).

109. Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoglu **have denied claims that Turkey is cooperating with Al-Qaeda organizations.** The Turkish media reported (November 2013) that the authorities have started to arrest Al-Qaeda operatives and have thwarted an attempt to send ammunition to the organization's fighters and to Syria. In some cases, the police managed to seize weapons intended for Al-Qaeda (zaman.com.tr, December 8, 2013). **On January 14, 2014, Turkish security forces carried out a series of arrests of suspected Al-Qaeda operatives.** The arrests were made in a number of provinces. At least 23 people were arrested. During the arrests, truckloads containing large quantities of arms and ammunition were seized in Adana.

110. In one of these raids, **Ibrahim Sen**, a former Guantanamo detainee described in the media as a senior Al-Qaeda operative, was detained. According to the newspaper Hürriyet, Ibrahim Sen and a few other detainees are suspected of sending jihadi operatives to fight in Syria, **helping Al-Qaeda operatives travel from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Syria**, fundraising in order to help Al-Qaeda and supplying them with weapons used in attacks in Syria, Pakistan and Afghanistan (The Long War Journal, January 14 and January 21, 2014; Zaman, January 19, 2014; Hürriyet, January 14, 2014).

111. However, **the activity of the Turkish security forces did not put an end to the passage of Al-Qaeda and global jihad groups and individuals through Turkey.** In early April 2014, there were reports about jihadi groups from Jordan traveling to the north via Turkey¹³. The Turkish authorities, on their part, have repeatedly denied claims that they are assisting Al-Qaeda and the global jihad. At a European Union security forum¹⁴ that met on March 27, 2014, the Turkish Foreign Ministry denied an Armenian representative's accusations that Turkey is aiding

¹³ For example, the Lebanese daily Al-Akhbar, relying on a source in the Syrian opposition and on Jordanian sources, reported in early April 2014 about an "airlift" conveying around 1,000 jihadi fighters from Jordan (from Marka Airport) to Turkey (Antioch Airport, in the Alexandretta region). It was reported that the jihadi operatives sent to Turkey were of various nationalities, including Saudis, Jordanians and Syrians. In addition, these operatives were transferred to Syria in groups (Al-Akhbar, April 4, 2014).

¹⁴ The Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda in Syria. A Turkish Foreign Ministry statement claimed that these accusations are unfounded, and that Turkey is the country most affected by terrorism originating in Syria (World Bulletin, April 7, 2014).

The involvement of the IHH organization in supporting Al-Qaeda in Syria

112. One of the organizations whose name has been mentioned as supporting Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria is **IHH**, the organization whose operatives led the **Mavi Marmara flotilla and played a major role in the violent clash with IDF soldiers on board the Mavi Marmara (May 31, 2010)**. It is an anti-Western, anti-

Semitic, radical-Islamic jihadi Turkish organization. In the past, IHH, was mentioned several times as providing logistical aid to global jihad elements.¹⁵ The allegations against it, in the Syrian context, were made once again on **January 1, 2014**, when Turkish soldiers apprehended an IHH truck in the Hatay (Alexandretta) region. The truck contained weapons and ammunition on their way to the Syrian border. As a result, an investigation of IHH was instituted by the public prosecutor of Hatay (The Long War Journal, January 14, 2014). IHH (as usual) denied the allegations against it.¹⁶

113. According to the Turkish daily *Aydinlik*, **on January 14, 2014, Turkish security forces raided the IHH headquarters in Kilis on suspicion of aiding Al-Qaeda**. It was reported that this assistance includes **supplying weapons, food and medical aid to global jihad operatives in Syria**. IHH would smuggle Al-Qaeda operatives in its ambulances, which were also used to transfer weapons. The main transit point was the village of Atma, located on the Syrian side of the border town of Reyhanli¹⁷ (*aydinlikgazete.com*). Another report in the Turkish media, based on a report in the

¹⁵ See our Information Bulletin from June 27, 2012: "According to the Turkish media (June 2012), IHH head Bülent Yıldırım was under investigation for having clandestinely transferred funds to Al-Qaeda. IHH is a radical Islamic anti-western Turkish organization that had a prominent role in the Mavi Marmara flotilla. Alongside its humanitarian activities in the past, IHH was mentioned several times in the context of providing logistical aid to global jihad elements, including transferring funds. In recent years, IHH has assisted Hamas and it has been outlawed in Israel and Germany."

