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FEATURE ARTICLE

Eighteen Years On: The War on Terror Comes of Age

DANIEL BYMAN

A VIEW FROM THE CT FOXHOLE

Joseph Maguire

ACTING DIRECTOR OF
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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FROM THE EDITOR

This September 11th, a new generation is taking up the mantle in the fight against terrorism. “Later this year, a U.S. service member is likely to be deployed to Afghanistan who was not yet born on September 11, 2001,”

Daniel Byman notes in our feature article on the jihadi terror threat facing the United States 18 years later. He assesses “although the operational freedom of jihadi groups is constricted by U.S. and allied counterterrorism efforts, the jihadi cause as a whole has far more local and regional influence than it did in the years before 9/11, it is better able to inspire individuals in the West to act on its behalf, and groups have proven resilient despite the fierce U.S.-led onslaught.”

Our interview is with Joseph Maguire, the United States’ Acting Director of National Intelligence. He says that “since the catastrophic attacks on 9/11, we have significantly diminished the ability of jihadists to strike the U.S. by removing hundreds of leaders and operatives, disrupting dozens of networks and plots, and degrading safe havens. But some jihadist groups still have that intent, not only to target the homeland but also our interests overseas. They are continually adapting to setbacks by modifying their tactics, seeking out alternative safe havens, and using new and emerging technologies to communicate, recruit, and conduct attacks. This makes for an increasingly diverse and unpredictable threat.” As the terror threat evolves, Acting Director Maguire stresses the importance of addressing the still-significant security challenges posed by the Islamic State in Syria, Iraq, and beyond given the group still poses a “tremendous threat” and has “all the recipes” for a resurgence.

Amira Jadoon and Andrew Mines examine Islamic State Khorasan’s leadership losses between 2015 and 2018 by leadership tier, year, and geography. Their findings highlight “the group’s tenacious presence in Nangarhar (Afghanistan) and Baluchistan (Pakistan), despite declines in overall number of attacks. An important factor contributing to ISK’s resiliency appears to be rooted in its steady recruitment of experienced Pakistani militants that sustain its leadership ranks.” Two years after the Marawi siege in the Philippines, Julie Chernov Hwang outlines the motivations for joining the Maute Group based on her interviews with 25 former members of the jihadi group and a related faction. Aaron Zelin and Katherine Bauer outline the significant progress Tunisia has made over the past two years in developing domestic counter-terrorism finance capabilities.

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Cover: An airman guards a C-130J Super Hercules during cargo loading and unloading operations in Afghanistan on August 3, 2019. (U.S. Department of Defense/ Air Force Staff Sgt. Keifer Bowes)

Eighteen Years On: The War on Terror Comes of Age

By Daniel Byman

The United States has scored impressive successes against al-Qa`ida, the Islamic State, and other jihadi groups, decimating their leadership and limiting attacks on the U.S. homeland. At the same time, the jihadi cause has far more local and regional influence than it did in the years before 9/11; it is better able to inspire individuals in the West to act on its behalf; and groups have proven resilient despite the fierce U.S.-led onslaught against them. The movement as a whole is likely to persist, but the strongest groups will be limited operationally due to U.S. and allied counterterrorism efforts and probably will be caught up with the pressing demands of the civil wars in their countries and regions. The United States, Europe, and other stable regions will face continued but low-level attacks from inspired jihadis or those with some coordination from abroad, but the greatest dangers, and impact, will be felt on U.S. interests in the Muslim world.

Later this year, a U.S. service member is likely to be deployed to Afghanistan who was not yet born on September 11, 2001, when al-Qa`ida terrorists launched the most devastating terrorist attack in history and killed almost 3,000 people, mostly Americans. The years in between have seen wars in Iraq and Syria justified in the name of counterterrorism as well as more limited U.S. interventions against jihadi groups in Libya, Somalia, and other countries. Hundreds of thousands have died in these conflicts—some from terrorism, but most from combat and the associated ravages of war. Yet even as this body count soared, neither al-Qa`ida nor other jihadi groups have proven able to conduct a repeat of 9/11 or even anything close to it.^a

Judging the threat that jihadi terrorism currently poses to the United States and, more broadly, the success of the U.S.-led struggle against various jihadi groups in the post-9/11 era depends on what

interests are prioritized and which perspective one takes. Under three very different administrations, the United States has scored impressive successes against al-Qa`ida, the Islamic State, and other jihadi groups, decimating their leadership and limiting attacks on the U.S. homeland to a fraction of what Americans feared in the aftermath of 9/11. Yet, almost two decades after 9/11, the United States has still not put the nail in the coffin of jihadis. Indeed, although the operational freedom of jihadi groups is constricted by U.S. and allied counterterrorism efforts, the jihadi cause as a whole has far more local and regional influence than it did in the years before 9/11, it is better able to inspire individuals in the West to act on its behalf, and groups have proven resilient despite the fierce U.S.-led onslaught. Americans are wearying of grinding conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria, and other countries and favor, at most, limited efforts in far-flung theaters like Somalia or West Africa where jihadis are active.¹ Efforts to pass the burden onto allies have met little success in most parts of the world, with a few important exceptions like the French counterterrorism campaign in Mali.

Before Americans celebrate or despair, however, it is useful to take stock of the problems facing the main jihadi organizations themselves. The al-Qa`ida core is weak and under siege, the once-triumphant Islamic State caliphate is now a memory, and the movement as a whole is plagued by infighting. Even in areas where jihadis groups are stronger in the post-9/11 era, they have largely failed to become sustained mass movements and otherwise exert influence beyond violence for a prolonged period, in contrast to less radical groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. Nor are they likely to find a theater of jihad as favorable as Syria in the near and medium terms. The jihadis, however, can comfort themselves knowing that their overall sphere of activity has expanded, the enduring weakness of regimes in the Muslim world will give them considerable operational space, and problems with Muslim integration in Europe may present new opportunities.

The movement as a whole is likely to remain persistent, but the strongest regional groups, like Boko Haram and al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), will probably be caught up with the pressing demands of the civil wars in their countries and regions. The United States, Europe, and other stable regions will face continued but low-level attacks from inspired jihadis or those with some coordination from abroad, but the greatest dangers, and impact, will be felt on U.S. interests in the Muslim world.

This article has five parts. It first gives a brief status report on jihadi attacks in the United States and abroad and describes other factors, such as levels of public fear, that are important components when weighing the terrorism danger. Sections II and III then look at what has gone well for the United States with regard to counterterrorism and what has gone poorly. In Section IV, this article reverses its perspective, asking similar questions for the jihadi movement as a whole. Finally, Section V explores possible future directions of the movement and argues that the jihadi movement

^a This article draws on several essays the author wrote for the Lawfare blog, including "Divisions within the Global Jihad: A Primer," September 29, 2017, and "Intelligence Liaison and Counterterrorism: A Quick Primer," May 6, 2017.

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will continue to localize and regionalize.

I. Snapshots of the Terrorism Threat

Judging how dangerous the jihadi terrorism threat is depends heavily on which factors are used in its evaluation. At the most basic level, the number of Americans killed on U.S. soil has been low since 9/11, and the pool of jihadis in the United States shallow and composed largely of untrained individuals with few direct connections to jihadi masterminds overseas.² At the end of 2018, jihadis had killed 104 Americans since 9/11, an average of six deaths a year. Only one American died in a jihadi attack on U.S. soil in 2018, which occurred when one teen murdered another at a sleepover, hardly a jihadi spectacular.³ Almost half the deaths (49) occurred in one attack, when Omar Mateen shot up a Florida nightclub while declaring his allegiance to the Islamic State. Mateen was a troubled man who at different times had claimed to be a member of the Lebanese Hezbollah and Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian faction linked to al-Qa`ida, despite the fact that both are violent rivals of the Islamic State.⁴ From the jihadi terrorists' perspective, he was hardly a worthy successor to Mohammad Atta, the steely-eyed 9/11 cell leader.

Using the deaths of Americans from jihadi attacks overseas as a criterion for the overall threat is trickier. Just over 140 Americans died between 2002 and 2016 in such attacks, excluding attacks in war zones—a significant number, but far fewer than died in the 1988 Pan Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie, which claimed 190 Americans among the 270 overall victims.⁵ Yet the American death toll soars to almost 7,000 if soldiers killed in war zones in which jihadis are active—Iraq, Afghanistan, and so on—are counted.⁶ Many of these soldiers died in attacks by Iraqi nationalists or other actors, such as Shi'a radicals linked to Iran, who killed over 600 Americans fighting in Iraq.⁷ In addition, over 2,000 of these losses represent U.S. deaths in Afghanistan, primarily against the Afghan Taliban, which in the post-9/11 era is not directly linked to extra-regional terrorism despite being a deadly foe of the United States in its home country.⁸

Some Americans, however, take a broader view of the death toll. Attacks in Europe in particular are often considered part of the overall balance sheet on the war on terror. U.S. fears of terrorism spiked after the Islamic State killed 130 innocents in a series of attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015. With high-profile bloody attacks in France, Spain, and the United Kingdom as well as many smaller strikes, jihadis have killed far more civilians in Europe than in the United States since 9/11. After a decline at the end of the last decade, attacks again increased when the Islamic State was at its peak from 2014–2016, but they have fallen again in recent years. The years 2018 and (so far) 2019 have seen lower levels of jihadi violence.⁹ Yet in Europe, the pre-9/11 picture was bleaker, when left-wing and ethnonationalist terrorism plagued Europe and when state sponsors like Libya wreaked havoc. The number of attacks peaked in 1979 when Europe suffered over 1,000 attacks, but attacks averaged around 10 a week during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Much of the violence was in the Basque region of Spain or in Northern Ireland. The average number of attacks fell after 1997.¹⁰

In addition, jihadi groups are active in bloody civil wars around the Muslim world. Deaths from conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, and other countries may number over one million.¹¹ As with the body counts of U.S. soldiers, such numbers are only partially linked to jihadi groups. There are many violent actors involved in addition to jihadis, and governments

(some U.S.- or allied-backed) are responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths.¹² Nevertheless, jihadis are contributing to human suffering on a mass scale. Indeed, the United Nations reports they are expanding the scale of their operations in the Sahel and West Africa.¹³ State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Nathan Sales, noting the spread of al-Qa`ida to Africa, even goes so far as to claim that “what we see today is an al-Qaida that is as strong as it has ever been.”¹⁴

Terrorists, of course, seek to do far more than kill people, and much of their violence is aimed at instilling public fear. And here they are doing better than their body count would suggest. Polling shows that the number of Americans who are “very worried” that they or someone in their family would fall victim to a terrorist attack actually increased from November 2001 to June 2017, going from eight percent to 13 percent while the number who were “somewhat worried” also rose from 27 percent to 29 percent. So, as terrorism analyst Brian Michael Jenkins noted in these pages in 2016, despite the relatively low body count after 9/11, the fear factor is high.¹⁵

II. What Has Gone Well?

Three mutually reinforcing efforts—denying havens, intelligence cooperation, and homeland defense—have played important roles in limiting the number of attacks on the U.S. homeland, and the first two efforts have also hindered jihadi attacks in other countries. Before 9/11, al-Qa`ida and other jihadi groups exploited the Taliban's shelter and sanctuary, training perhaps 20,000 volunteers, building a mini army.¹⁶ In addition, jihadis raised money, proselytized, and coordinated operations on a global scale with relatively little interference, including in the United States.¹⁷

After 9/11, the United States, backing local forces, ousted the Taliban from Afghanistan, killed much of the al-Qa`ida cadre there, and drove the scattered remnants to Pakistan and other countries.¹⁸ Since then, al-Qa`ida, the Islamic State, and other jihadi movements have enjoyed mini havens in Pakistan, Somalia, the Maghreb, Syria, and other countries. In each, however, the United States has worked with local allies, used drone strikes to target operatives, and otherwise tried to limit the scope and scale of the haven.¹⁹ The Islamic State's caliphate in Iraq and Syria was by far the most impressive jihadi success, but it proved short-lived, ground down by attacks from an array of Iraqi and Syrian forces, often backed by the United States.²⁰ As a result, jihadi groups are under far more pressure when they operate than in the pre-9/11 era.

Complementing the attack on havens is a global intelligence campaign against the jihadi movement.²¹ Foreign intelligence relations are at the heart of U.S. counterterrorism efforts against the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida.²² After 9/11, U.S. partnerships expanded to over 100 countries,²³ and they played a vital role in capturing and killing suspected terrorists.²⁴ Paul Pillar, a leading terrorism analyst, points out liaison services can work with their countries' police forces when they arrest terrorists and recruit sources.²⁵

The United States seeks to enhance its allies' capabilities, not duplicate them. It might help with technical assistance in particular, as many developing world governments fighting jihadis are weak in this area. The United States can also coordinate multiple intelligence services. When “Hambali,” an important al-Qa`ida operative and Jemaah Islamiyya official, was captured in 2003, the operation involved U.S. coordination of operations and information from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.²⁶

Although much homeland defense spending is inefficient or



Soldiers assigned to the 1st Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, await extraction via a CH-47 Chinook during an aerial response force live-fire training exercise at Al Asad Air Base in Iraq on October 31, 2018. (U.S. Department of Defense/Army 1st Lt. Leland White)

wasted,²⁷ efforts to track terrorist travel, to pool databases of suspects, and to otherwise tighten borders make it harder for terrorists to penetrate the United States, as they did before 9/11. The FBI has undertaken a far-reaching campaign to identify and disrupt potential terrorists on U.S. soil, resulting in numerous arrests of would-be jihadis—a campaign that continues unabated to this day.²⁸ Many of these plots would have come to nothing, but at least a few might have reached fruition if not for government intervention.

Social media companies have also made progress in reducing terrorists' online presence in recent years. When the Islamic State reemerged during the Syrian civil war and then electrified jihadi extremists around the world with its beheading videos, Twitter hashtag hijackings, and other social media successes, it seemed technology was on the terrorists' side.²⁹ Although jihadi groups still remain active on the internet, their presence on mainstream platforms like Twitter and Facebook is now far more risky. Internet companies are taking down their content, and governments are monitoring their accounts to identify followers and disrupt them. Indeed, would-be terrorists in the United States who are active on social media are more likely to be caught, not less.³⁰

These combined efforts show up in the post-9/11 successes the United States has had against foreign fighters. Although foreign fighters are rightly billed as force multipliers for jihadi groups and were responsible for some of the deadliest jihadi attacks on the

West, zero foreign fighters have perpetrated attacks on U.S. soil since 9/11. Part of this success is because the United States is now able to target and disrupt them at multiple stages: arresting them before they travel, detaining them when they go back and forth, killing them in a war zone, or arresting them on return. When they post information to recruit and travel on social media, they are more likely to be discovered. Although the United States has proven especially effective at stopping foreign fighters, Europe's track record has also improved, especially in the aftermath of foreign fighter-linked attacks in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in 2016.³¹

III. What Has Gone Poorly?

Yet the optimistic view, which this author usually shares, has several weaknesses and limits, and when judging the overall threat, much depends on which factors are considered.

Perhaps the most obvious limit is that the jihadi groups remain active despite 18 years of direct clashes with the United States, and they have spread their influence throughout the Muslim world. The list of countries in the Middle East with civil wars that feature jihadi groups now includes Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, with Egypt also suffering significant unrest. Most of the wars grew out of the 2011 "Arab Spring" and regimes' responses to it, and there are many complex reasons for their breakout and persistence unrelated to jihadism.³² However, jihadis groups exploited this chaos, increas-

ing their influence and the scale of their operations.

How dangerous the threat jihadi groups pose to U.S. interests depends heavily on how much the stability of the affected countries matters to the United States—a contested question. Libya, Mali, Somalia, and Yemen have never been important U.S. interests in and of themselves. Even countries that matter far more due to oil reserves or other strategic factors, like Algeria, Nigeria, and Pakistan, usually face violence contained to their periphery that is horrific for those affected but has not impacted oil flows or otherwise jeopardized traditional U.S. interests, narrowly defined. Spillover remains a constant risk, and indeed violence in Algeria, Libya, and Mali has spread to almost all of West Africa, but key regional countries like Saudi Arabia and Turkey do not seem at risk of civil war.³³

Although the risk to traditional interests has proven limited, the increasingly global presence of jihadi groups has led the United States to become enmeshed in a series of low-level but grinding, and seemingly endless, civil wars in the greater Muslim world. The United States has forces in 80 countries involved in the fight against terrorism.³⁴ This has both a human and economic cost, but it is sustainable militarily, as it represents only a fraction of total U.S. forces, and the number of casualties is lower than when the United States had large numbers of troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, political support in the United States for military operations is far weaker. The surge of enthusiasm for aggressive counterterrorism after 9/11 steadily fell as the Iraq War became more deadly and costly. The leaders of both political parties are now skeptical of high levels of U.S. intervention abroad, suggesting the United States is becoming even less willing to do the slow, hard work of stabilizing weak countries and improving governance around the world.³⁵ In a poll from 2018, over half of Americans believed that it was time to draw down or completely withdraw troops from Afghanistan, and in January 2019, the public was split on a similar question regarding the U.S. troop presence in Syria.³⁶

Nor has the United States always been able to hand off counterterrorism responsibilities to local forces. Ideally, local forces would provide security to residents, administer justice, and uproot the jihadi infrastructure, backed by U.S. intelligence and standoff firepower. In reality, many U.S. train and equip programs have failed to move the needle, at times disastrously. When a small detachment of 1,500 Islamic State forces approached Mosul in June 2014, the approximately 30,000 Iraqi troops stationed there panicked and fled.³⁷ The United States had lavished over \$25 billion dollars on Iraqi forces with little payoff.³⁸ In Syria, one program that cost \$500 million and was intended to train 15,000 rebels there produced only a handful of actual fighters.³⁹ The United States has been able to work with the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces, which proved highly effective in fighting the Islamic State. However, they represent one faction within a small Syrian minority group, and they are not politically acceptable to Turkey and to some local communities in Syria.⁴⁰

Many U.S. allies are less than ideal partners.⁴¹ Bad governance, social divisions, and economic problems plague many U.S. counterterrorism partners and make insurgency more likely. Partner regime policies often perpetuate or exacerbate these problems.⁴² Many communities see the national army as dominated by one communal group, and when pressure grows, integrated units often defect or desert. Scholar Mara Karlin has found that U.S. efforts to build a stronger national army in Lebanon were hindered by deep divisions among the country's communities.⁴³ In the Arab world,

only Tunisia has true democratic legitimacy, and weak legitimacy is a common problem for many countries in Africa where the Islamic State is active. In response to these many problems, rulers often politicize their militaries.⁴⁴

Corruption is also common. In 2016, the Iraqi army had tens of thousands of “ghost soldiers”—troops who existed only on paper—which enabled their superiors to collect their salaries.⁴⁵ In many cases, reducing corruption and increasing legitimacy require a dramatic change in who governs a country and how they do so. Not surprisingly, local powers try to resist pressure or co-opt it, and U.S. administrations have proven unable or unwilling to put sustained pressure on recalcitrant partners. Jihadi groups exploit these problems and try to portray themselves as able to deliver law and order more effectively and even to provide better social services than the government.⁴⁶

The United States is not well-positioned to resolve these deep governance problems. The budgets of the State Department, USAID, and associated programs are increasingly a rounding error when compared with the overall defense budget. Putting its budget questions aside, the State Department is not bureaucratically committed to the governance mission and instead focuses on elite diplomacy.⁴⁷

The counterterrorism mission has also led to significant opportunity costs. The United States and its key allies have devoted considerable time and resources to this challenge. In so doing, other problems, like a more bellicose Russia and the rise of China, received less attention.

IV. The Jihadis' Perspective

Imagining how the world looks through the eyes of Ayman al-Zawahiri or Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi sheds additional light on what is going well and what is going poorly for U.S. counterterrorism.

Jihadis leaders could take comfort from much of what gives the United States pause: the spread of their ideas and movements around the Muslim world, the lack of legitimacy of many of their local enemies, and the growing fatigue of the U.S. public and leaders who rail against forever wars. After the Arab Spring began in 2011, al-Zawahiri recognized that the fall of traditional jihadist enemies like the Saleh regime in Yemen or the Qaddafi regime in Libya offered opportunities for jihadis.⁴⁸

Indeed, the jihadis' defiance in the face of the U.S.-led worldwide campaign is impressive. In his September 2018 message “How to Confront America,” al-Zawahiri calls for “hitting hard at America, bleeding it to death economically and militarily, until it departs from our lands defeated - with the permission of Allah - just as it had departed from Vietnam, Aden, Iraq and Somalia.”⁴⁹ In a rare video in 2019, al-Baghdadi praised “brothers in Sri Lanka” for the Easter attacks there, which proved the Islamic State's vitality after the loss of its caliphate, although it appears that the attack was not centrally directed by the Islamic State.⁵⁰ Both groups have proven, repeatedly, that they can suffer considerable losses but still survive and return. They would probably expand their international terrorist efforts if pressure let up.⁵¹

Jihadis can also take comfort that their ideas are far more widespread and supported than ever before. When 9/11 occurred, the idea of taking on the “far enemy” of the United States was shared by only a minority of jihadis, most of whom focused on their local regime. By 2017, however, polls suggest that significant minorities in Nigeria, Turkey, and other countries had a positive view of groups

like the Islamic State.⁵² Before 9/11, some jihadis even embraced the idea of a “covenant of security” for Europe—because European countries had opened their doors and protected them from oppression in the Muslim world, then jihadis who accepted a visa had an obligation to be peaceful in exchange for this sanctuary.⁵³ The participation of some European states in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, angered the jihadis and proved, in their eyes, that Europe had broken the covenant of security. Al-Qa`ida in particular began to turn the networks developed to export foreign fighters from Europe to fight in wars in the Muslim world into operational nodes to attack Europe.

Europe’s failure to integrate its Muslim citizens made all this worse. Alienation between Muslims and non-Muslims is considerable in most countries, and there is little trust of the police and security services.⁵⁴ As politics grow more contentious, some European states have adopted anti-Muslim measures, ranging from the French veil ban⁵⁵ to Swiss efforts to ban the building of minarets⁵⁶ on mosques to efforts to cut or end support for Muslim refugees. Right-wing violence, which often explicitly targets Muslims, also increases tension.

Jihadi operational doctrine reflects the worldwide influence of their ideology as well as the weakness of the various groups’ leaderships, moving more toward so-called “Lone Wolf” or bottom-up inspired attacks or at least ones that require less direct coordination. As the caliphate crumbled, al-Baghdadi called for attacks in the West, noting that one of them equaled 1,000 strikes in the Middle East.⁵⁷ Although foreign fighters have been effectively disrupted, the United States and especially Europe have suffered through a plague of attacks inspired by the Islamic State or with limited direction from the group.⁵⁸

Yet despite these wins, the loss side of the ledger is staggering. The defeat of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria is more than just the loss of an operational home for the world’s dominant jihadi group. Rather, the Islamic State had staked much of its prestige and mission on the continuation and expansion of the caliphate, and its brief success was a potent recruiting pitch.⁵⁹ Its destruction, no matter how hard the group tries to rationalize this, is a devastating blow. This loss makes it more difficult for the Islamic State to attract new recruits. In addition, it has focused much of its energy on surviving and reviving rather than enduring and expanding. All this has made it harder for it to direct devastating attacks as it did in Paris in 2015.

Nor are the jihadis likely to find a theater of jihad as favorable as Syria in the near and medium term. The Syrian cause proved highly compelling, far more so than Somalia, Mali, and other conflicts that have arisen in the post-9/11 era. The United States also tried to avoid any intervention in Syria for several years and refused to work with the genocidal Syrian government, giving the Islamic State an unusual amount of space to grow and expand. In other theaters, direct and indirect U.S. military intervention limits the jihadis.

Indeed, the shift to emphasizing bottom-up inspired attacks by untrained individuals can be seen as a sign of weakness. When the Islamic State’s ‘caliphate’ was strong, the group urged volunteers to emigrate and fight to defend it. When al-Qa`ida was strong, it sought to train and direct recruits. As both groups weakened and their command and control came under siege, bottom-up attacks enabled them to stay active and strike their enemies, but if they had more freedom of action, they would probably prefer to train and direct volunteers to carry out terrorist attacks or work directly for the group as fighters or logisticians, among other roles.

The jihadi movement is divided over targeting, tactics, and ideology, and these divisions are deeper than they were on 9/11. Disagreements also extend to whether there should be a caliphate now and even whether to impose ‘Islamic’ law on areas they control or simply preach there and provide services to win over locals. More broadly, there are divisions over the killing of innocents.⁶⁰ Bin Ladin himself warned fellow jihadis that many jihadi groups have lost popular support when they killed innocents, especially innocent Muslims, in their operations.⁶¹ When the Islamic State captured and murdered Western aid workers in Syria, for example, al-Qa`ida’s Jabhat al-Nusra decried this as “wrong under Islamic law” and “counter-productive.”⁶²

Even though jihadis’ ideas are more popular than in the past, they are far from becoming a mass movement. This stands in contrast to groups like Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah, which have entered politics and directly or indirectly govern territory. Such groups exert tremendous influence on their societies, while jihadi organizations remain on the fringe because they have been neither able to compromise and enter politics nor hold territory for long periods of time.

V. Future Directions

Al-Zawahiri still pushes the message that “behind all the conflicts involving Muslims one finds either the direct hand of the secular crusader West in the leadership of America, or its silent approval, connivance, collusion, or intrigues.”⁶³ Yet, in practice, most groups do not seem to share his perspective, and indeed one of the most striking features of the broader jihadi movement in the last decade is its localization. The movement as a whole, including al-Qa`ida, always had local and global ambitions, and this continues to this day, while the Islamic State still encourages attacks on the West, including in the United States. The Al-Qa`ida core, however, has not conducted a major attack on the West in over a decade, and in 2015, it reportedly instructed its Syrian affiliate to focus on Syria, not international terrorism.^b The bulk of the core Islamic State organization is focused on reviving its power in Iraq and Syria. The other most active groups such as AQAP, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and the Taliban, among others, all focus first and foremost on civil wars in their country and their region. This consumes the vast majority of their resources and the attention of their senior leadership. It also enables them to exploit local grievances for recruitment. In many of these countries, the groups control at least some territory, and they can fulfill their ideology by proselytizing and enforcing ‘Islamic’ law.

Part of the localization trend is simply opportunity combined with the greater difficulties in attacking the West due to more effective U.S. counterterrorism. Many governments in the Middle East are far weaker than they were 18 years ago; opportunities also abound in the Sahel, East and West Africa, and other parts of the world. For some groups, like the Taliban, U.S. forces are in their country, enabling them to strike the United States and local enemies simultaneously.

The fate and aspirations of the perhaps 30,000 or so surviving foreign fighters who fought for the Islamic State are also import-

b Al-Qa`ida’s affiliate in Yemen had links to the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris. Catherine Shoichet and Josh Levs, “Al Qaeda branch claims Charlie Hebdo attacks was years in the making,” CNN, January 14, 2015; “Al-Qaeda ‘orders Syria’s Al-Nusra Front not to attack West,” BBC, May 28, 2015.

ant factors that will determine the shape of the jihadi movement in future years.⁶⁴ Scholar Petter Nesser finds that foreign fighters played an important role in many terrorist plots in Europe and veterans from previous conflicts served as recruiters and facilitators for subsequent waves of jihad.⁶⁵ Governments, however, are far more focused on this danger than they were in the pre-9/11 era, and thus the counterterrorism response is more effective. The United States has not suffered an attack from foreign fighters since 9/11, and homegrown violent extremists have eclipsed foreign fighters in Europe as well in recent years, though the large number of European foreign fighters and the uneven quality of security services remain a concern. In addition, many European states give convicted foreign fighters only short stays in prison, which enables them to radicalize others yet be released quickly.⁶⁶ Returning foreign fighters are likely to be a particular problem in Muslim countries with weak security services, seeding future terrorist groups and exacerbating civil wars.⁶⁷

Potential U.S. troop withdrawals or further drawdowns in places like Afghanistan and Syria hinder efforts to target potential jihadi safe havens. Already, a U.S. government report found that the re-

duction of U.S. forces in Syria helped the Islamic State mount a limited comeback there.⁶⁸ However, the United States still maintains a regional basing network and works with local partners, giving it direct and indirect means to pressure safe havens around the world. Moreover, in contrast to the pre-9/11 era, the United States is far more likely to act kinetically to disrupt any perceived threat. So a U.S. withdrawal from Syria or Afghanistan does not mean the United States has no ability to target jihadis there, though it would be more difficult.

The United States must take a hard look at its interests when designing its counterterrorism strategy. The further destabilization of Yemen or West Africa, or terrorist attacks in parts of the world like Sri Lanka, is dangerous for those countries, but the impact on U.S. security is questionable and a massive U.S. commitment to these countries is not necessary. The U.S. mix of intelligence cooperation, putting pressure on havens, and better homeland security has kept America itself mostly safe and also helped limit the threat to Europe and other key areas. Jihadi terrorism, of course, will not go away, but the impact will mostly be felt in parts of the world where U.S. interests are limited. **CTC**

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A View from the CT Foxhole: Joseph Maguire, Acting Director of National Intelligence

By Paul Cruickshank and Brian Dodwell

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted while Joseph Maguire was still serving as the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center and shortly before he transitioned to his new role as Acting Director of National Intelligence.

Joseph Maguire was sworn in as the sixth director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) on December 27, 2018. In August 2019, he became the Acting Director of National Intelligence (DNI). Maguire previously served as NCTC's Deputy Director for Strategic Operational Planning from 2007 to 2010, and represented the Center as a part of the National Security Council's Counterterrorism Security Group.

Prior to his confirmation as the director of NCTC, Maguire served as president and CEO of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides college scholarships and educational counseling to the surviving children of fallen special operations personnel, and immediate financial grants to severely combat-wounded and hospitalized special operations personnel and their families. Prior to leading the foundation, he was a vice president with Booz Allen Hamilton. Maguire retired from the United States Navy in 2010 as a vice admiral, culminating a 36-year career as a naval special warfare officer. He commanded at every level, including the Naval Special Warfare Command.

NCTC leads and integrates the national counterterrorism (CT) effort by fusing foreign and domestic CT information, providing terrorism analysis, sharing information with partners across the counterterrorism enterprise, and driving whole-of-government action to secure national CT objectives.

CTC: Eighteen years on from 9/11, what is your assessment of the jihadi terrorist threat facing the U.S. homeland and U.S. interests overseas?

Maguire: The counterterrorism enterprise is the best example of integration that exists across our national security establishment. We built a comprehensive infrastructure to analyze, assess and minimize the terrorism threat. Since the catastrophic attacks on 9/11, we have significantly diminished the ability of jihadists to strike the U.S. by removing hundreds of leaders and operatives, disrupting dozens of networks and plots, and degrading safe havens. But some jihadist groups still have that intent, not only to target the homeland but also our interests overseas. They are continually adapting to setbacks by modifying their tactics, seeking out alternative safe havens, and using new and emerging technologies to communicate, recruit, and conduct attacks. This makes for an increasingly diverse and unpredictable threat, and one that has evolved over time. Eighteen years ago, we were primarily focused on al-Qa`ida,

which was then headquartered in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan and along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border areas. Fast forward to now, and the global jihadist threat landscape still includes al-Qa`ida, but also now its four affiliates as well as ISIS and its network of almost two dozen global branches and networks. In fact, we assess global jihadist groups have extended their reach into more countries than at any other point in the movement's 40-year history. This growth has largely paralleled the deterioration of security, governance, and humanitarian conditions in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia. While this threat will continue to be a challenge for us, the U.S. and our partners continue to achieve significant successes applying kinetic pressure on top of the jihadist organizations—most recently demonstrated through the degradation of ISIS safe havens in Iraq and Syria—which has taken time away from them and diminished the luxury they had to plan and execute external attacks. Going forward, we will need to apply persistent pressure against these groups, but we also need to expand our tools in the toolbox to do much more than kinetic to address the permissive environments which they repeatedly exploit.

At home, our Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, and all of the interagency have done an excellent job of preventing global jihadists from traveling to the United States. While we remain concerned about the threat from groups overseas, the homeland threat has changed. The most persistent and frequent form of global jihadist terrorism in our country is homegrown violent extremists; individuals who are inspired by global jihadism and radicalize within our borders. Before 2014, we saw a few terrorist groups attempting to encourage supporters to attack. One of the most prominent examples of that was AQAP's Inspire Magazine. Since 2014, we've seen ISIS demonstrate the ability to leverage social media, mobile messaging applications, and high-quality propaganda to maintain an image as the most prominent global jihadist group and convince individuals around the globe that it is worth fighting and even dying for their movement. So, within the U.S., the Federal Bureau of Investigation has worked hard over the last several years to diminish the HVE threat. This year, we have had one HVE attack. In 2018, we had four HVE attacks. And in 2017, we had five. But that said, the FBI, according to Director [Christopher] Wray, has about 1,000 active HVE cases that he's following right now in all 50 states. These are all related to the jihadi threat and suggest this is a real threat that as of yet does not seem to be diminishing with the changes in the terrorism landscape overseas.

So, you take a look at all of the effort we put in here, job number one is protecting the homeland. And we've done a good job since our wake-up on the 11th of September 2001. Yet, the threat remains, and after all this time, much remains to be done to make sure the homeland, our citizens and our interests are safe.

CTC: In no small measure because of U.S.-led counterterrorism

efforts, the Islamic State has been seriously degraded, losing all of its territory in Syria and Iraq. However, the group is still thought, according to the United Nations, to retain up to \$300 million in financial reserves¹ and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, earlier this year surfaced in a video² and is still at large. What is your assessment of the threat that the Islamic State poses today?

Maguire: ISIS still remains a tremendous threat in spite of the loss of the caliphate. Since the rise of ISIS in about 2013, somewhere around 45,000 to 50,000 foreign terrorist fighters entered into that combat zone. The West has been effective in applying kinetic pressure and working with Syrian Democratic Forces as well as with the Iraqi government to reduce the physical caliphate, but that was not without great cost. That said, we have killed thousands of them and taken away their leadership. We have bought time and space for us and taken away time and space from ISIS. But now that the Syrian Democratic Forces have cleared the Middle Euphrates River Valley, they have over 2,000 foreign terrorist fighters in their internment camps. There are roughly 72,000 internally displaced people in the Al-Hol camp. Many of them are, in fact, hardcore ISIS. And we estimate that tens of thousands more fighters remain unaccounted for in Syria and Iraq.

ISIS has tried to demonstrate that although they've lost the caliphate, they still remain a viable threat. Since March of this year, the group has identified additional branches and now has a network of approximately two dozen global branches and networks. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi remains at large—he remains as the titular head of the organization, and as you know, after the caliphate fell, he made a point of coming out and making sure that he was visible and was able to keep his leadership alive. The ISIS branch in Southeast Asia and others have sworn allegiance to al-Baghdadi to demonstrate that although ISIS lost the physical caliphate, they still have influence that is more than just in the Middle East. NCTC's assessment is that al-Baghdadi and the core ISIS are somewhere still in Syria and Iraq. They are still able to move finances back and forth.

As for the threat going forward, I think the greatest threat we in the West have is the foreign terrorist fighters that have left that we did not know about and the 2,000-plus foreign terrorist fighters that are in the Syrian Democratic Forces camps. The U.S. military and our partners and allies are biometrically enrolling those foreign terrorist fighters so if they leave, we can track them. But we don't necessarily have accurate information that the name that they provided [is] who they really are. We in the West really need to address this situation, especially given the pressure that the Syrian Democratic Forces are facing right now within Syria and the difficulty with these prisons. We must do our best to account for terrorists hiding in the refugee camps and to locate any other fighters still aligned with core ISIS, who altogether could still prompt a resurgence.

I also remained concerned about ISIS' adaptability. They've certainly lost a lot of their leadership and capability, but they have learned a great deal as well. As I noted earlier, terrorist groups are constantly evolving and they are agile. We in the West, certainly we in the intelligence community, need to be every bit as agile as they are and do our level best to stay ahead of that.

The bottom line is [currently] ISIS remains a threat. There's more of them in more places, than during their ascent in 2013. So with all the successes that the West has had—our partners, the in-



Acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire

telligence community, and military—and the defeat of the physical caliphate, with the foreign terrorist fighters that remain in Syrian Democratic Forces custody as well as the thousands and thousands of foreign terrorist fighters that are unaccounted for and we assess have gone to ground in Syria and Iraq, they pose a tremendous threat. And the issue of repatriation is very difficult. We've got at least 8,000 foreign terrorist fighters that we know of who have departed the conflict zone, but they came from over 110 different countries. The threat of returnees is tremendous. And we also have a correlation [to] the amount of time they spent in combat: those in the conflict zone longer before they return home, tend to be more capable of providing a threat to the West.

The State Department and Department of Defense have worked very closely with our partners and allies. But repatriating these foreign terrorist fighters is an extremely difficult problem. Most of the nations do not have laws with which they can prosecute these individuals. And if they do, they are democracies, so they require battlefield evidence with a chain of custody that would hold up in court. Then, if they are convicted, the sentence would in many cases be three to five years, which is minimal. And then they wind up in prison with the other radicalized prisoners, so when they eventually do come out in their home countries, they feel like they've got a worse problem than they have today. So, this is extremely complicated. It needs to be addressed by all of us in the West. As I mentioned earlier, if we don't do something about this now, they have all the recipes and the timing is right for the resurgence of this terrorist group, an ISIS 2.0.

CTC: The Easter 2019 Sri Lanka attacks caught the intelligence community by surprise. There had been very little jihadi activity in Sri Lanka up until that point.³ And then you had these major, coordinated suicide bombings, which killed a lot of people. What are the lessons learned given it did catch a lot of people by surprise?

Maguire: The intelligence community has learned a lot from the Sri Lanka attacks. The factors that led to the Easter Sunday attacks were a lack of coordination among Sri Lankan security services, the attackers' access to and competence with explosive materials, the discipline of the attack cell members, and familial involvement that kept some of the plans insular. In addition to that, we have spent a lot of time following the money, tracking and interdicting foreign terrorist finance as it flows between and within groups. But the Sri Lanka attacks were financed by wealthy members of that terrorist cell. The Sri Lanka attackers also targeted public spaces, in this case, churches which often have no security measures in place and are vulnerable to this type of attack.