¹⁶ The Secretary General of the IHH protested the arrests, claiming that their intention was to present the IHH as an organization that maintains ties with terrorist organizations (The Long War Journal, January 14, 2014). Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc rejected these claims, noting that IHH is a legal organization which, to the best of his knowledge, is engaged in peaceful humanitarian activities (Anatolia News Agency, January 16, 2014).

¹⁷ A terrorist attack that killed 47 Turkish civilians was carried out in this town, located in the province of Alexandretta, on May 11, 2013. Turkey accused the Syrian intelligence of responsibility for the attack. The Syrians denied responsibility.

French newspaper Le Monde, said that global jihad operatives made use of IHH ambulances to cross from Turkey to Syria. It was also reported that hotels in the town of Reyhanli are occupied by Al-Qaeda and global jihad operatives and that many of these hotels have been turned into meeting and gathering points for operatives (Cumhuriyet.com.tr).

Foreign Fighters from non-Muslim Countries in Asia

China

114. In China there is an Uyghur Muslim minority, with separatist tendencies. The number of Chinese Muslims who volunteered to fight alongside the rebels in Syria ranges from **a few dozen to around one hundred**.

Overview

115. The first report about foreign fighters from China who joined in the fighting in Syria appeared in the second half of 2013, with the publication of a report by counter-terrorism experts in China. The report stated that Uyghur Muslim separatists have been traveling to Syria since May 2012 in order to join in the fighting alongside global jihad organizations. The report said that their trips were organized by opposition groups in China, which finance their activities through drug trafficking, arms dealing, abduction and robbery (www.chinapost.com, October 30, 2012).

116. **The Muslim separatists in China** belong to the **Uyghur people**, living in the **Xinjiang Autonomous Region** in northwestern China (sometimes called **East Turkestan** by the separatists). The Uyghurs, at least in part, strive for independence. In the 1990s, their uprising was suppressed by the Chinese authorities. In July 2009, violent riots broke out between the Uyghurs and another ethnic group, the Han people, in which 197 people were killed, mainly members of the Han people (Wikipedia).

117. A top expert on counter-terrorism noted that since **the beginning of 2012, around one hundred Muslims have travelled from China to Syria to join in the fighting alongside the rebels**. According to him, the objective of their stay in Syria is, in part, **to improve their fighting capabilities and gain experience in order to subsequently carry out terrorist activities** (www.globaltimes.cn, July 1, 2013). According to researcher Aaron Zelin, the number of Chinese operatives fighting in Syria ranges from six to one hundred (washingtoninstitute.org). At a press conference held by the spokesman for the Chinese foreign minister on October 29, 2012, he revealed that

operatives from East Turkistani organizations entered Syria in order to join in the fighting (www.frnprc.gov.cn, October 30, 2013).

118. According to a Syrian representative in China, **several Chinese Muslims were trained at military camps in Pakistan** and sent to Syria. He said that **about thirty young people were trained in Pakistan and then went to Turkey** (the main transit country for the foreign fighters in Syria). It is likely that they are now in the Aleppo region but he is not sure of this. These allegations were made shortly before the visit of the prime minister of Pakistan in China (www.hindustantimes.com, July 3, 2013).

119. It appears that two Muslim separatist organizations in China are sending foreign fighters to Syria. The first, **East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)**¹⁸, is a movement whose goal is to establish a Muslim state in China. The second, **East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (ETESA)**¹⁹, is an organization in exile, based in Turkey. According to experts, fighters from the Muslim minority in China previously took part in the fighting in Chechnya and Afghanistan (www.chinapost.com, October 30, 2012). However, the statement issued by the ETESA denied reports that Chinese Muslims went to Syria to join in the fighting. According to the statement, Chinese Muslims were not involved in any terrorist activity and even if there are Chinese Muslim fighters in Syria, they came as individuals and they represent only themselves (the movement's website).