We have seen the use of family members in other attacks further afield than Sri Lanka. One example was in the Philippines earlier this year where an Indonesian couple went into a church in Jolo and conducted a suicide bombing.⁴ And in May 2018 in Indonesia, a family with their children conducted suicide attacks against three churches.⁵

The attacks in Sri Lanka, and other global ISIS attacks, demonstrate to us the need for all governments to evaluate their security and intelligence structures and reflect on whether they share information appropriately on counterterrorism matters internally and externally. Closer global cooperation in the post Syria and Iraq era will further help us all detect burgeoning ISIS branches and networks.

CTC: All this points to how critical information sharing is.

Maguire: 9/11 was in part a failure of information sharing. And we work very, very hard within the international community, particularly with our Five Eye partners,^a in sharing as much information as we can. We're all in this thing together. We have our Five Eye partners; we have our other allies that we work extremely closely with. And we are all managing more information than ever, so we all have to find ways to separate the signal from the noise.

Within the U.S. government, information sharing in the intelligence community has come a long, long way, and that's probably one of the greatest successes that we've had since the beginning of this campaign. But I'm also seeing, since I've been back to NCTC, that information sharing across the board between and among agencies and partners is sliding a little bit back to the left, and that's because of compartmentalization. But that's a much larger issue than just the counterterrorism information sharing, and that is being addressed by the intelligence community.

CTC: What is your assessment, all these months later, of the Islamic State nexus to the Sri Lanka attacks? Did ISIS direct it to any degree? Or is it still quite cloudy in terms of figuring this out?

Maguire: It's not cloudy. It's our assessment that ISIS leaders in Syria and Iraq had no role in either the plotting or the execution. But clearly, ISIS inspired the attack as evidenced by the pledge video that the attackers made the day before. But we have no indication at all that ISIS was involved. This is an extremely insular group, so

not only was the West surprised by the attack, but I think it's safe to say that ISIS was also extremely surprised. But they'll always claim what they view as a win.

CTC: Any firm idea of whether any of the Sri Lanka attackers actually trained in Syria with the Islamic State?

Maguire: We have no information to corroborate that any of the attackers trained in Syria. Most of the operation was likely planned in Sri Lanka. We view the ISIS threat throughout South and Southeast Asia as having been and still remaining a strong threat.

CTC: We spend a lot of time talking al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State, but the role of Shi`a militant groups over the years has not received as much public attention. From the perspective of the National Counterterrorism Center, how do you perceive that threat? Is it a threat that is growing, or is the general public just becoming increasingly aware of it? How is the trajectory of the Shi`a militancy threat looking?

Maguire: It's quite evident that people who aren't steeped in counterterrorism issues have become much more sensitized to the threat since the sanctions that we've placed on Iran, and when they struck the oil tankers and everything that's been going on there. But Iran has really expanded its footprint in the Middle East over the last decade: Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the Gaza Strip. They have, as you said, their Shi`a militia forces that they train, that they provide significant sophisticated weapons to, and of course, their greatest proxy is Lebanese Hezbollah. The only terrorist group that's killed more Americans than them is al-Qa`ida. We have sanctioned Iran as being a state sponsor of terrorism. The IRGC-Quds Force are also a terrorist organization. The Iranians have been trying really hard over the last couple of months since the tensions have risen to be able to conduct operations with plausible deniability.

Our assessment is that they have provided the resources and guidance to the Shi`a militia and Hezbollah in the event of hostilities with the United States. This is nothing new to the American military over there; they've always viewed the Shi`a militia forces as something that's a threat. As we all understand, back in Iraq around 2006, we lost about 600 of our U.S. military through the explosively formed penetrators. We anticipate that they've distributed these EFPs to the Shi`a militia. But as far as Hezbollah is concerned, they have thousands of rockets, missiles, and sophisticated weapons that they could use against Israel or us.

We assess that Iran will do everything they can not to go into a conventional conflict with the United States because they realize they cannot match the United States in its conventional capability. So, it is most likely that if something happens, they will encourage the Shi`a militia forces and Hezbollah to attack [the] U.S. and our interests. Hezbollah is spread out in many different countries. The intent would be to give Tehran plausible deniability. But I would anticipate we would respond to whatever that group is, and I do think our national policy would be that we would also hold Iran accountable for its proxy forces.

CTC: You mentioned the designation of the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization, which was a bit of a new step given its official status as an Iranian government agency. Could you comment on the rationale behind that designation, but more impor-

a Editor's Note: The Five Eyes (FVEY) is an intelligence alliance of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

tantly, what impact this has had on the United States' ability to counteract that threat?

Maguire: As far as the National Counterterrorism Center is concerned, designating the IRGC and the Quds Force as a foreign terrorist organization has meant that we have had to ingest that information into our data bank of known and suspected terrorists. So that has created a great deal of work for us. But it's also complicated in that the IRGC also has business interests within Iran and a lot of our partners and allies also have relationships and business with them. So, it's extremely complicated, but it has not to any great extent really impacted the work that we've done here or the counterterrorism community at large. But certainly it was a policy statement. They are the action arm. If we've identified Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism, then the IRGC-Quds Force is the action arm of that state that sponsors terrorism. So that's the nexus there.

CTC: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo drew attention to a suicide bomb attack on May 31 in Kabul, which injured four American servicemen and which the U.S. government believes was instigated by Iran.⁶ To what degree do you assess Iran is preparing to put themselves in a position to harm U.S. interests and even the U.S. homeland in the case of conflict between the two countries?

Maguire: I was in Kabul on the 31st of May when that attack took place. It's just a page out of their playbook, what they're doing—again using proxies, paying financially for that organization to go ahead and do the attack, be able to put pressure on Americans and our interests, and make it uncomfortable for us to be in the area. But that's the cost of doing business out there. I think they will do everything they can and take every opportunity they have in order to make life unpleasant for us, and to make the cost of being involved in that part of the world as high a cost as possible. But we have national interests there, and we will remain steadfast.

As to your question on the threat to the U.S. homeland, we know from the attempted attack on the Saudi ambassador years ago⁷ that they had Iranian assets here. There's no saying that you have all of them identified. And if they can, once again, they'll use their proxies. As for the threat to the homeland from Iranian proxies right now in the U.S., I do not view that as a grave threat thanks to the work of our law enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Homeland Security.

CTC: When it comes to the terror threat, technologies are continuing to evolve. We've seen that through unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), 3D printing, bio engineering, cyber, and so on. And there's naturally concern they can be exploited by terrorist groups. In testimony⁸ before your confirmation, you said, "In order to stay ahead of our adversaries, NCTC must find ways to appropriately acquire and adapt new technologies while mitigating the threat of terrorist use of technology." Could you elaborate a bit on that and speak to what NCTC is doing in this sphere?

Maguire: At one point in time, you had to be a sovereign nation to have this kind of technology, but with the proliferation of technology and with the global economy, much of it is now easy to acquire and simple to use. ISIS and Hezbollah in particular, have

been developing additional, sophisticated technologies, whether it is UASs [unmanned aircraft systems] or quad-copter drones with munitions on them. NCTC's Technical Evaluation Program (NTEP) works to assess the threats posed by terrorist use of novel and disruptive emerging technologies including their viability and lethality. In this program, for example, we have people who will read information terrorists might publish in [al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula's] Inspire [magazine] that talks about "this is a great formula to use for the explosive, this is what you do with the UASs" and where we will also process information from sensitive intelligence reporting. Then, our analysts will conduct evaluations on whether this can be replicated using the instructions, and the most effective counter measures.

Another area in which terrorists have exploited technology is in communications. They use the internet and encryption to a great extent. They understand technology. We are a technological nation, and we have to make sure we understand the problem set and not be reactive but be anticipatory to what they're going to do.

We spend a great deal of effort here not just at National Counterterrorism Center but working with American industry and all of our partners here to try to understand the threat, not only as it exists today but based on the technology and what's developing, and what can we anticipate that our adversaries might use tomorrow. Terrorists have exploited technology in communications, using the internet and encryption to a great extent, making it a critical need for us to work closely with industry. There was just a conference out in Palo Alto in July 2019 for the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism—led by Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube—focused on how the tech industry is combating terrorist use of the internet. Industry has been extremely supportive. We routinely share strategic insights to help them identify terrorist activity online and understand the context of what's out there in a way that informs of the terrorist threat, like what was promulgated in the case of Christchurch attacks in New Zealand, without narrowing their capability. We want to help quickly identify nefarious content and help to prevent others from downloading and republishing. So we've provided terrorist data and contextual information for them to see [to show them what to look out for], and we partner with industry that doesn't always get the credit due for contributions to counterterrorism efforts.

CTC: How do you see a balance between the competing pressures that some of these companies are under? Because on the one hand, for many of these companies, ensuring the privacy of their users is a big part of their marketing and their appeal to consumers. On the other hand, if something bad happens where their platform played a significant role, that's also bad from a PR perspective for them. So how do you see these companies thinking through those competing forces? For a while, there was significant concern, articulated by the FBI among others, about 'going dark' when it came to the use of encryption. Have we seen a shift? Or are we still in a precarious balance between these pressures?

Maguire: Well, encryption's a whole different thing. But as far as just Facebook and the like are concerned, they have been extremely supportive, just trying to do the right thing. What happened in Christchurch, what happened in the Poway, California, synagogue,⁹ and what happened in the Pittsburgh synagogue, they understand

the damage that can result from these social media posts. And they also understand full well copycats and people just taking this information, so they are, in my estimation, extremely responsible industry partners in this fight. And they have not been given enough credit for that. When it comes to technology and Facebook, they are light years ahead of us, and we think offering unique insights on what could be done allows them to prioritize and execute how they see best. They're capable of doing all of these things without having government getting in the way.

CTC: If we could pivot to the mission set at NCTC. This has been an incredibly key organization for improving coordination between the different agencies here, becoming a key hub for information and analysis for the community of people working in counterterrorism in the United States. What do you see as the key value added of NCTC's work here? And how do you feel that it needs to evolve as the landscape shifts?

Maguire: NCTC was established through the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, which was established as a result of the 9/11 failure. So this center is the result of failure in communication, trust, and imagination. We've been around for 15 years now, and our value proposition is the authorities that we have allow us to possess and acquire all terrorism information that the United States either possesses or acquires. Our most important value-add, though, is the workforce that is here, with 15 years of focused counterterrorism intelligence. Part of our strength is we have 20 different governmental organizations that are also represented here at the National Counterterrorism Center. So, it is a culture of sharing this information and to ensure all stakeholders who have equities in this information receive this. We don't wait for an inquiry. We push it out. The 20 different representatives from their governmental agencies come from FBI, Justice, Treasury, CIA, DoD, and others, with the strengths that each department or agency has. But while they're here, if there ever is an issue that we don't have the requisite talent or information [for], all they have to do is go back to their parent organization and reinforce what we need here.

Our counterterrorism effort is really much more of a coalition of the willing than an enterprise. I think NCTC as the mission manager of counterterrorism is without a doubt the best example within the interagency of the United States government for sharing information. And I think to a large degree, the fact that we have that culture—understanding why we're here, where we came from—just reinforces the need to be able to share. As I mentioned before, we've done a good job of keeping terrorists from coming across the border. But right now, the greatest threat we have against the homeland is the homegrown violent extremist.

We've talked about Islamist terrorism, but domestic terrorism is also a great threat to the homeland. Recent high-profile attacks internationally like Christchurch, New Zealand, and domestically, with Pittsburgh, San Diego, and El Paso in particular have amplified conversations about the significance of the threat and the role of the U.S. government's response.

So, in as much as we've lost more Americans from homegrown violent extremists and domestic terrorism threats than we have from Islamists from outside [since 9/11], we at NCTC are building our in-house capacity to support the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security efforts to combat the threat of domestic terrorism. As we continue to support our partners in this, we are training analysts in understanding how to

tackle domestic terrorism within the guidelines and rules that protect privacy and civil liberties, with oversight to ensure adherence to the law.

The threat is evolving, and unfortunately, domestic terrorism is a threat that the nation is facing right now. When I look at this as the National Counterterrorism Center, I know there are significant things we can do to support the national effort and aid the fight. We are hosting a two-day conference in September with invited members from government, academia and think tanks to discuss these issues and the whole-of-government response. As the threat continues to expand, we need to be mindful that we cannot sit back and be comfortable with what we're doing today. We need to continuously be seeking ways to do more, be more effective, and more efficient in this space. The nation expects us to keep them safe, and we have to make sure that we live up to that. It is a no-fail mission.

CTC: Some, including your predecessor as director of NCTC, have suggested a more formal change in NCTC's mission to encompass some of the domestic terrorism issues may be warranted.¹⁰ Do you feel that's necessary, or do you feel under your existing construct, you can do the things you're talking about?

Maguire: I've had discussions with FBI Director Christopher Wray about this as well as Special Agent Mike McGarrity, who runs the counterterrorism directorate for the FBI, and the FBI is extremely supportive. I don't want to rush into anything—we need to be sure we are value added and do no harm to the current process. The FBI is doing a wonderful job, but the domestic terrorism threat is evolving and we are seeing an international connection with that, so that is where NCTC is best positioned to get involved. We are not rushing into this. Our role is clearly a support role for FBI and for the Department of Homeland Security.

CTC: You served for 36 years as a naval special warfare officer, commanding at every level, including the Naval Special Warfare Command. How did this help prepare you to fulfill your duties as NCTC director?

Maguire: Having spent my time in Naval Special Warfare and having had an opportunity to command—I spent 39 months as the commander of Naval Special Warfare while my forces were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan—I can honestly tell you it was very difficult time for the force. And so, there were a lot of lessons learned and it made me fully aware how significant the stakes are.

I first came to NCTC as director of strategic operational planning from 2007 to 2010. But now that I am back, the relationships I have with the special operations community, my understanding of the fight has been a significant help to me. A bit earlier this year, just with my relationships with the special operations community, I was able to travel to Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and see firsthand the conditions on the ground, talk to our special operations forces, our intelligence professionals out there, our political leaders out there, the Chiefs of Mission, and the deputy Chiefs of Mission, as well as those who were negotiating with the Taliban. I don't think I would have access to be able to go there, especially into Iraq, with the conditions that were taking place with the Iranians, I don't think the CENTCOM commander would have given me the permission to go in there had I not had that special operator background.

While being in Washington is critically important to work in

the interagency and the national security enterprise, being able to get out there and see things firsthand, hear it from the individuals who are actually implementing national security at the grassroots level, talk to men who were in firefight the day before, be in Kabul when two attacks go off and people are killed makes it all very real. It brings it home. I'm no longer a SEAL; I'm no longer in special operations. But one of our main customers at the National Counterterrorism Center is the special operations community. We provide national intelligence to them, but we are also on the receiving end from the work that they're doing out there. We have many of our analysts that are deployed with the forces, and we also have special operation forces who are embedded with us here at the National Counterterrorism Center. So, I think my background is helping me more than I even would have thought before I came back into this job. Not that you need to be a special operations individual to effectively do this job, but having that experience in the past has been helpful to me. Most things in life are about relationships and trust, and I have the relationships and trust with the special operations forces, many of whom I trained because I had the training command from 1997 to 1999, and I pinned the trident on a lot of these young guys when they were E-4s and ensigns, and they're now captains and master chiefs.

One of my officers in the wardroom when I had command of SEAL Team 2. When I was in Baghdad, I had an opportunity to see him and how high he's risen through the ranks since then. It's God's way of telling me I'm getting old. So, this whole thing is very real to me. But now where I am, I have to play my role, stay in my space, and do what I can to support them there. I also have an understanding of the sacrifice they're making, and we back here need to be worthy of what they're sacrificing. The kinetic pressure that they've been applying has really been a tremendous help to us, but we need to do more. We just can't kill our way out of this.

CTC: Russ Travers, the deputy director of NCTC [acting director as of August 2019], in a recent Q&A with former CIA Acting Director Michael Morell [currently a senior fellow at CTC] talked about a certain amount of fatigue in this country about the terrorism threat.¹¹ Given there is this palpable sense of exhaustion and the risk this could lead to complacency and parts of the counterterrorism effort being de-prioritized, what are the things that most concern you and what are the things that make you the most hopeful?

Maguire: In spite of our successes, they're still trying to strike the homeland and knock down our airliners and attack our interests abroad. But after 18 years, and I understand this, the American people have changed the channel. The counterterrorism enterprise is really, I think as Russ said, victims of our own success, in that the nation has not been hit by a terrorist attack externally directed by a foreign terrorist organization since September 11, 2001. And because of that, people don't understand all the efforts that have gone into keeping the homeland safe. The view according to some is because we haven't been hit, well, "what's the problem?" Well, the problem still persists.

But in addition to that big picture, Russia and China and North Korea and Iran are significant threats, and at the national level, we now we have the additional priorities of great power competition and I support the policy. Not too long ago, it was all things counterterrorism all the time. And that is no longer the case. So with those other four threats—I just call them additional threats, other people refer to them as priorities—my job as the director of the National Counterterrorism Center is to ensure that counterterrorism does not become the number-one threat again because we blew it and we missed it. It is a no-fail mission.

I want to make sure that we support the national policy. But great power competitions are going on right now. When I was in Syria, the Russians were in Syria in Manbij. We've got our forces in Yemen, and Iran is present all through there. The Chinese are present all through Africa in areas [where] our forces are also present. With counterterrorism no longer being the number-one priority, my job is to make sure that the counterterrorism enterprise is resourced properly to support and protect the homeland. The country has invested a tremendous amount of money in our counterterrorism efforts and I fully endorse a hard look at how our money is being spent and the comparative risks posed by other threats. But we need to be careful. While the country is faced with a complex national security environment and must address other threats, I worry that there is an unwarranted degree of complacency setting in when it comes to terrorism.

I come to work every single day to make sure that counterterrorism does not become the number-one issue here again. The American people expect us to keep them safe. And the folks here at the Center, the intelligence community, the interagency, and our foreign partners work tirelessly in this effort. **CTC**

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Taking Aim: Islamic State Khorasan's Leadership Losses

By Amira Jadoon and Andrew Mines

Since its official formation in Afghanistan and Pakistan in early 2015, the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) has emerged as one of the Islamic State's deadliest affiliates. While extensive counterterrorism operations have resulted in leadership decapitation, ISK retains its ability to orchestrate lethal attacks and continuously replenish key leadership positions. A closer examination of ISK's leadership losses between 2015 and 2018 by leadership tier, year, and geography highlights the group's tenacious presence in Nangarhar (Afghanistan) and Baluchistan (Pakistan), despite declines in overall number of attacks. An important factor contributing to ISK's resiliency appears to be rooted in its steady recruitment of experienced Pakistani militants that sustain its leadership ranks.

The clandestine nature of terrorist organizations often means that it is difficult to assess the composition of their resource bases or the configuration and size of their leadership structures. While past studies have assessed Islamic State Khorasan's—the group's wilaya (province) in Afghanistan and Pakistan—organizational capacity by examining its network of operational alliances with local groups, and patterns of its tactics and target choices,¹ to the authors' knowledge, no systematic study has analyzed wide-ranging counterterrorism (CT) efforts against the group to gain insights about one of its most important elements—the group's leadership.

This article exploits publicly reported accounts of the group's leadership losses between 2015 and 2018, against the backdrop of its operational activity, to gain new insights about ISK's militant base, an important source of its demonstrated resiliency. The authors first provide a brief overview of extensive CT efforts against a seemingly resilient ISK to establish the case for examining ISK's leadership losses more closely. This is followed by a description of the methodology used, the data collected, and a discussion of key findings. While scholarly literature on the effectiveness of leader-

ship decapitation remains mixed, this study finds considerable geographical variation in the effect of leadership losses on ISK's violent capacity, reflective of the importance of sub-national operational environments. While ISK's total leadership losses appear to have curtailed its attacks in some regions, they remain steady in others. Examining ISK's leadership losses in the aggregate by tiers, year, and geography highlights the difficulty facing Afghan and Pakistani security forces to penetrate the two hubs of ISK activity (Nangarhar and Baluchistan) and the critical role of experienced Pakistani militants in sustaining ISK's leadership.

ISK's Persistence in the Face of Losses

Since the official formation of its Afghanistan and Pakistan province in January 2015, the ISK's campaign of terror against state and civilian targets has garnered the attention of regional and global policymakers. More recently, the Islamic State's loss of its final territorial holding in Syria's Baghouz in March 2019 and its return to guerrilla tactics in the Syria/Iraq region have resulted in speculation about which of the organization's many wilayat might be the next big challenge to global CT efforts. Arguably, the Islamic State's wing in Afghanistan and Pakistan has the potential to become ISK's most dangerous provinces. This is not only because of ISK's demonstrated capacity thus far, but its potential to attract surplus resources from Islamic State 'Central,' which is estimated to currently have between \$50 and \$300 million in funds.² However, Islamic State Central's ability to liquidate and transfer funds to its branches around the world, much of which were generated during the caliphate era,³ remains unclear. But ISK does not appear to be entirely dependent on the center for resources; the group has reportedly exploited local mineral, lumber, and talc black markets, in addition to extortion and kidnapping for ransom.⁴ More generally, the existing security landscape in Afghanistan and Pakistan's weakly governed areas (with inadequate law enforcement and illegal smuggling routes) furnishes the Khorasan province with a permissive operating environment for terrorist groups. As such, ISK is not only considered to be a regional threat but—according to some analysts—one that is capable of facilitating attacks against Western countries.⁵

Recent organizational changes by the Islamic State, which saw the emergence of Islamic State-Pakistan as well as Islamic State-Hind (India) in May 2019, indicate the group's intention to continue its efforts across the region.⁶ Although it is too early to understand fully the drivers or implications of these changes, the creation of Islamic State-Pakistan and Islamic State-Hind suggests an orga-

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nizational restructuring of Islamic State's presence in the region.^a While this is likely to create some organizational redundancy across the region, it can allow the Islamic State to better modulate and manage differences in strategy, tactics, and membership relevant to each specific country.⁷ Establishing multiple Islamic State branches by country in South-Central Asia is likely to give more autonomy to the leadership in each country, an ability to exploit local developments and circumvent disputes amongst leaders.

ISK has retained its status as a politically relevant terrorist organization despite having repeatedly clashed with both state and non-state actors and having suffered significant militant losses. In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, ISK has endured extensive military operations tailored to undermine the group's militant base;⁸ such CT efforts have resulted in the killing of ISK individuals in leadership roles at the provincial, district, and sub-district level.⁹ This may be a reasonable strategy in some circumstances, given that leadership decapitation has been shown to increase mortality rates of terrorist groups.^b In early 2016, the U.S. military gained broader authority to launch airstrikes against Islamic State operatives and loyalists within Afghanistan;¹⁰ it subsequently deployed its most powerful non-nuclear bomb on an ISK camp in Nangarhar in April 2017.¹¹ U.S. airstrikes have killed numerous prominent ISK leaders based in Afghanistan. In August 2018, the U.S. military confirmed the death of Abu Saad Orakzai in Nangarhar, marking the fourth announcement of the killing of an ISK emir (head of the group).¹²

In Pakistan as well, targeted efforts against ISK have resulted in the arrests of several high-profile leaders.¹³ One of the more prominent arrests involved the capture of the head of ISK's network in Sindh province, Ujmar Kathiwer (also spelled Umer Kathio), in January 2016. Prior to joining the Islamic State, Kathiwer, based out of Karachi, had been networking recruits on behalf of al-Qa`ida since 2011.¹⁴ His defection to ISK marks one of several former AQIS militants who became prominent leaders within ISK's network in Pakistan, including the network of individuals responsible for carrying out the Safoora Goth Massacre in Karachi in May 2015, an attack on a bus carrying Shi`a Muslims that left over 40 dead.¹⁵

The above examples illustrate only a few of ISK's high-level losses. Despite the existence of numerous reports of ISK's militants being successfully targeted, there is currently a lack of an overarching open-source assessment of the landscape of ISK's losses across the AfPak region since 2015. To the extent possible, answering the following questions can enhance understanding of the expanse of

ISK's operational base and corresponding activity:

- What results have operations against ISK yielded in terms of leadership losses across Afghanistan and Pakistan over the span of four years?
- In what capacity and roles did these individuals operate?
- Which areas have emerged as the hotspots of ISK's leadership cadres?
- What do we know about the countries of origin and prior affiliations of ISK's leaders?

A detailed examination of the who, where, and how of ISK's leadership losses can shed light on the structure and nature of its leadership and the rate at which the group is able to replenish its leadership ranks.

Methodology and Coding of Leadership Tiers

To answer these questions, the authors compiled an original database by analyzing and coding open-source reports regarding deaths, captures, and surrenders of all ISK militants between January 2015 and December 2018. The database captures various characteristics pertaining to the individuals targeted in counterterrorism efforts by coalition forces and Afghan and Pakistani security forces. This article draws on a subset of this larger database to focus specifically on the loss of ISK members who were reported to be in some type of a leadership position. The leadership losses subset makes up approximately 4.1% of all ISK personnel losses recorded in the larger database (the latter captures all ISK operatives and loyalists reported killed, wounded, arrested/captured, and surrendered across the AfPak region). With regard to interpretation of the data presented in this study, an important limitation to consider is the authors' reliance on open-source resources in the English language, resulting in data that does not include information that may have only been reported in regional languages. Another limitation of this study is linked to the general nature of reporting about military operations in conflict regions; it is likely that some operations in Afghanistan-Pakistan were under-reported in areas that were inaccessible by local, national, or international reporters to confirm or deny outcomes. Collectively, these limitations are likely to make the authors' data more conservative approximations of ISK's losses.^c Figure 1 shows the four-tiered approach employed to code the relative ranking of ISK leaders killed or captured primarily in CT operations. Operational tactics used against ISK included drone strikes, airstrikes, ground force operations, police/security forces arrests, and artillery shelling.^d

a While the Islamic State announced the creation of its Pakistan and India chapters, it has not publicly provided any information on how these chapters are organizationally linked to the original Khorasan chapter. Given that recent attacks in Pakistan have been claimed by Islamic State-Pakistan and attacks in India-controlled Kashmir by Islamic State-Hind (while ISK continues to claim attacks in Afghanistan), the Pakistani and Indian chapters appear to be independent rather than sub-chapters of ISK. For example, see Robert Postings, "ISIS announces new India and Pakistan provinces, casually breaking up Khorasan," *Defense Post*, May 15, 2019.

b Many scholars argue that decapitation tactics can be an effective counterterrorism. See, for example, Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36:4 (2012): pp. 9-46. However, other researchers have argued that leader decapitation is not always effective and may even be counterproductive for certain types of groups. For example, see Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* 18:4 (2009): pp. 719-755.

c The data presented here excludes ISK's rank-and-file militants, or ISK sympathizers not indicated to be in any notable leadership position. The authors relied on English-language materials obtained via open sources including but not limited to Lexis-Nexis, local and national news stories, think-tank reports, and official documents released by governments. The authors were able to substantiate the majority of all reports by at least one additional source. While it is possible that the authors missed a handful of events due to a lack of access to some local media sources, it is less likely that these events included leadership-level militants beyond ISK's rank-and-file. Even low-level leadership losses were widely covered between these local and national media sources.

d The authors also included limited instances of ISK losses via uprisings by local militias to ensure completeness of data.

Tier 1 consists solely of emirs of the entire ISK organization.^e As of the publication of this article, four emirs were confirmed killed in CT operations. Tier 2 consists of a mix of spokesmen, provincial-level commanders and their deputies, chiefs and deputy chiefs of ISK's functional wings (e.g., intelligence, military operations, recruitment, etc.), and shura council members.^f The Tier 2 leadership level included, for example, Sharafat Shafiq, a former spokesman for ISK who was killed in an airstrike by the Afghan Air Force in November 2018.¹⁶ Tier 3 consists of district-level commanders and their deputies, and critical mid-tier leaders (i.e., leaders identified as "senior," "key," "notorious," or by other qualifiers). One Tier 3 leader was Mulla Hangul Pacha, a Pakistani national killed in a drone strike in Afghanistan in July 2016 who gained notoriety as a "senior" commander in Achin district of Nangarhar province for his role in gruesome executions of civilians.¹⁷ Finally, Tier 4 consists of local leaders or notable figures operating at the sub-district level. For example, an individual identified as "Muhajir," killed in a ground assault in Behsud, Nangarhar, in July 2018, is coded as a Tier 4 leader for his role as a notable urban attack coordinator and an IED expert.¹⁸ For each leadership loss reported, the authors coded (where available) the date, location (down to the district/town level), targeting force, targeting tactic, name, age, gender, nationality, reported role(s), and prior affiliation(s).

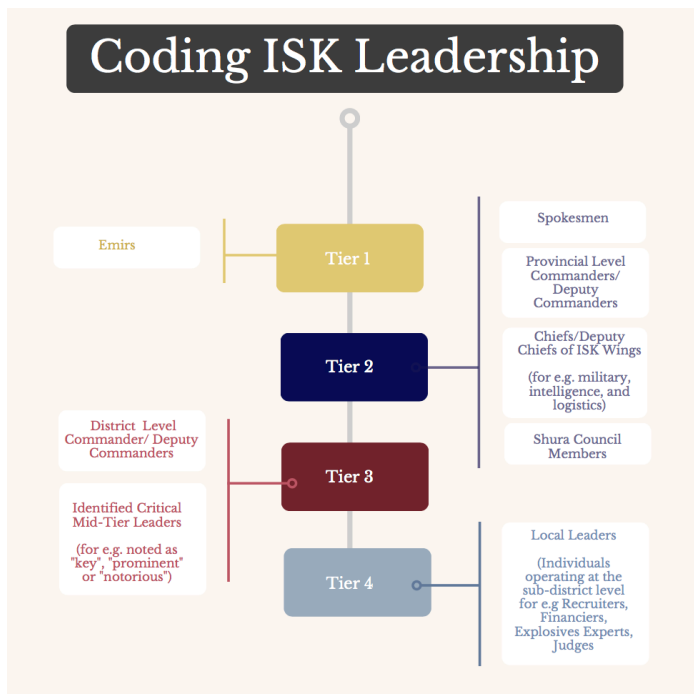


Figure 1: Description of ISK's Leadership Tiers

^e Emir is the Arabic word for commander and is not specific to the head commander of ISK or of any other militant group. The term is used by operatives and subordinates to refer to their superiors in general. To avoid confusion regarding the widespread use of the Arabic word emir by Islamic State operatives and other jihadis, the authors refer only to the head commander of ISK as emir, and all other commanders simply in the English equivalent—commander.

^f The Shura Council is generally a small group of individuals close to the emir who both provide advice and counsel to the emir and also select his successor in the event of death.

ISK Leaders Killed, Captured, and Surrendered between 2015-2018

By analyzing the leadership subset, the authors are able to derive the following initial insights about the characteristics of ISK leaders in four years of extensive CT campaigns by NATO, U.S., Afghan, and Pakistani forces: the scale of ISK's leadership losses over time, the geographical locations of those losses, the structure of leadership tiers, the presence of foreigners in leadership roles, and prior affiliations of the various leaders.

Leadership Losses by Year

In Afghanistan, the authors recorded a total of 399 individuals across the four leadership tiers who were either killed, captured, or surrendered during the four-year time period. Of these, almost 71% percent were reportedly killed and 24% arrested in various operations. These losses peaked in Afghanistan in 2017, amounting to at least 157 reported dead, captured, or surrendered, and remained high in 2018. (See Table 1.) In Pakistan, the bulk of reported ISK leadership losses have been in the form of arrests; of the total leadership losses of 149 individuals that occurred in that country, about 93% were arrested. ISK leadership losses in Pakistan peaked in 2016 and saw substantial declines in 2017 and 2018.

Table 1: Total ISK Leadership Losses (Killed and Captured) 2015-2018

	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
AFG	39	88	157	114	399
PK	32	84	19	14	149
Total	71	172	176	128	548

The Impact of Losses on Operational Capacity

How do these losses compare with ISK's capacity to conduct lethal attacks in each country? A comparison of the total number of attacks linked to ISK in Afghanistan between the same time period shows that the number of attacks dropped by 43% between 2017 and 2018, from 101 attacks to 57, respectively.¹⁹ Similarly, data on ISK attacks conducted in Pakistan shows that attacks peaked in 2016 at 39 and fell to between 10-16 in both 2017 and 2018.²⁰ While an organization's core leadership is not the sole component of its ability to orchestrate violent attacks, it certainly contributes to its internal coherence and ability to persist. An examination of the aggregate number of people killed^g in each country due to ISK attacks depicts a more uncertain picture. In Afghanistan, while ISK's overall number of attacks fell in 2018 compared to 2017, the total number of individuals killed in 2018 (843) exceeded the total killed in 2017 (688), indicating a precipitous rise in lethality per attack. This high lethality rate was largely underpinned by a series of suicide attacks in Kabul and Nangarhar in the second half of 2018.²¹ However, the first seven months of 2019 indicate diminishing ISK lethality where 28 attacks resulted in 94 casualties in the first seven months of the year. A similar trend was observed in Pakistan with regard to ISK's lethality; while the total number killed in 2018 increased by 51% compared to 2017, the first seven months of 2019

^g The total number of people killed in an attack includes the total number of civilians and security personnel reported to have died in an attack claimed by or linked to ISK.

resulted in a comparatively low number of 29 deaths in four attacks. As such, it seems that while leader decapitation of ISK has helped contain the number of attacks conducted by the group, especially in the last two years, the effect on ISK's lethality has oscillated.

ISK's significant drop in lethality in 2019 may partially explain ISK's recent change of leadership; in April 2019, ISK's leader Mawlawi Zia ul-Haq, also known as Abu Omar al-Khorasani, was reportedly replaced by a new leader. The change was attributed to the Islamic State's dissatisfaction with ISK's performance in 2018.²² Yet, despite such important losses, ISK's continued capacity for violence signals its ability to maintain a talent pipeline and replenish its leadership cadres.

Leadership Losses by Tier

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of these losses by leadership tier. As one might suspect, in both countries, the majority of losses took place in Tier 4 (59% in Afghanistan, 79% in Pakistan), which consists of local leaders or notable figures such as local recruiters, financiers, and explosives experts operating at the sub-district level. Next, Tier 3 accounted for the second-highest number of losses in each country, 26% and 15% in Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively. Tier 2 accounted for 14% and 7% of leadership losses in Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively, and, unsurprisingly, Tier 1 leadership losses, which only comprises ISK emirs, were recorded in the lowest numbers and only in Afghanistan.

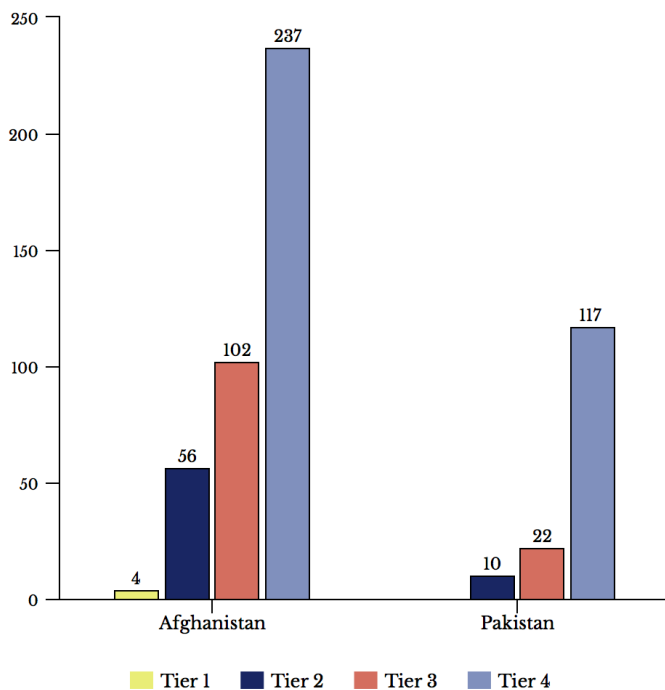


Figure 2: ISK's Total Leadership Losses by Tier in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2015-2018)

The proportion of leaders killed at the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th leadership tiers was generally similar between Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the proportion of losses in Tier 1—the emirs—tells a slightly different story. Not a single Tier 1 leader was killed or arrested in Pakistan; all four emirs were killed in Afghanistan. Over a 24-month period, U.S. and Afghan forces killed four ISK emirs who were responsible for leading and directing the Islamic State's

presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In August 2016 in Nangarhar, a U.S. drone strike killed Pakistani national Hafiz Saeed Khan, a native of Orakzai Agency in Pakistan and former commander with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).²³ The death of Khan's successor and former deputy, Abdul Haseeb Logari,²⁴ an Afghan Taliban defector and native of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in April 2017 in Nangarhar was followed shortly by the killing of Abu Sayed Bajauri (also known as Abdul Rahman Ghaleb) in July 2017 in a U.S. drone strike in Kunar. Bajauri was a former TTP commander and native of Bajaur Agency.²⁵ The group's fourth emir, Abu Saad Orakzai (also known as Abu Saad Erhabi), originally from Orakzai Agency, was killed in August 2018 in a U.S. drone strike, also in Nangarhar.²⁶ All four of ISK's deceased emirs were Pakistani nationals, three of whom originated from areas that were once a part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Three were killed in Nangarhar province within 50 kilometers of one another. The common characteristics amongst ISK's emirs suggest that the future leadership of ISK is likely to draw heavily from militants of Pakistani origin with ties or prior leadership roles in TTP; the latter has proved to be an invaluable source of leaders with operational expertise, local connections, and knowledge of the local terrain.²⁷ Given the increasingly hostile environment within Pakistan for TTP due to the Pakistani army's aggressive efforts against the group and the group's internal rifts,²⁸ TTP leaders are likely to be eager to defect to ISK to assume leadership positions.