¹⁸**East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)** - a separatist movement that was established in East Turkistan, which is under Chinese rule. The movement was founded in 1993 by two natives of Bhutan but was dissolved by the end of the year. In 1997, it was reorganized and it is still in existence. Its center is in Kabul, under the protection of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Its leaders have met with Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders. They operate in cooperation with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan. During the US military campaign in Afghanistan, the movement suffered a blow when one of its leaders was killed. The movement carried out attacks against American targets such as the US mission in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) and it is on the US list of terrorist organizations. China has accused it of recruiting Chinese Muslims to fight in Syria.

¹⁹**East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (ETESA)** - an organization founded by young Turkistanis from around the world who are well-trained, imbued with faith and hold degrees in Islamic studies. The organization's goal is to educate Turkistani Muslims and make them part of the Muslim nation (the organization's website.) The organization's center is in Istanbul.



A poster calling to join the fighting in Syria on behalf of the East Turkistan movement against a background of the Al-Qaeda flag. The text in the center (in green letters) reads: “Those who believed (?) and emigrated, and fought the war of jihad.” (<http://www.shamikh1.info>, October 17, 2012)

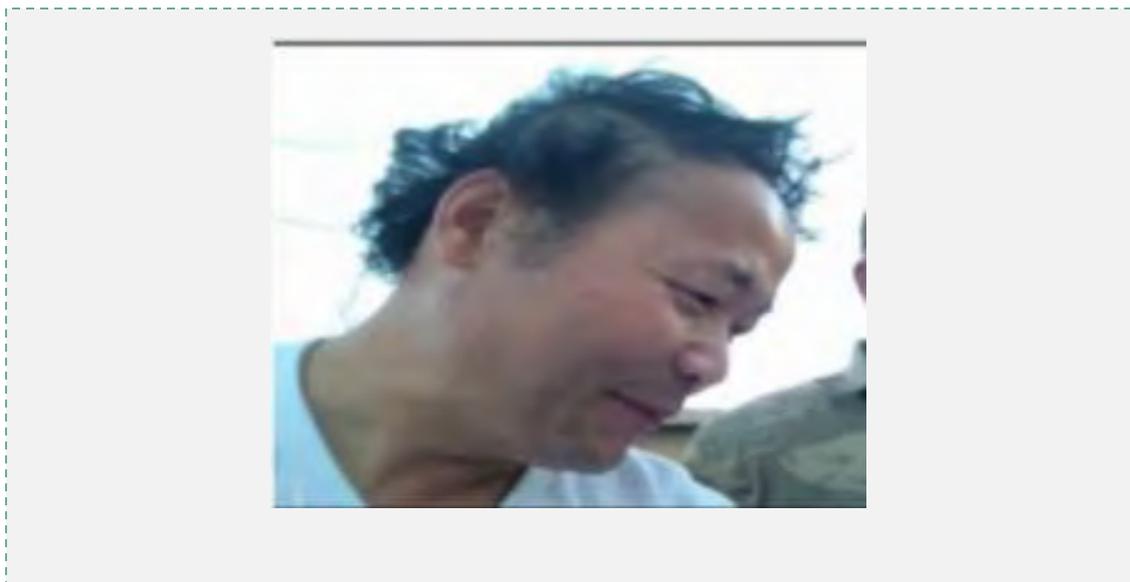
Information about foreign fighters from China

120. A video posted on YouTube on March 17, 2013, entitled “A Message of Victory to the Chinese People” **shows a man with Chinese features dressed in camouflage fatigues and armed with a Kalashnikov, bearing an Al-Qaeda flag.** The subtitles of the video, which is in Chinese, state that the man's name is **Bo Wong** and he calls himself “**Yussuf**” (an Arabic name). He says that he represents all the Muslims who warn the Chinese government to immediately stop all forms of assistance to the Syrian president, including arms sales and economic aid. Experts claim that this was the first time that a Chinese fighting alongside the jihad fighters in Syria has been identified. Bo Wong, who speaks Mandarin, said that he converted to Islam after reading the works of **Sayyid Qutb**²⁰. He then travelled from China to Libya to learn Arabic. He was in Libya during the Revolution against Qaddafi. After the revolution, he went to Syria (like many other operatives who participated in the revolution). The video was uploaded to the Chinese YouTube network and was deleted immediately (The New York Times, March 29, 2013; www.rightsidenews.com, April 24, 2013).