Leadership Losses by Geography and Their Impact on ISK Activity

Overall, ISK's leadership losses in Afghanistan at a provincial level have generally been in proportion to the group's number of attacks—in other words, areas where ISK conducted the highest number of operations also experienced the highest numbers of leadership losses. Figure 3(a) shows a geographical map of ISK's leadership losses in Afghanistan. However, the trends suggest that containing ISK in Nangarhar, ISK's center of gravity in Afghanistan, has proven to be much more arduous than in Jowzjan. In Afghanistan, ISK suffered 251 of all 399 (63%) leadership losses in Nangarhar province, a majority of which occurred in districts hugging the Spin Ghar mountain range. This geographical concentration overlaps with the group's overall activity; ISK's attacks were largely concentrated in Nangarhar, where it conducted more than half of all attacks between 2015 and 2018.²⁹ Despite heavy leadership losses in 2017 and 2018, ISK remained active in Nangarhar during 2018 and the first half of 2019.³⁰



Figure 3a: Geographical Locations of ISK's Leadership Losses in Afghanistan (2015-2018)

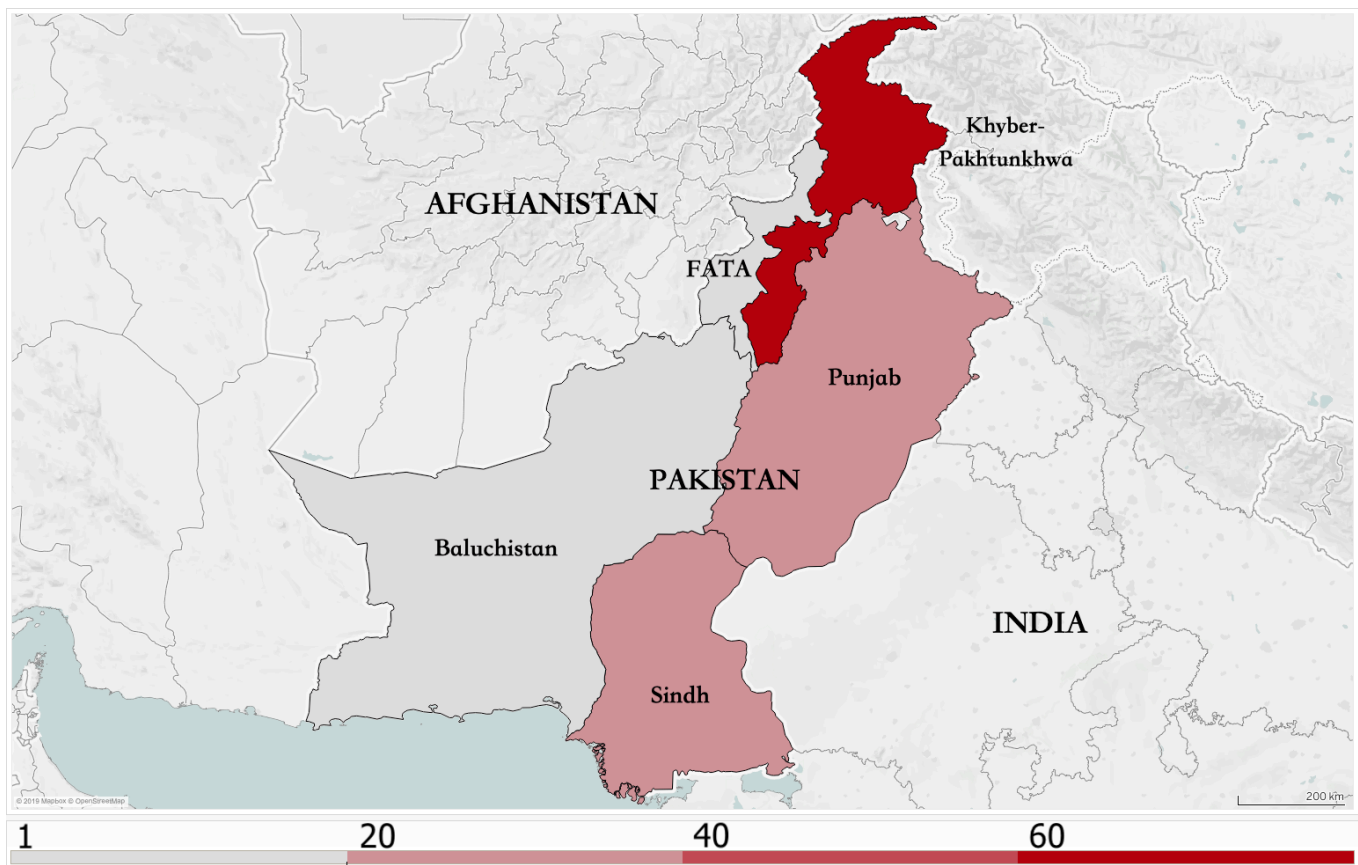


Figure 3b: Geographical Locations of ISK's Leadership Losses in Pakistan (2015-2018). Note: The FATA region officially became a part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in mid-2018.

Why has Nangarhar—Achin and Deh Bala districts in particular—despite having emerged as a hotspot of leadership losses managed to sustain itself as an ISK stronghold? This largely appears to be due to the province's geostrategic location and the existing local militant infrastructure, which facilitates ISK's operations. Nangarhar province borders Pakistan at the four ISK emirs' original homes of Bajaur and Orakzai agencies in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The Spin Ghar ("White Mountain" in Pashto) mountain range serves as a natural geographic barrier between the two countries in this area and is traversable by the main access highway—the Khyber Pass—between Peshawar and Jalalabad. The Khyber Pass not only links Pakistan and Afghanistan, but is also known to be a critical hub for smuggling and accessing weapons black markets.³¹ TTP members escaping Pakistani military operations have long created safe havens in various districts of Nangarhar,³² and the region has hosted groups such as Lashkar-e-Islam and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, which have cooperated with ISK operationally and logistically.³³ Spin Ghar also carries significant historical weight for the jihadi movement in general; just over 150 kilometers west of the Khyber Pass along the mountain range lies the Tora Bora ("Black Cave" in Pashto) cave complex used by Usama bin Ladin and his al-Qa`ida and Taliban associates as a stronghold before U.S. airstrikes and ground operations cleared the area in late 2001.

Around 500 kilometers to the northwest of Nangarhar along the border with Turkmenistan lies Jowzjan province, where ISK suffered 34 of its 399 (8.5%) leadership losses. The proportion of leadership losses again corresponds with ISK's proportion of attacks in Jowzjan over the same time period, which made up only about 9% of all attacks between 2015 and 2018.³⁴ However, in contrast to Nangarhar, ISK activity in Jowzjan was observed primarily between 2015 and 2017, and was limited to a single attack in 2018, with no attacks observed in the first seven months of 2019.³⁵ ISK's inability to maintain territorial control in Jowzjan may be linked to a particular chain of losses amongst the group's 34 leadership losses in the province; ISK lost four chiefs of recruitment (Tier 2), who were all captured or killed in the Darzab district of Jowzjan in the first four months of 2018. These four recruitment chiefs appeared to have had a major role in facilitating the inflow of fighters.³⁶ The first chief, Khitab,^h captured by Afghan forces in January 2018, was reported to have been recruiting both Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) fighters and foreign fighters in Jowzjan province.³⁷ His two co-chief successors, Omair and Abu Samaya, were killed by a joint U.S. drone strike-Afghan commando operation in Darzab in March 2018.³⁸ Their successor, Qari Hekmat, killed by a U.S. drone strike in Darzab in April 2018, was previously a member of the IMU as well as the Taliban's former shadow district governor for Darzab district.³⁹ The loss of Hekmat struck a significant blow to ISK, since he also served as the group's operational commander in Jowzjan in addition to his responsibilities as a recruitment chief. In the wake of Hekmat's death, Mawlawi Habibur Rehman, another Uzbek national with intermittent ties to the Taliban, is believed to have been named as his successor in a move possibly intended to preserve ISK's draw for foreign fighters from Uzbekistan.⁴⁰ Yet, a lack of ISK attacks in the province in 2018 and 2019 suggests that decimating four chiefs with recruitment and operational responsibilities has stymied ISK's growth on the northwestern front. This effect has likely been compounded by ISK's clashes with the Taliban

in Jowzjan and the general remoteness of the province from ISK's stronghold in Nangarhar.

In Pakistan, as shown in Figure 3(b), ISK suffered 72 of all 149 (48%) leadership losses in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions along the border with Nangarhar, and a majority of these FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa losses occurred in the Peshawar District. Again, ISK's leadership losses in Pakistan correspond with the group's focus on FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in terms of its attacks in the country. Between 2015 and mid-2018, these two regions accounted for 42% of all ISK attacks in Pakistan.⁴¹ For reasons discussed above, it is sensible that a majority of ISK's leadership losses in Pakistan occurred on the other side of the Spin Ghar mountain range to their associates in Afghanistan. While the mountains provide ample opportunities for ISK to set up strategic bases, they also provided a zone of relief during the Pakistani army's *Zarb-e-Azb* ("Sharp and Cutting Strike") campaign against TTP and other militant groups in 2014–2015. As pressure mounted on these groups, survivors and defectors—particularly from TTP—pushed farther north and many joined ISK.⁴² ISK's leadership losses in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, however, appear to have curtailed its capacity in these regions, partially assisted by Pakistan's effort to fence off its 1,600-mile border with Afghanistan to impede militant movement and cross-border operations.⁴³ Between mid-2018 and mid-2019, only a single ISK-linked attack was reported in FATA, and none in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁴⁴

However, ISK's leadership losses in the areas of Pakistan outside of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa do not overlap directly with ISK's geographical activity in Pakistan, which is indicative of two characteristics of ISK Pakistan. First, ISK leaders and rank-and-file members are dispersed throughout the country, and second, ISK has a proclivity to operate through operational alliances with other militant groups in Pakistan.⁴⁵ Around 300 kilometers southeast of the AfPak border areas, ISK's leaders began cementing the group's networks in northeastern Punjab province (cities of Lahore, Gujranwala, and Sialkot) where ISK suffered 25 of its 149 (17%) leadership losses. Substantially further south along the coast of the Arabian Sea, ISK leadership was busy forging new networks and coopting older ones in Karachi, Sindh, at the hands of leaders like Ujmer Kathiwer (the head of ISK's network in Sindh province).⁴⁶ By the end of 2018, 29 of ISK's 149 leadership losses in Pakistan (19%) had occurred in Karachi. Although Punjab and Sindh recorded high levels of ISK leadership losses, they have certainly not been the hubs of ISK activity in the country. (Each accounted for only 10% of all ISK attacks in Pakistan between 2015–2018.) Rather, Baluchistan, where only 7% of all leadership losses occurred, accounted for about a third of all ISK attacks in Pakistan up till mid-2018; between mid-2018 and mid-2019, ISK attacks have been conducted almost exclusively in Baluchistan.⁴⁷ Overall, while leadership losses in the other four regions are correlated with significant declines in ISK activity post-2016, ISK has managed to sustain its attacks within Baluchistan since 2015.⁴⁸ Given the geographical expanse of Baluchistan and its political and economic fragility,⁴⁹ which makes effective operations challenging, the province is likely to remain the future location of continued clashes between the Pakistani state and ISK militants.

Nationalities

The authors also collected data on the leaders' nationalities, where they were reported. It is likely that nationalities were only reported in cases where the individual was not suspected to be a local—that

^h His full name has not been reported.

is, non-Afghan nationalities by Afghan newspapers and non-Pakistani nationalities by Pakistani newspapers. In Afghanistan, foreign nationalities were reported in at least 48 cases and in 64 cases in Pakistan. As shown in Figure 4, in Afghanistan, the majority of 'foreign' nationals reported were from Pakistan, although Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Indians were also reported. Interestingly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the only 'foreigners' reported in Pakistan were from Afghanistan.

A closer look at the roles occupied by these foreign nationals indicates that 11 of the 42 Pakistani nationals in Afghanistan had assumed Tier 1 and 2 roles, and that Tier 1 leadership targeted in Afghanistan was solely composed of Pakistani nationals. In contrast, in Pakistan, all Afghans were reported to be exclusively in Tier 4 roles and only a handful in Tier 2 and 3. This indicates that while the top two tiers of ISK leadership will continue to reside mostly in Afghanistan rather than in Pakistan, those positions (if past practice is a guide) are likely to be filled disproportionately by Pakistani nationals. This aligns with previous findings that ISK likely operates primarily through its operational alliances in Pakistan,⁵⁰ whereas the core components of its top leadership operate from within Afghanistan. An important point to note here is that these nationalities only reflect ISK's leadership cadres, and the breadth of nationalities found amongst its rank-and-file members has been reported to be much more diverse, to include Chinese, Chechens, Iranians, French, Algerian, Sudanese, Kazakhs, and Bangladeshis.⁵¹

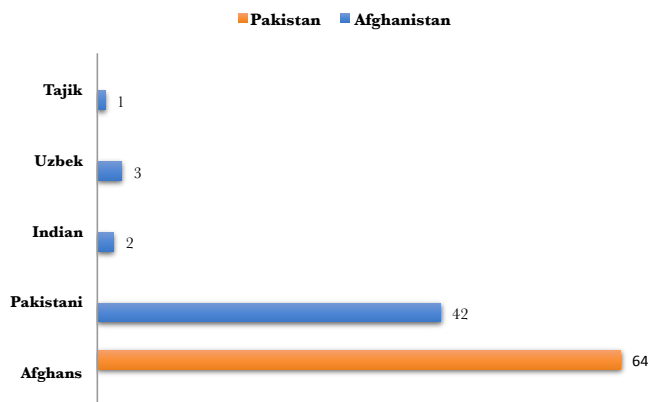


Figure 4: Identified Nationalities of ISK Leaders Killed or Captured in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Prior Affiliations

The authors observed that a number of ISK leaders had prior affiliations spanning over a dozen different militant groups. These groups included Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, IMU, the Afghan Taliban, TTP, al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Tanzeem-e-Islami (TeI), Jama'at-ud-Da'wah (JuD)/Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jundullah, al-Badr, Jamaat-ul-Muslimeen (JuM), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and the Haqqani Network. While the motivations for joining ISK vary from leader to leader, two cases presented briefly below illustrate how ISK has actively sought out and indoctrinated members of other groups as well as exploited individuals' preexisting grievances with their former organizations.

The first involves former Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Rauf Khadim. Khadim was arrested in 2001 and was incarcerated for six years at Guantanamo Bay for his involvement with terrorist organizations.⁵² After his release, he returned to Afghanistan

and was appointed as the Taliban's shadow governor of Uruzgan province in 2011, but was later demoted out of the Taliban's leadership council to the rank of commander and reassigned to Helmand province after a reported falling out with Mullah Omar.⁵³ Not long after his demotion, Khadim defected to ISK and was named its deputy provincial commander in Helmand under then-emir Hafiz Saeed Khan.⁵⁴ Khadim was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Kajaki, Helmand, in February 2015.⁵⁵

In the second case, a group of nine former members of Lashkar-e-Taiba's charity arm, Jama'at-ud-Da'wah, were flipped by two ISK recruiters. Brothers Babar (also known as Abu Akasha) and Nadeem Butt reportedly recruited, indoctrinated, and groomed these nine individuals over a 15-month period to join ISK. After pledging allegiance in June 2015, the group started recruiting for ISK in Sialkot, Pakistan. As part of the process, Babar Butt reportedly facilitated contact between these nine individuals and Abu Muavia Salfi, a Pakistani commander in charge of a contingent of Pakistani militants fighting for the Islamic State in Syria. Though these nine Pakistan-based recruiters did not intend to join Islamic State Central in Syria and Iraq, the network used these channels to Islamic State Central to build up a base in Sialkot, Pakistan, and to expand their recruitment efforts in nearby districts.⁵⁶

The Evolution of ISK

Overall, this study indicates that CT efforts against ISK have resulted in significant ISK leadership losses that have, amongst other factors, likely contributed to suppressing the overall number of attacks conducted by ISK in Afghanistan-Pakistan. However, although leadership decapitation appears to have diminished ISK's number of attacks in recent years, it has been less efficacious in moderating ISK's lethality—until 2019. As reflected by the data presented in this article, CT efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan collectively resulted in the killing or capture of 548 ISK leaders between 2015 and 2018, including four emirs in Afghanistan. While such losses have not completely undercut ISK's ability to conduct lethal attacks, they seem to have slowed down its upward trajectory. A common trend observed in both countries was that the sharpest declines in the number of ISK attacks took place in the year following the year in which ISK suffered its highest number of leadership losses. An associated negative externality of this drop in attacks, however, was the concurrent rise in ISK's lethality per attack in the same year. For example, in Afghanistan, ISK experienced its highest number of leadership losses in 2017, at 157 losses (including two emirs), which was followed by a significant fall in its number of attacks in 2018.⁵⁷ In parallel, though, 2018 was also the year in which the total number of casualties due to ISK attacks exceeded all previous years.

The decline in ISK's lethality in the first seven months of 2019 in Afghanistan-Pakistan is noteworthy and encouraging, but it remains unclear whether such gains against the group will be sustained. ISK's ability to orchestrate highly lethal attacks, despite heavy leadership losses, suggests that broader and consistent efforts are required to quell the group's ability to persist. A closer examination of these trends at the province-level highlights the geographical variation in the effectiveness of leader decapitation, which can guide future counterterrorism efforts. CT efforts across AfPak have contained ISK activity in regions such as Jowzjan and FATA, but Nangarhar in Afghanistan and Baluchistan in Pakistan remain the locus of ISK's operational activity. An important factor contributing to ISK's resiliency is rooted in its ability to recruit

from a whole host of existing militant groups, such as the TTP⁵⁸ and LeT.⁵⁹ The interweaving of Pakistani and Afghan militants in ISK's leadership cadres necessitates coordinated efforts across the region to halt ISK's capability to continually replenish its ranks.

The May 2019 announcement of the reorganization of Islamic State's presence in South Asia, into Wilayat Pakistan, Wilayat Hind, and Wilayat Khorasan (Afghanistan), suggests that the differing operational environments likely spurred the creation of three distinct groups. Interestingly, these changes arrive on the heels of ISK experiencing significant leadership losses in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, declines in its number of attacks, and a change in ISK's leadership, reportedly due to Islamic State Central's dissatisfaction.⁶⁰ The creation of Wilayat Pakistan and Hind as separate entities could be a concerted effort to delegate greater autonomy to

leaders in each country who can respond quickly to local dynamics and localize their recruitment efforts. Overall, these developments coupled with the findings of this study illustrate both the usefulness and limitations of leadership decapitation of ISK. While the goals of restricting recruitment and undermining ISK's militant bases in key operational areas are critical, additional coordinated efforts amongst targeting forces on both sides of the Durand Line are warranted given ISK's potential to conduct a protracted terror campaign. Additionally, the findings of this study demonstrate a need for a more holistic regional approach to keep ISK at bay, one which goes beyond targeting ISK's leadership cadres, and includes efforts to dismantle its strongholds through kinetic and intelligence operations, and disrupt its financial resources and links with resourceful regional militant groups. **CTC**

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Relatives, Redemption, and Rice: Motivations for Joining the Maute Group

By Julie Chernov Hwang

Two years after the Marawi siege in the Philippines, there are now new opportunities to interview some of the men and women who joined the Maute Group. The profiles that emerge are quite varied. Some attended university while others had no schooling whatsoever. Some were farmers and businessmen while others were students and imams. There were even addicts among the recruits. For the 25 respondents this author interviewed in February and July 2019, the two most important factors that drove their joining the group were having a pre-existing friend or relative already in the network and financial exigency. Redemption, revenge, and a desire to learn about Islam and participate in a jihad were secondary.

In 2013, “Abu Hamdan” returned to Butig, in the province of Lanao del Sur on the Philippines’ island of Mindanao, from Manila, following his divorce from his wife. He contends he had been a hitman for a drug gang, a drug dealer, a gun runner, and a carjacker, and he abused both alcohol and drugs. He returned home to Butig with one of his sons. The remaining five children stayed in Manila with their mother. He moved back into his mother’s house to sober up and figure out the next steps in his life.¹

Shortly after he and his son arrived home, he says Omar and Abdullah Maute, his first cousins on his mother’s side, began sending a liaison to convince him to join the new group they were putting together to build an ‘Islamic’ society and mini-state in Lanao Del Sur. This went on until one day when he got fed up and went personally to Omar and Abdullah and told them, “I’m not ready to join you, but I will inform you when I’m ready.”²

Abu Hamdan asserts that Omar and Abdullah were eager to recruit him. He knew the underworld. He knew how to hold guns. He had been involved in *rido* (clan wars). He had been involved in gunfights with the military. From their perspective, Abu Hamdan was key to making their group lethal and successful. And he was also family. To win him over, they flattered his ego. “You’re an expert

on guns. We need your expertise.” He responded that he had just gone through the failure of a personal relationship and needed to rebuild the broken pieces inside.³

Yet Omar and Abdullah seemed like the solution. “I wanted to cleanse my heart. Omar would help me. He would teach me Islam so I could live like a Muslim. I went to my mother and told her, ‘I want to cleanse everything. Get rid of my vices. I feel sorry for the horrible things I’ve done. I want to join Omar because maybe he can help me.’” According to Abu Hamdan, his mother immediately retrieved the family car and dropped him at Omar’s house. The Maute brothers were happy to see him. They embraced him, served him a lot of food, and said, “hey brother, you’ve made the right choice. This is the true way to be a Muslim.”⁴

Abu Hamdan joined the Maute Group in its infancy, driven by a combination of two factors: his longstanding ties to the Maute brothers and his desire for personal redemption. He wanted to be better, do better, and saw a return to an ‘Islamic’ life as a possible solution; Omar Maute represented the key to that life.⁵

In February and July of 2019, the author and her research team conducted interviews with 25 former members of the Maute Group and its related faction, which locals termed Daulah Islamiyah, in Marawi, Butig, and Piagapo.⁶ One of those interviewed was Abu Hamdan. Twelve were farmers at the time of recruitment, while five had been students; one was a teacher; one was an imam; four others ran small businesses; one was an unemployed addict; and one, Abu Hamdan, a hitman. Three had attended college; six had attended some high school but did not finish; the remaining 16 either attended elementary school before dropping out or never went to school at all. Four were women, and 21 were men.⁶

In looking at this small subgroup sample, those who joined did so because, like Abu Hamdan, they knew and trusted the person

a The research for this project was conducted by the author in Butig, Piagapo, and Marawi in February and July 2019. The project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Goucher College. To arrange interviews, the author worked through several guides who arranged interviews with their contacts among the Maute surrenderees and the not-yet-surrendered former members of the Maute Group and Daulah Islamiyah. Meetings were conducted in people’s homes, a short walk from interviewees’ or guides’ homes, and the research team provided food for interviewees, if meetings coincided with a meal or snack time. There was always coffee. When the author did interviews, she asked each interviewee to provide a pseudonym. Interviews were conducted in Maranao or Tagalog unless the respondent was fluent in English, which two of them were. One of the guides also translated Tagalog-English, while the author worked with a translator for Maranao-English. Informed consent was provided orally. Interviewees were apprised of the goals of the project, that the research would take steps to shield their identity, that participation was strictly voluntary, that they could stop at any time, and that they were under no obligation to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. The author was not in a position to independently verify the accounts provided by the interviewees. Unless a more specific citation is provided to a particular interview, these interviews are hitherto cited “Author’s Philippine Interview Series.”

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recruiting them—most often, a relative—because they were desperately poor and needed the promised 20,000–50,000 pesos (\$382–\$954) to provide for their families; and less frequently, because they were seeking redemption at a critical juncture in their life. Those with more education, some high school or college, who were recruited earlier than the farmers—in 2013 or 2014—were enticed by the opportunity to learn more about Islam.

What Was the Maute Group?

The Maute Group was the brainchild of Omar and Abdullah Maute, two brothers from a wealthy and politically well-connected family in the town of Butig who had studied abroad in the Middle East.⁷ At some point, following the conclusion of their schooling, they became radicalized, but the trigger for this remains unclear. It is known that Omar married an Indonesian but was later expelled from her family's Islamic boarding school for his strict Wahabi views.⁸ It is uncertain whether initially, the Mautes deployed Islamic State symbols instrumentally, but in time, the incentives for allying themselves with the Islamic State—in the form of attention and funding—proved irresistible.

The Mautes provided Qur'an study lessons to children, using them as a means of recruitment and ideological indoctrination, and offered paramilitary training in 2013, 2014, and 2015 in Butig.⁹ They built a coalition of pro-Islamic State groups that transcended clan, bringing together Maranao, Tausug, and Maguindanao, and that included Isnilon Hapilon's faction of the Abu Sayyaf Group; an Islamic State cell from the town of Cotabato; and Ansharul Khalifa Philippines (AKP) based in Sultan Kudarat.¹⁰ They escalated activities in 2016, clashing with the military in Butig in February; posting a video of themselves in April swearing allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and referring to themselves as Islamic State-Ranao; masterminding the bombing of the Davao night market on September 2 of that year in conjunction with other components of its coalition; occupying the town of Butig that November; and clashing again with the military in April 2017 in Piagapo.¹¹

The Maute Group's activities need to be understood against the backdrop of 40 years of Moro insurgency against the state; the reality of the military's repressive tactics in areas like Butig and Piagapo,¹² which would become prime recruiting ground for Maute Group members; and the Bangsamoro^b dominant narrative of justice only through self-governance based on Islamic precepts.¹³ Initially, the Maute brothers sought to form an alliance with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); this made sense as the Mautes were a MILF family. At first, one of the MILF's 'renegade commanders,' the influential Commander Bravo, allowed them to use one of their training camps.¹⁴ However, after a falling out with Commander Bravo in 2014, the Maute brothers established their own camp in Butig and began recruiting from family and friends, as well as from local mosques and communities in Butig, Piagapo, and Marawi. They poached recruits from the MILF, mostly disillusioned younger members who were dismayed at the slow progress of the latter's peace process plan through the legislature.¹⁵

In May 2017, the coalition took over Marawi. As they moved about the city, they took hostages, executing those who could not recite the *shahadah* (the profession of faith in Islam).¹⁶ Adopting

the manner of the Islamic State, they dressed the hostages in orange jumpsuits, and videos of the executions were distributed via Islamic State media channels.¹⁷ According to Quinton Temby, a visiting fellow at the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, the goal of the Marawi takeover appeared to be carving out territory in an attempt to gain official recognition as part of the Islamic State, as the East Asia Wilaya (East Asia Province).¹⁸ The Marawi siege was masterminded by Omar and Abdullah Maute, with funding from both Islamic State Central and local sympathizers.¹⁹

The Battle for Marawi, as it was termed, lasted five months. On May 23, 2017, the Philippine government launched a massive counter-attack, deploying 22 battalions drawn from its army, air force, and navy and shelling large portions of the city.²⁰ The conflict also resulted in massive displacement of the urban population; Amnesty International estimated some 360,000 persons were forced to flee their homes during the conflict.²¹ As of March 2019, 70,000 people were still living in squalid evacuation sites, IDP camps, transitional shelters, or relatives' homes.²² While much of the affected area has been cleared as of August 2019, the IDPs are still unable to return to their homes.²³

Who Joined the Maute Group

The leadership of the Maute Group was smart and highly educated. Omar and Abdullah Maute had gone to university abroad, Omar at Al Azhar University in Cairo and Abdullah in Jordan.²⁴ Commanders were also well educated, as were some of the early recruits from universities and several members of other coalition groups, notably the Islamic State cell in Cotabato.²⁵ Many among the rank and file Maranao,^c however, were poor farmers or small businessmen from large families.²⁶ Some were former members of the MILF or had MILF members in their extended families.²⁷ In some instances, they had witnessed fathers and uncles going to battle against the government.²⁸ Thus, they were socialized into a paramilitary jihad culture and community and MILF narratives of Bangsamoro grievance in a way that perhaps the average civilian was not.

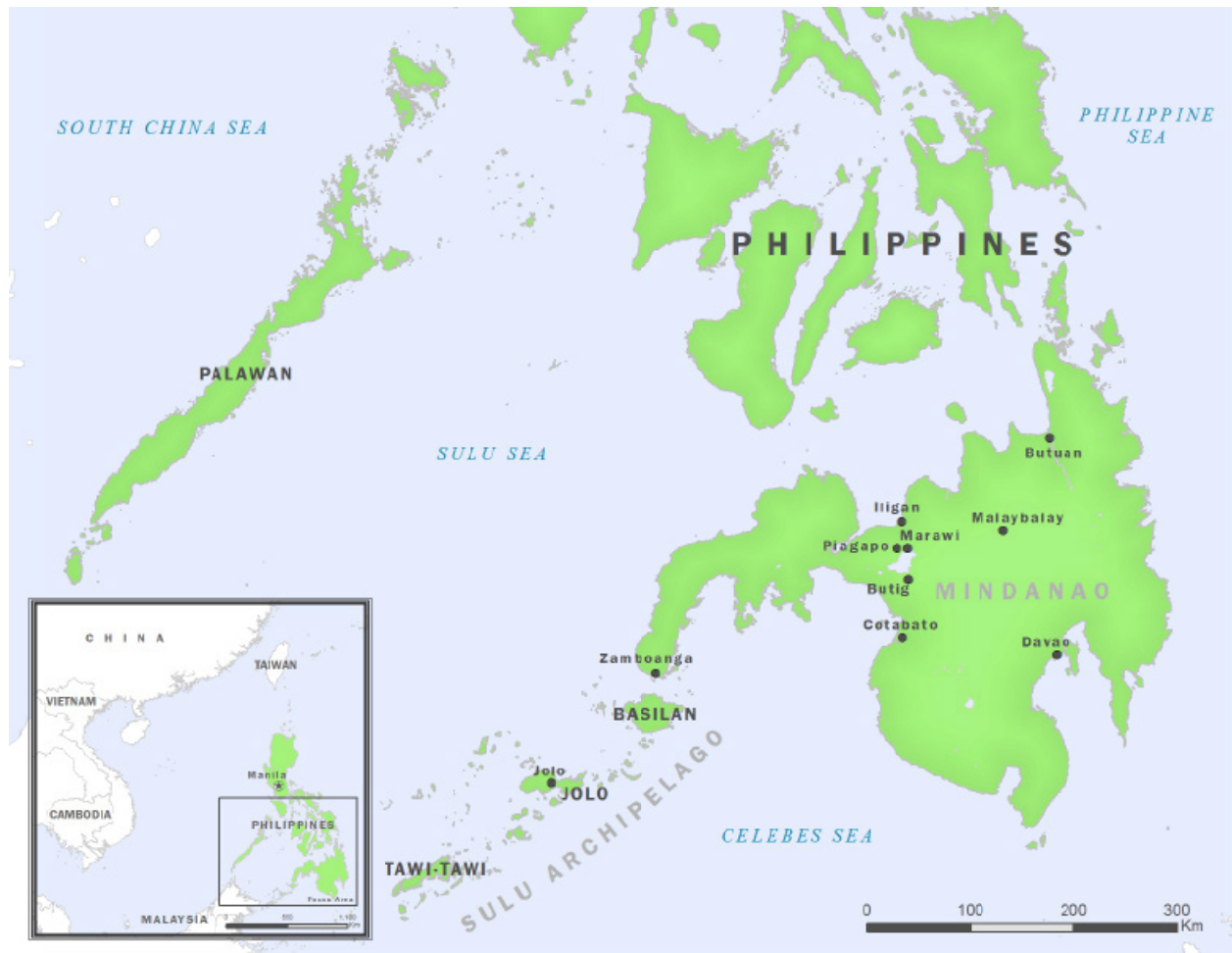
Why They Joined

Most of the 25 individuals interviewed who joined the Maute Group were recruited by someone they knew, typically a family member or a relative. This finding is consistent with the study of political participation; social activism; gang and cult membership; and right-wing, left-wing, and religious forms of terrorism that kinship ties and prior friendship bonds facilitate recruitment.²⁹ Kinship both inspires loyalty within movements and makes betrayal far less likely.³⁰ Kinship ties are used in the construction of terrorist cells. For example, six of the 19 9/11 hijackers were brothers.³¹ The perpetrators of the 2002 Bali bombings in Indonesia also included three brothers—Mukhlis, Amrozi, and Ali Imron³²—while the 2009 Marriott and Ritz Carlton hotel bombings in Jakarta included the extended family of Saifuddin Zuhri.³³ The perpetrators of the Surabaya, Indonesia, bombings came from three families who attended religious study together.³⁴ In short, recruitment among family and friends is quite common.

Of the 25 former jihadis interviewed in the Philippines, 15 reported being recruited by a family member or friend. Omar and Abdullah Maute recruited heavily from their direct and extended

b Bangsamoro is a unifying term used by Muslims from the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao to refer to themselves.

c The Maranao are one of the Muslim clans in Mindanao.



Southern Philippines (Brandon Mohr)

families, including children as young as eight.³⁵ For example, they groomed their nephew “Jabir” since the age of 13, after he joined their daily Qur’an study in the town of Butig. In Piagapo, Imam Abilino Dimakaling targeted his nephews, cousins, sons-in-law, and the young men who attended his mosque.³⁶

In addition to personal ties, 15 of those interviewed cited financial promises of a regular salary of between 20,000 and 50,000 pesos (\$382-\$954). For example, “Faidah” was recruited by Islamic State militants at the age of 16 due to her family’s poor financial conditions.³⁷ Similarly, “Amira” joined the Maute Group also at 16 to obtain money to pay for a hernia operation.³⁸ However, incentives were not only monetary. On rare occasions, other material incentives came into play. For Shaba^d-addicted “Teo,” for example, the promise of a steady supply of methamphetamine led him to join and remain.³⁹

Redemption and revenge emerged as secondary themes. Redemption was salient for five individuals who either had a history of alcoholism, drug abuse, or criminality, on the one hand, or who had gone through a traumatic event such as a serious illness or divorce, on the other. Calls to “make your life worth living” and “do jihad and go to heaven” resonated especially with this sub-group.⁴⁰ Revenge was also a secondary theme for three young men. For two

youth from Piagapo, “Alex” and “Asis,” it was the killing of Imam Abilino Dimakaling that prompted them to join the Maute Group, driven by a desire to avenge his death.⁴¹

While ideological affinity did not drive joining, it played a role among the more educated members in the sample—those who attended high school or college. “Abu Usama,” a college student, was invited to attend a four-day religious seminar by a friend in 2013 at the home of Omar and Abdullah Maute.⁴² Abdullah taught the approximately 30 participants, covering the meaning of Islam, its importance in a person’s life, punishments for violating ‘Islamic’ law, and the meaning and importance of jihad.⁴³ The lectures on punishments convinced him—he drank, he smoked—of the need to redeem himself.⁴⁴ By day four, he was promising to be the shield of Islam.⁴⁵

According to others’ earlier research, members of the Islamic State cell in Cotabato participated in religious discussions at what they called the “Salaf” mosque in Sousa, Cotabato, where they would watch YouTube videos about the Islamic State.⁴⁶ Likewise, “Jamal” the nephew of Imam Abilino Dimakaling, reported attending daily study sessions at Dimakaling’s mosque in Piagapo where they would watch YouTube videos about the Islamic State’s predecessor group in Iraq, beginning as early as 2007.⁴⁷ Those who were recruited early, between 2013 and 2015, attended either one- or two-month-long paramilitary training sessions in Butig, which were a combination of ideological indoctrination, weapons training,

^d Shaba is a form of methamphetamine.



Marawi "Ground Zero," February 2019 (Chernov Hwang personal photo)

and physical fitness.⁴⁸ However, for six others recruited at Friday prayers at Dimakaling's mosque in 2016 and 2017 just prior to the siege, ideological instruction was done at a more superficial level.⁴⁹ The population was not high school and college students; it was men with either no education or elementary-level education.⁵⁰ There were no YouTube videos and no four-day seminars.⁵¹ The major takeaways imparted were that they would "raise Marawi" for Muslims and that if they died in a jihad, they would go to heaven.⁵² Among those six, the desire to participate in such a jihad was palpable, but their understanding of that jihad was limited and localized.

Implications for Post-Conflict Rehabilitation

Marawi remains a traumatized city. As civil society organizations work to design effective rehabilitation and reintegration programming, it is important to consult with Maranao men and women, with the victims of the siege, and with those who participated in it.⁵³ It is also critical to understand what drove individuals to join the Maute Group. If their accounts are to be believed, they did not join out of affinity with the Islamic State. Rather, they joined because they trusted the person asking them, most often a relative; the promise of supplemental income was enticing; and for a handful, they wanted to redeem themselves or they wanted to learn more about Islam. While they were enamored with the idea of joining a jihad, this was fundamentally a local jihad meant to improve conditions in Marawi, not the 'global jihad' of the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida. This dovetails with several key points made by Sidney Jones and Kiriloi Ingram in their research on recruitment in various components of the pro-Islamic State coalition in Mindanao.⁵⁴

With these lessons in mind, as civil society organizations look

toward rehabilitation of former militants, a focus on life-skills training, professional development and, possibly, trauma counseling is likely to be useful. The Philippines Mindanao Youth for Development Project, which offers job training for at-risk youth, is one such program worthy of attention.⁵⁵

However, even the best designed CVE programming will fall short if the government does not expedite the rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure in the Most Affected Area (MMA). Initial efforts were inadequate, as the Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM), the government office in charge of rehabilitation, neglected initially to involve local stakeholders.⁵⁶ Plans proposed by the TFBM to remake Marawi as a gentrified hub for tourism neglected the city's heritage as the center of Islamic education in Mindanao.⁵⁷ This evoked considerable ire among local Maranao.⁵⁸ In October 2018, the Ranaw Multi-Sectoral Movement asserted, "plans have been made without our participation that bear the stamp of our culture ... and whose mechanics and implementation are not clear to us. One thing is clear: the people of Marawi are largely left out."⁵⁹ There is some indication that at least as of July 2019, there was some Maranao involvement in reconstruction and rehabilitation via investors.⁶⁰ The ongoing issue remains the displaced. Some have taken to social media, creating the hashtag #letmegohome to protest the iterated delays.⁶¹ If reconstruction continues to stall, this risks amplifying the ideas pushed by the Maute Group that Islam is under attack.⁶²

"Abu Usama" had his own take on what was needed going forward to prevent a recurrence and reemergence of a Maute-style group in Marawi. "The government has to put more effort into reaching these people. Show them the government cares for them.

They are still trapped in their mindset of historical injustices. Show them in advance what Islam is. Because if someone who has bad intentions comes to them first, there is a possibility they would be

recruited ... if they are a poor person, ignorant of their religion, they are easy prey.”⁶³ **CTC**

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The Development of Tunisia's Domestic Counter-Terrorism Finance Capability

By Aaron Y. Zelin and Katherine Bauer

Tunisia's National Counterterrorism Commission has established an anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism regime to supplement its law enforcement and military action against its local jihadi movement. The move comes amid Tunisia's efforts to graduate from ongoing monitoring by the Financial Action Task Force, which is expected in October. Tunisia's efforts go beyond what is technically required under international standards, highlighting the seriousness with which it seeks to operationalize this tool. Tunisia has created a sanctions list of 107 terrorist individuals, organizations, and associations as of mid-August 2019. This capacity, still under development, may help alleviate pressure on Tunisia's judiciary and provide more transparency to civil society, as well as deter financial support to local fighters and foreign fighters abroad.