²⁰ **Sayyid Qutb** - a prominent thinker and member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In his books, he legitimized violence by defining jihad in order to enforce religious law (Sharia) in Muslim society as the personal duty of every Muslim. The concept of global jihad and *takfir* (blaming the “other” for heresy among Moslems) developed on the basis of Sayyid Qutb's ideology.

121. In the summer of 2013, a 23-year-old man named **Memeti Aili** was arrested by the Chinese police. He said he was recruited while in Turkey by the East Turkistan Islamic Movement. He abandoned his studies and his family in Istanbul and went to fight in Syria in the framework of the jihad. He joined a group of young people and **traveled with them to Aleppo**, where they underwent an accelerated seven-day training in one of the city's neighborhoods. The training included rifle shooting and making explosive charges. After his training, he was sent to join the Free Syrian Army (www.globaltimes.cn, July 1, 2013). He says that he helped evacuate the wounded to hospitals. Around two months after arriving in Syria he was sent back to Istanbul (www.globaltimes.cn, July 1, 2013). Memeti Aili returned to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region where he was arrested while planning to carry out "violent attacks in China" (timesofisrael.com)²¹.

122. **Ching Vimang (?)** - a Chinese artist who joined in the fighting in Syria, in the ranks of the Free Syrian Army (elmokhalestv.com).



Ching Vimang (?), Free Syrian Army operative (elmokhalestv.com)

²¹ According to an article by Dr. Ely Karmon from March 4, 2014: "Did the salafist / jihadist wave reach China?"



Photograph of operatives from East Asia in the Aleppo region (their identity is unknown) belonging to ISIS, taken probably in 2012 (from an ISIS video clip that was shown on transatlanticacademy.org).



Left: Chinese operative in Syria (voltairenet.org, July 4, 2013)
 Right: Chinese operative in Syria, with the Al-Qaeda insignia to his left (YouTube)



Photograph from 2012, taken from a video of Al-Furqan, the public relations arm of Al-Qaeda: the operative on the right is most probably Chinese. The operative on the left is from Tajikistan (islamicinvitationturkey.com).