Following Tunisia's 2011 revolution, the rise of jihadi groups put a major strain on the country. First, there was Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia's (AST) *dawa* campaign, which marshalled auxiliary charities and associations to deliver social services, alongside other activities. Then Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi (KUBN) and the Islamic State launched insurgencies in mountainous areas along the Algerian border, with the latter group carrying out a terror campaign planned from across the border in Libya. In the aftermath of the Islamic State's large-scale attacks at the Bardo Museum in March 2015, Sousse Beach in June 2015, and attempted takeover of Ben Gardane in March 2016, Tunisia's government and security sector began a more concerted effort to combat jihadism in the country, a task given extra urgency in the past five years by the return of Tunisian jihadis from foreign

conflicts.¹

Much attention has been given to its military and law enforcement efforts, but Tunisia has gone beyond this to begin building a more robust plan that tackles the challenge posed by jihadism from a number of angles. On November 7, 2016, Tunisia's national security council adopted a strategy to fight terrorism and extremism, saying in a statement that the "national strategy to fight against extremism and terrorism" is built around four points: prevention, protection, judicial proceedings, and retaliation.² One aspect of this strategy is worth exploring: Tunisia's domestic counter-terrorism finance plan. This article will examine the development of Tunisia's anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism system, including the implementation of a domestic terrorism sanctions list, as well as examine the information released as part of that list and what it provides analysts in terms of insight into trends in jihadi activity in Tunisia and the government's official response.

In November 2018, Tunisia rolled out its first set of domestic counterterrorism sanctions, freezing the funds of 23 individuals and entities based on their ties to terrorist organizations.³ While a number of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries have adopted such lists in recent years, Tunisia's stands out for the level of detail published about sanctioned entities, as well as the robust framework in which the sanctions are deployed. The establishment of a legal framework to deploy such domestic sanctions falls within Tunisia's efforts to get off the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) so-called "grey list" of countries found to have strategic deficiencies in combating money laundering and terrorist financing. Tunisia was added to the list in November 2017⁴ after an assessment by FATF—the global standard setter for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT)^a—which was conducted in 2015 and published in 2016.⁵ In the intervening years,

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a Established in 1989 by the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and the United States), the FATF is the international standard-setting body for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT). Members submit to peer reviews or "mutual evaluations" of their compliance with FATF standards, and jurisdictions that fail to address strategic AML/CFT deficiencies—whether FATF members or not—are publicly identified by the FATF in statements released following the group's plenary meetings in February, June, and October of each year. The FATF also tracks money laundering and terrorist financing trends and responses and regularly issues reports on typologies and best practices.

and as part of an action plan agreed upon with the FATF,^b Tunisian authorities have focused on assessing AML/CFT risk, improving oversight of the association sector, and establishing the aforementioned targeted financial sanctions regime. Through their efforts, Tunisia is slated to be removed from the grey list in October 2019.^{6c}

Background

Prior to the 2011 revolution, Tunisia's AML/CFT system had limited capacity. Officials considered the risk of money laundering and terrorist financing to be low in Tunisia—in part, because exchange controls made it an unattractive destination for ill-gotten gains.⁷ Despite having a relatively well-developed banking sector, Tunisia was not a regional financial center. A 2003 law to facilitate compliance with international standards on AML/CFT criminalized money laundering and terrorist financing,^d and established a financial intelligence unit, called the Tunisian Commission of Financial Analysis (CTAF), which is hosted by the Central Bank of Tunisia.⁸

The country's first mutual evaluation against FATF standards was conducted by the World Bank in March 2006 and published in 2007. The assessment found that Tunisia's legal framework provided some liability for illicit financial activities, such as money laundering and terrorist financing, but that authorities had yet to promulgate regulations that would support prevention and detection of such activity.⁹ For example, regulators had not provided guidance or procedures for reporting suspicious or unusual financial activity, although such reporting was required by law. As a result, only five suspicious transaction reports (STRs) were filed with the Tunisian Financial Analysis Committee (CTAF) between 2003 and 2006, none of which were forwarded on to prosecutors.¹⁰

When it came to Tunisia's ability to implement U.N. sanctions, assessors found that while Tunisian authorities informally flagged new U.N. sanctions listings for Tunisian financial institutions and

requested that they check for any account holders, there was not an adequate legal basis for banks to freeze such assets should they find a match nor any procedures to notify potential holders of assets outside of the financial systems. The 2007 mutual assessment reports that such a situation had yet to be tested since, to date, no Tunisian bank had identified a U.N.-designated client.¹¹

Although less concerned about money laundering, authorities were "highly mobilized concerning terrorist matters," according to the 2007 FATF report.¹² Still, they considered these activities "purely local" despite the 2002 al-Qa`ida-directed and -funded Djerba attack that was planned in Afghanistan, a then-recent reminder of the threat of terrorism against Tunisia.¹³ Similarly, Tunisian security services projected confidence when, in late 2006, an al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) front group called Jund Asad Bin Furat (JABF) led a multi-week, low-level insurgency in the mountains of eastern Tunisia.¹⁴ However, the reality was different. According to a former senior-level Tunisian minister close to then President Ben Ali, there was a major panic about the cell. There was a fundamental lack of understanding about jihadism, the number of people involved in Tunisia, and the identities of those actually plotting attacks.¹⁵ This gap was exacerbated by government officials' view that it was a homegrown threat rather than a regional or international issue since the JABF cell contained individuals that had trained in Algeria and was financed from Italy.¹⁶

By the subsequent 2016 FATF assessment of Tunisia's AML/CFT system, terrorism and its financing had emerged as a significant concern for local officials. The collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya and the porousness of the border allowed for the movement of drugs and arms, as well as fighters traveling to join the Islamic State in Libya or onward to other foreign conflicts, and back. Some of this activity was funded by and through money transfer systems, according to the 2016 assessment.¹⁷ Use of charitable associations receiving foreign funds to finance such activity was also "a major concern" according to Tunisian authorities.¹⁸

The 2016 assessment also found that law enforcement continued to struggle with limited human and physical resources, as well as expertise in financial crimes in particular. As of 2015, authorities had yet to effectively prosecute a terrorism financing case, in part because judicial specialization in financial crimes was only very recent.^{19e} The Tunisian judiciary also struggled to prosecute terrorism-related charges more broadly. According to the United Nations, as of early 2017, the process was extremely slow and the judicial apparatus was overwhelmed.²⁰ Evidencing this, in January 2017, according to Tunisia's Minister of Justice at the time Ghazi Jeribi, 1,647 prisoners were involved in terrorism and money laundering cases, with only 183 having been tried while the rest remained custody.²¹ Such delays threatened to undermine the post-revolution

b FATF regularly identifies countries with strategic AML/CFT deficiencies, either based on specific threats a non-participating jurisdiction may pose to the international financial system (such as proliferation or terrorist financing) or on the basis of poor results from a mutual evaluation against FATF standards. Countries with poor results on a mutual evaluation are given one year, working with FATF, to address deficiencies prior to being publicly identified. If progress is insufficient during this period, FATF works with the country to develop an action plan to address remaining deficiencies. FATF requires countries to make a "high-level political commitment" to implementing the action plan. Tunisia's action plan included elements beyond those discussed in this report. The full plan is available on FATF's website.

c It is worth noting that Tunisia was the first MENA country to be evaluated against FATF's revised recommendations adopted in 2012. See "3rd Enhanced Follow-Up Report for the Republic of Tunisia (Re-Rating)," MENAFATF, January 23, 2019. At the time of Tunisia's evaluation in 2016, only a handful of countries globally had been assessed against the new standards, which represented a significant evolution from the previous version. Notably, under the revised procedures, countries are evaluated not just for technical compliance with the standards but the effectiveness of their application. Such assessments are targeted at developing a roadmap for countries to improve both compliance with international standards as well as attractiveness to foreign investment and greater cross-border financial integration. More information on the revised standards can be found at "Revisions to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Standard—Information Note to the Executive Board," International Monetary Fund, July 17, 2012.

d Laundering of funds associated with narcotics trafficking was criminalized in Tunisia in 1992, but there had been no convictions for money laundering as of 2007.

e Under Tunisia's 2015 law on counter-terrorism financing and money laundering, a specialized unit of judges was created to handle terrorism cases, which are investigated by the Criminal Investigation Department of Tunis, rather than at the governorate level, according to the State Department's 2017 Countries Report on Terrorism, available at https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/crt_2016.pdf.

government, giving the appearance of detention without trial.^f

Post-revolution efforts to recover stolen assets also underscored the inefficiencies of Tunisia's AML regime at the time, according to a 2012 IMF report.²² International Financial Institutions (IFIs) working with Tunisia under the umbrella of the Deauville Initiative—aimed at providing support to post-Arab Spring economies in transition—therefore encouraged Tunisian officials to schedule their FATF assessment as early as the end of 2012. The methodology for assessments under FATF standards updated in 2012 was not released until the end of 2013, however.²³

When Tunisia's evaluation finally took place in early 2015, several initiatives to address gaps in the country's AML/CFT system were already in progress. Tunisia's Basic Law Number 26 of August 2015, for example, established the National Counterterrorism Commission (NCC) within the cabinet to monitor and implement U.N. resolutions related to combating terrorism.²⁴ Notably, this includes UNSC Resolution 1267 (and successor resolutions) that underpin the United Nations' al-Qa'ida/Taliban/Islamic State sanctions regime, as well as UNSC Resolution 1373, which calls on countries to establish a domestic designation capability to respond to requests—beyond the 1267 regime—to freeze terrorism-related funds. However, it was not until January 2018 that regulations were promulgated establishing the procedures by which Tunisia's NCC would implement these requirements, including the process for designation, proposal of names to the 1267 list, and freezing procedures.²⁵ Although Tunisia was initially found noncompliant with related FATF requirements for international obligations, a follow-up assessment published in December 2018 found that the deficiencies had been largely rectified.²⁶

Likewise, just prior to FATF's 2015 assessment, Tunisia undertook its first National Risk Assessment (NRA) of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, which was ultimately published in 2017 after 30 months of work.²⁷ ^g With regard to terrorist financing, the 2017 NRA found a high level of both risk and vulnerability, reporting that national coordination related to counterterrorism

and oversight of associations was insufficient considering domestic threats, those emanating from the conflict in Libya, and those related to the return of Tunisian foreign fighters from conflict zones. The 2017 NRA further assessed that the situation in Libya provided "appropriate ground for the growing strength of terrorist groups in Tunisia," including for training in but also smuggling through Libya, which serves as "an important source of funding for these groups." Nonetheless, the 2017 assessment concluded that the nature of attacks in Tunisia during the recent period were undertaken by lone actors and required limited funding.²⁸

Indeed, between 2001 and 2016, a relatively small number of the cases referred to prosecution by the Tunisian financial intelligence unit were for terrorist financing.²⁹ Of the 456 suspicious transactions referred to the prosecution during this period, 46 were based on suspicion of terrorist financing, while the remainder involved suspected money laundering. This is not surprising given greater awareness of money laundering indicators and challenges associated with developing terrorist financing cases, such as tracking small-value transactions and often needing to work around intelligence information. However, of the 46 terrorist financing cases referred to prosecution, 32 or (70 percent) involved cross-border wire transfers, underscoring the transnational nature of such funding and relatedly the importance of access to the international financial system for those involved in sending or receiving funds related to terrorism. So while on the one hand, the 2017 NRA points to legitimate sources such as self-financing (from loans or savings) as a primary source of terrorist funding in Tunisia, it also points to concerns about the exploitation of charitable or civil society organizations, including donations through non-profit organizations (NPOs)—whether made locally or from abroad—or fundraising at mosques and smuggling.³⁰

The 2017 NRA also discussed the challenges of tracking and interdicting the physical movement of cash and did not mince words when addressing the risks associated with the NPO sector: "This sector has become a clear threat and a direct link to terrorism."³¹ Bad actors in the sector were responsible for the direct funding of jihadis as well as the provision of assistance to the families of foreign fighters.³² Between 2011 and 2014, Tunisian authorities suspended 150 associations suspected of having a link to terrorism, according to the 2017 NRA.³³ Measures adopted in 2011 requiring local associations to use formal banking channels for transfers exceeding 500 dinar (roughly \$175) had not been fully implemented. Nonetheless, the main source of suspicious transactions related to associations were from abroad and amounted to between 500,000 and three million dinar (approximately \$200,000 to \$1.2 million).³³

As part of its 2015 FATF assessment, Tunisia was found to lack an effective system for regulation and oversight of its non-profit sector.³⁴ To address the deficiency, Tunisian authorities conducted an assessment of the risk of exploitation of NPOs by terrorists, categorizing 110 NPOs as vulnerable.³⁵ Under an E.U.-funded program,

f The Tunisian government does not provide information on duration of those detained, so it is difficult to assess how severe the backlog of cases is. However, based on a collection of data from local Tunisian and regional media, more prosecutions of various terrorism-related offenses have been publicly disclosed since early 2019. As context, there were two prosecutions in 2014, two in 2015, four in 2016, one in 2017, three in 2018, and 18 as of mid-August 2019. It should be noted that many of these prosecutions involved more than one individual. The uptick in 2019 suggests a more streamlined process, which will hopefully alleviate pressure on the judiciary and become more of an efficient trend going forward.

g The requirement that countries conduct a national risk assessment was a key change in the 2012 update to the FATF recommendations, which shifted the focus of assessments from technical compliance with the recommendations to effectiveness, signifying a maturation of the global anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) system. Additional information on the 2012 update can be found in the introduction to the revised recommendations at www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/fatfrecommendations/documents/fatf-recommendations.html#UPDATES. Such assessments are meant to spur countries—as well as financial institutions and other regulated entities—to develop a better understanding of the risks of money laundering and terrorist financing within their jurisdiction and use this as a basis for more effective allocation of resources. With the assistance of the World Bank, Tunisia's NRA was led by the CTAF and representatives of the Central Bank of Tunisia. "Tunisia National Risk Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing," Tunisian Financial Analysis Committee, April 2017.

h However, according to Tunisian academic Alaya Allani, in total there were around 200 such charities and associations affiliated with AST when the group was active from 2011-2013. Yet, only 10 of AST's affiliated charities and associations were featured in its propaganda during that time frame. Eric Reidy, "Tunisia cracks down on radicalization," *Al-Monitor*, May 19, 2015. For more on these individuals and others, see Aaron Y. Zelin, *Your Sons Are At Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming 2020).

authorities hosted a series of workshops in early 2017 for the designated charities to raise their awareness of the potential misuse of the sector for terrorist financing.³⁶ In 2018, the CTAF issued guidelines for NPOs on identifying beneficiaries and partners, and other due diligence measures, as well as for registration of organizations, including NPOs.³⁷

It is important to note the challenge the Tunisian government faces in regulating NPOs in Tunisia. Decree 88 on associations, issued in 2011 just post-revolution, was one of the most “progressive and enabling [civil society organization] CSO laws in the region,” according to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, which called it “a clear break with the past,”³⁸ meaning the restrictions on free speech and association seen under the Ben Ali regime. Attempts to place constraints on NPO actors, even those aimed at protecting the integrity of the charitable sector from exploitation by terrorist actors or political groups from external meddling, have come under significant criticism due to a number of Tunisians’ worries about the potential for civil liberties being taken away and a return to pre-revolutionary authoritarian practices.³⁹ It demonstrates the fine line Tunisian authorities must navigate in implementing CT and CFT policies amid democratic transition.

The Creation of a Sanctions List

In an April 12, 2018, press conference, Tunisia’s NCC announced that it was in the process of developing a national list of designated terrorists as the basis for freezing their assets.⁴⁰ The move was in line with a January 2018 decree in which the Tunisian government charged the NCC with implementing both international sanctions obligations discussed above, through the establishment of a national list of:

“persons, organizations and entities ... of which there are relevant and reasonable ground indicating that they committed or attempted to commit a terrorist offense, participated in or facilitated the commission of a terrorist offense, as well as any entity owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by such persons, organizations or entities or any other entity acting on their behalf or under their direction, or any entity affiliated with them, dissident or derived.”

The decree further set forth that the NCC could rely on nominations to the list from domestic CT and CFT agencies, as well as requests from other countries, as stipulated in UNSC Resolution 1373. Laying out this framework, as well as provisions that require public notice of such actions (although without prior notice to the accused), a process for gaining access to frozen funds for “essential expenses,” and application for appeal or “delisting” from the national list, is in line with Tunisia’s commitment to follow through on its action plan, agreed upon with the FATF in October 2017.⁴¹ However, populating the list goes above and beyond what is strictly required under the FATF process. Rather than a “check the box” exercise, Tunisian authorities are cultivating their domestic list as another tool in the counterterrorism toolkit.

It was not until November 16, 2018, however, that the mechanism was implemented, when the first 23 terrorist elements were listed.⁴² The NCC published on its website the individuals’ name, date and place of birth, current address, nationality, current status (imprisoned, fighting domestically or internationally, or killed), reason for being on the list, and other relevant details.⁴³ The list has since been updated three times: on December 24, 2018, April 2, 2019, and most recently June 21, 2019. As of the latest update,

there are now 107 individuals, groups, and/or entities on the list.

Tunisian authorities have also provided the public with frequently asked questions related to the designations and freezings, published on the NCC’s website,⁴⁴ and have conducted outreach to the financial sector,⁴⁵ accountants, real estate agents, and other obligated entities with the aim of having all stakeholders apply the same methodologies when pursuing the sanctions in various sectors.⁴⁶ Most recently, in July 2019, in coordination with the Central Bank of Tunisia, the NCC conducted an information session for various government authorities, including security services, on implementation of the sanctions list.⁴⁷

How the List Sheds Light on the Jihadi Threat Facing Tunisia

Tunisia’s sanctions list provides various details on the individuals being sanctioned and what activities they have been involved in, which explains why they are on the list. The list broadens analysts’ understanding of the Tunisian jihadi ecosystem since many of the details provided were not known publicly previously. Of the 107 listed entities, 105 of them are individuals, one is an organization—Jund al-Khilafah (aka the Islamic State in Tunisia)—and the other is an extremist charity that ran a children’s school, al-Jama’iah al-Qur’aniyah Ibn ‘Umar.⁴⁸ The latter was run by Faruq Bin Ibrahim al-Zaribi, who is also on the sanctions list, having used the charity and school for “planting ideas of religious extremism and of intolerance and hatred” in the children attending.⁴⁹ Al-Zaribi is also accused in the sanctions list of “financing activities related to terrorism.”⁵⁰ Inexplicably missing from the list is Katibat ‘Uqbah Bin Nafi, an AQIM front group that has been fighting against Tunisian security and military forces and has killed local civilians in the mountainous area close to the Algerian border since December 2012.⁵¹

In terms of individuals, of the 105 people on the sanctions list, 24 of them also appear on Tunisia’s wanted list,^j which has 135 names.⁵² This suggests there are individuals on the wanted list who could be added to the sanctions list in the future. Since the sanctions list began, six individuals on it have been killed, all of whom were with the Islamic State in Tunisia, and when the NCC made updates to the list, it noted the individuals had been killed.