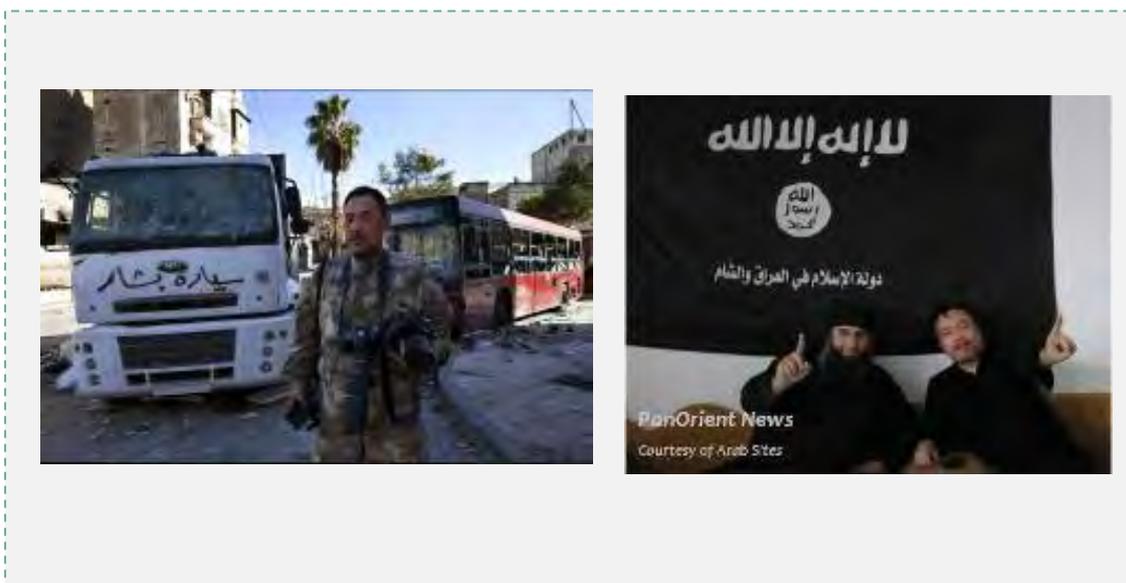
The position of the local authorities

123. In the past, China has accused Turkey of recruiting Chinese Muslims to fight in Syria and has claimed that Al-Qaeda organizes their trips. In late June 2013, there was an attack on a police station in the Muslim region of China. **The Chinese charged a group of fighters with assault, claiming they had spent time in Syria, where they were trained and sent back to China to carry out attacks.** On the other hand, Chinese Islamic activists living outside China said that this is impossible since, so they claim, those Muslims cannot even obtain a passport, let alone leave China to travel to Turkey and from there to Syria (news.antiwar.com, July 1, 2013).

124. In any case, **China is aware of the potential dangers inherent in Sunni Muslim separatists joining the ranks of the rebels** (especially the Al-Nusra Front and groups associated with the global jihad) and the return of these operatives to China at the end of the fighting. The Chinese Foreign Ministry has called for close international cooperation in this regard, stressing that such groups not only threaten China's security but the security of other countries as well (www.chinapost.com, October 30, 2012).

Japan

125. To date, we know of **one Japanese foreign fighter** who went to Syria. He is a photographer, 45, by the name of **Toshifumi Fujimoto**. He came to Syria as a tourist, converted to Islam, changed his name to **Abd al-Yazid al-Assiri** and joined **ISIS**.



Left: Toshifumi Fujimoto in Syria (his Facebook page, October 5, 2013).
 Right: Toshifumi Fujimoto against a background of the ISIS flag
 (www.panorientnews.com, October 14, 2013)

India

126. Reports about jihadi Indian fighters operating in Syria began to appear on March 8, 2013. This was in the wake of statements made by the Syrian president's political adviser, Bouthaina Shaaban. In an interview with the Indian media during her visit to the country, she noted that the participation of Indian fighters in Syria was one of the reasons why New Delhi should play a more active role, since the expansion of this conflict would not leave anyone invulnerable (timesofindia.indiatimes.com).

127. On September 6, 2013, the Syrian ambassador to India, **Riad Kamel Abbas**, claimed that Indian fighters go to fight the jihad in Syria, alongside fighters from Afghanistan, Chechnya and other countries. He noted that a number of Indian nationals had been killed in Syria and others had been arrested by the Syrian regime. The ambassador added that reports about these fighters had been sent to the government of India and that the government of India was surprised. **He added that the Indian nationals in question were "Indians from Muslim communities who are not Hindus,** since Hindus do not maintain jihad." He refused to disclose any details about the identity of the fighters (alhindelyom.com).

128. Another report about the Indian foreign fighters in Syria appeared in the newspaper The Hindu on March 25, 2014. According to the report, the Indian police and intelligence mounted a cross-border investigation in the wake of information that at least

two students from Chennai College were being trained at jihadi training camps in Syria (thehindu.com).

129. **Maulana Abd al-Rahman al-Hindi**, the man in charge of matters of Islamic religious law in the **Ansar al-Tawhid** organization, affiliated with Al-Qaeda and based in India, recently distributed a video clip, calling on young people in India to join various combat zones of Al-Qaeda and the global jihad, including in Syria. He also warned the Indian intelligence services against mistreatment of Muslim clerics such as Maulana Abdul Qavi, who was recently arrested by the Indian police (memri.org).



Recently released video featuring a call by Abd al-Rahman al-Hindi to young Muslims in India to join the service of global jihad in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq (memri.org)