In the first and second update, the sanctions list noted if the individual was imprisoned or in a “state of flight” (i.e., with a group locally in the mountains or abroad as a foreign fighter). Of the 63 individuals featured on the list at the time of the second update, 26 were imprisoned, six were dead, and the rest were still active with either KUBN or the Islamic State in Iraq, Libya, Syria, or Tunisia. Yet, in the subsequent two updates after that, the NCC did not include this information, making it impossible to know if individuals were in Tunisia’s prison system and therefore less of an immediate threat.

i The NCC also noted that Tunisia’s list will be supplemental to the United Nations’ sanctions and designation list, which is derived primarily from the U.S. designation and sanctions list for terrorists. Most Tunisians on those lists were primarily designated in the direct aftermath of 9/11 and were more linked to the global jihadi networks than more localized ones that could be less relevant to the United States or Europe. “As’ilah mutadawlah hawala al-tajmid,” Tunisia’s National Counterterrorism Commission, January 4, 2019.

j This has only been used for terrorists and not other criminals.

The age range of those on the list is between 56 and 21 with an average age of 34.43 and a median age of 34. With almost 60 percent under the age of 35, most of those sanctioned are young adults. The list also provides information on where all of the individuals (105) were born and on their last known address. (See Figure 1.) Of both geographic identifiers, there is not too much variation between the location of where someone was born and where they currently live (or at least lived prior to joining militants at home or abroad), with a few exceptions. Most of those on the list were born in Tunis (18), the capital; Ben Gardane (10), near the Libyan border that the Islamic State attempted to take over in March 2016; and Kasserine (10), which like Ben Gardane has been a recruiting ground for the Islamic State.^k The current addresses are slightly more distributed, but the top locations point to Tunis (14); El Kef (8), which has had a KUBN cell based in Jabal Ouergha since 2014 conducting IED attacks against Tunisian security; and Kasserine (7). The data on where people are from and where they currently live is consistent with past research on Tunisian jihadi networks by one of the authors.⁵³

Within the sanction list, there are many relatively unknown

k Kasserine has been a hub for both the Islamic State and KUBN, and both groups have recruited from there. Aaron Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able To Do It: al-Qaeda in Tunisia's Inability to Take Advantage of the Islamic State's Setbacks," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13:1 (2019).

figures, many of whom are foot soldiers and/or individuals in the mid- to low-level ranks. Nevertheless, there are some prominent leaders on the list:⁵⁴

- **Wanas al-Faqih:** Originally part of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia's (AST's) clerical network, having participated as a lecturer at *dawa* events in Moknine, Kebili, and Sousse, among other places. Following the August 2013 designation of AST as a terrorist organization by the Tunisian government, al-Faqih joined KUBN in the mountains along the Algerian border before allegedly taking on a larger regional role in the Sahel with AQIM prior to his arrest in Niger in December 2016 and extradition back to Tunisia in January 2017. Al-Faqih was also designated as a terrorist by the U.S. State Department in January 2018, even though he was already imprisoned in Tunisia.⁵⁵
- **Shams al-Din Sherif Sandi:** Planned the Islamic State terrorist attacks at the Bardo Museum in Tunis in March 2015 and at the Sousse Beach in June 2015 from Sabratha, Libya. Sabratha was the base for Tunisian Islamic State leaders who planned external operations in Tunisia before the February 2016 U.S. airstrike against their camp.⁵⁶ Sandi's current status and whereabouts remain unknown.
- **Bilal al-Shawashi:** Youth leader in AST who was arrested for involvement in the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tunis and helped recruit individuals to fight in Syria in 2012-2013 through street *dawa* as well as appearing on local Tunisian

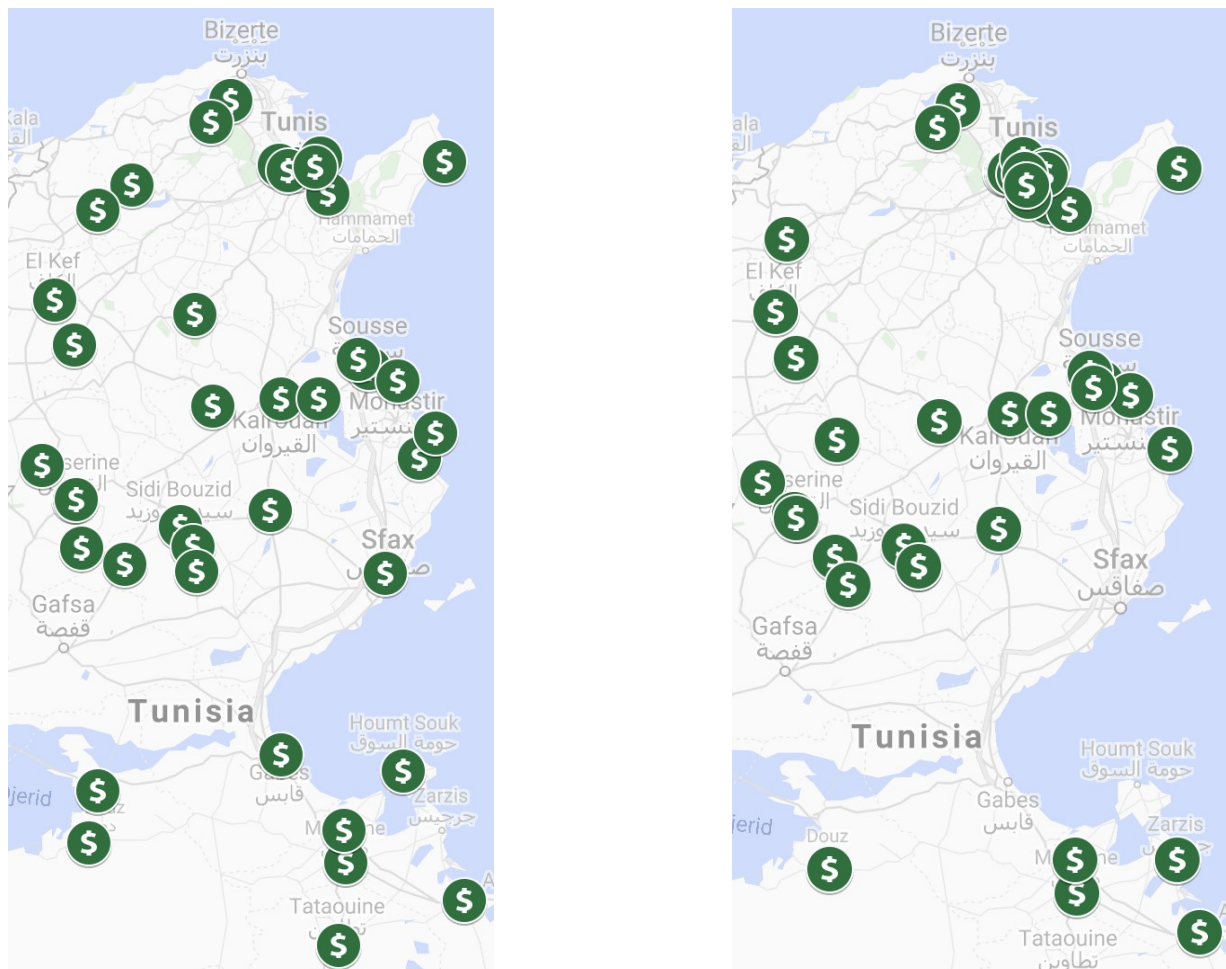


Figure 1: Location of Birth (left) and Current Address (right) of Tunisian Jihadis with Assets Frozen. Note: If more than one individual is from the same location, then only one dollar sign is used to signal that particular location.

primetime television shows. In Syria, he joined Jabhat al-Nusra in 2013 and became one of the group's sharia officials, but defected and pledged *bay`a* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in April 2014. But due to the Islamic State's violent excesses in late 2016, al-Shawashi returned to the al-Nusra fold by joining al-Nusra's successor group Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, which now calls itself Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Al-Shawashi is now HTS' head sharia official in Kafr Nabl in Idlib province.

- **Fadhl Mansi:** Involved in developing the Islamic State's drone program in Syria and according to the sanctions list may still be in Syria. Whether he is imprisoned by the Syrian Democratic Forces or is still operational is unknown.
- **Adam Bukadida:** Was on AST's sharia committee and was part of a cell that helped introduce weapons into Tunisia from Libya following the 2011 revolution. While smuggling weapons in February 2012, Bukadida was involved in a skirmish with Tunisian security in Bi'r Ali Bin Khalifah, which is 40 miles west of Sfax and 45 miles southeast of Sidi Bouzid. Two other individuals on the sanctions list were also allegedly part of this incident.¹ Bukadida's current whereabouts are unknown.

The data from the sanctions list also provides details on groups that those on the list have belonged to as well as their involvement in particular plots or attacks. This helps shed light on jihadi networks in Tunisia and the fluidity of jihadi allegiances. Of the 105 individuals sanctioned, 86 listings specify a group affiliation, with 17 of those 86 having moved from one group to another, according to the information, and three having moved groups twice.

Based on the information on the sanctions lists, the majority of the listed individuals appear to have become active only after the 2011 revolution. This is likely because the domestic list is a supplement to and as of September 2019 does not duplicate the U.N. sanctions list, which includes Tunisians that were al-Qa`ida affiliated primarily in the direct aftermath of 9/11. That is why it makes sense that only four of the individuals on Tunisia's domestic list are listed as affiliated to groups that were active prior to 2011, with one having been a foreign fighter in Iraq with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's network. The other three had been involved with the aforementioned failed Jund Asad Bin Furat (JABF) insurgency before moving on to other groups. Of the other 82 affiliations provided, 37 are to groups active between 2011-2013 with 36 joining AST and one assisting AQIM in weapons trafficking. This means the remaining 45 appear to have only become active in the jihadi movement after the Tunisian government designated AST as a terrorist organization in August 2013, which pushed recruitment and radicalization efforts underground, with 31 joining the Islamic State in either Libya, Syria, or Tunisia and 14 joining KUBN.

The largest network on the sanctions list comprised of 12 people trafficking weapons and introducing them to Tunisia following the revolution. This was primarily facilitated through traditional clandestine smuggling routes that jihadis took advantage of following the Libyan uprising and refugee camps for Libyans in Tunisia, where former officials who were part of the Qaddafi regime would sell weapons to jihadis.⁵⁷ Between May 2011 and August 2013, when AST was officially formed and then was later designated as a terrorist group by the Tunisian government, there were 10 weapons smuggling-related attempts that the Tunisian government was able

to interdict. How many went unnoticed is unknown, but the weapons that got through no doubt helped sustain terrorist activity in Tunisia.⁵⁸ According to other research conducted by one of the authors (Zelin), there were 37 terrorist plots and 24 attacks of varying degrees (most were small in scale and targeted the Tunisian security apparatus) from 2011-2013.⁵⁹

As for other general activities, five on the sanctions list were specifically involved in financing of terrorism-related crimes—two helped finance KUBN activities in the mountains, two financed jihadi groups abroad, and one helped finance the failed Islamic State takeover of Ben Gardane. It is possible more individuals involved in terror financing will be added to the list because between January 2014 and July 2019, there were 48 arrests of individuals and networks involved in various financing terrorism-related crimes.⁶⁰ The sanctions list references 11 attacks in which more than one of those listed were involved. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Networks of Tunisian Jihadis on Frozen Assets List

<i>Date</i>	<i>Attack</i>	<i>Number of Individuals That Are Sanctioned</i>
<i>March 2016</i>	<i>Failed takeover of Ben Gardane</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>March 2015</i>	<i>Bardo Museum attack</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>February 2013</i>	<i>Assassination of Chokri Belaid^m</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>October 2013</i>	<i>Targeting of elements of the National Guard in Sidi Ali Bin Aounⁿ</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>July 2014</i>	<i>Lufti Bin Jiddu assassination attempt (Minister of Interior at the time)</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>February and July 2013</i>	<i>Assassination of Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi^o</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>December 2018</i>	<i>Armed robbery of Al-Aman Bank in Kasserine</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>December 2012</i>	<i>Douar Hicher incident^p</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>June 2015</i>	<i>Sousse Beach attack</i>	<i>2</i>

m Chokri Belaid was a secular-left leader of the Democratic Patriots' Unified Party.

n This is a small town of 9,300 people in Sidi Bouzid governorate.

o Mohammed al-Brahmi was the secular-left founder and leader of the People's Movement Party. On the sanctions list, the Tunisian government notes that six individuals were involved in the Chokri Belaid assassination, three took part in both the Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi assassinations, and two were played a role in the Brahmi assassination. Meaning, overall, 11 people were involved in total in either one or both of the assassinations.

p This is an under-governed and impoverished suburb of Tunis.

1 The other two individuals are Hashimi Bin Muhammad Bin Hashimi Madani and Ziyad Bin Muhammad Muhsin Bin Hadi Abdali.

July 2013	<i>Assassination of Mohammed Brahmi</i>	2
September 2012	<i>Attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tunis</i>	2
November 2016	<i>Attack against the presidential security bus in Tunis</i>	2

Conclusion

Since 9/11, the international community has endeavored to improve global capacity to combat terrorism through innovative diplomatic, military, and financial initiatives. International best practices related to counter-terrorism financing have matured into a transnational regime facilitating detection and disruption of illicit transnational financial flows that underpin such activities. Mandates related to the development of domestic counter-terrorism financing regimes, including targeted financial sanctions, supplement U.N.-level sanctions, and deprive bad actors of access to both the local and global financial systems needed to raise, move, and store funds.

As part of the trend, in recent years, a number of MENA countries have deployed domestic sanctions lists, not only because non-compliance with such international best practices increasingly serves as a barrier to integration with the global financial system, but also because of a recognition of the importance of having such a tool in their national security toolkit.^q By publicly identifying terrorists and their financiers, countries can deter others from supporting jihadi groups at home and abroad, as well as share important typologies of not only fundraising, but recruitment, radicalization, and operational activities that raise public awareness of the threat from such groups. Sanctions also block assets and access to the global financial system necessary to move resources in support of such

activities. Beyond making it harder for terrorist groups to operate, mapping jihadi financing networks provides greater insight into relationships between different nodes within the networks, and even groups' plans and priorities.

Tunisia's list goes beyond previous efforts in the region by focusing on domestic actors and threats; in terms of the level of detail released about designees, including their current location and past and present affiliation; and because of due process protections and domestic outreach that has accompanied the implementation of the list.

Counterterrorism has emerged as a political priority for Tunisia post-revolution.⁶¹ The country has experienced a growing number of attacks domestically as well as being one of the largest contributors of foreign fighters to the most recent wave of jihadi travelers.⁶² As a transitional democracy, Tunisia faces specific challenges in effectively regulating the charitable and association sector to ensure its integrity against exploitation by terrorist actors without limiting the activity of civil society and the development of judicial capacity to ensure the timely prosecution of detained and suspected terrorist actors.

Clear and effective AML/CFT regulations and targeted financial sanctions can be an important and useful tool in this context, as long as the systems developed are seen as transparent and having integrity. For example, targeted financial sanctions may offer officials an alternative to detention. Often, domestic targeted financial sanctions are not necessary when there are judicial avenues for freezing funds pending a prosecution that may lead to not only the seizure of funds, but the conviction and incarceration of the perpetrator. Sanctions, however, have a lower evidentiary standard than a prosecution and often greater discretion in relying on intelligence information, meaning that a designation can serve as an intermediary option, pending additional evidence against a perpetrator or as a stop gap to inhibit further bad activity while investigations continue. They are also easier to appeal and reverse in many ways when compared to prosecutions because they are based on an administrative rather than judicial process. The implementation of a sanctions list in Tunisia has allowed authorities to expose and restrict local bad actors' access to the financial system, as well as giving them the tools to potentially restrict so-called 'martyrs' payments to their families, even while the judiciary reforms itself and builds up greater capacities.⁶³ Tunisia's counterterrorism sanctions regime remains in its nascent stages, and its overall effectiveness remains to be seen. Many of those on the list are also abroad, so how this affects local actors will be answered in greater detail in the coming years as this mechanism matures. Engagement and information sharing with foreign partners, for example, could strengthen implementation of the list. However, it is hard to know whether or not Tunisia has taken this sensitive next step.

Going forward, heightened awareness within Tunisia of terrorist financing risks and methodologies will likely prove useful in detecting and disrupting cross-border financial transfers between militants locally and abroad. Tunisia faces ongoing terrorist financing-associated challenges given the Islamic State's continued strength in Libya,⁶⁴ the potential for the Islamic State in Libya or Syria to rebuild external operation capacities and project attacks back into Tunisia, and possible financial flows between Tunisian

q The United Arab Emirates (UAE), for example, first released a list of terrorist organizations on November 15, 2014, to "ensure transparency" and "make all members of society aware of these organizations," according to the Emirates News Agency, WAM. However, it did not specify how the list was to be implemented, including by financial institutions, nor how one might appeal a listing. The UAE added to its list in June 2017, in conjunction with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Bahrain, designating more than 60 individuals and entities allegedly associated with Qatar, in the context of the Gulf rift emerging at that time. (Although the UAE does not have a centralized public sanctions list, the Dubai Financial Services Authority maintains on its website a database of all sanctions-related WAM press releases.) Furthermore, all GCC states, including Qatar, have also undertaken a number of "joint designations" with the United States against al-Qa'ida, the Islamic State, and Iran-related targets under the umbrella of the Terrorist Finance Targeting Center (TFTC), an initiative launched in 2017. (See testimony by U.S. Treasury Undersecretary Sigal Mandelker in front of the House Committee on Appropriations, March 12, 2019.) Despite these announcements, Gulf states largely do not have centralized public sanctions lists or clear instructions for their implementation. Iraq has also issued a list of sanctioned individuals and entities within the context of the counter-Islamic State campaign, although it does not include the level of detail offered by the Tunisian list. (The Iraqi list is available on the Central Bank of Iraq's website.) Across the MENA region, officials are in the process of developing and implementing the appropriate legal and regulatory structure, as well as conducting appropriate outreach to key stakeholders, such as financial institutions, either in advance of upcoming or in response to recent FATF mutual evaluations. Tunisia, as the first MENA country to be assessed by FATF this round, has had a jump start in developing and implementation a targeted domestic sanctions list.

jihadis based in Tunisia and those based in Europe and elsewhere.^r
Beyond local outreach to raise awareness with domestic banks,

r For example, there are two cases, one in June 2017 and one more recently in April 2019. The older case involves a financial network in Ben Gardane, Bizerte, and Ariana that were helping finance fleeing terrorists abroad in Syria. The money was sent to Turkey and then provided to members of the network in Syria. When the Tunisian government uncovered this illicit finance network, they arrested 13 individuals, including two women, and seized three million Tunisian dinars (\$1.2 million USD at the time) worth of Euro bank notes and gold. Less has been publicly revealed about the more recent case, but according to Tunisia's Interior Ministry, two individuals were arrested in Tunis for being involved with smuggling funds to a terrorist abroad who then in turn transferred money to a third country in what the Tunisian government described as a "hotbed of tension," which is a local colloquialism meaning a foreign fighting destination abroad (Syria, Libya, Iraq, and/or Mali). "MI : démantèlement d'un réseau de financement de terroristes tunisiens à l'étranger," Shems FM, June 28, 2017; "Ben Guerdène : 3 millions de dinars saisis chez un réseau de financement de terroristes," *Business News*, June 28, 2017; "Balagh," Tunisia's Ministry of Interior, April 12, 2019; "Détournement de fonds : Une cellule démantelée," Mosaïque FM, April 12, 2019.

civil society associations, and other regulated entities, Tunisian authorities should consider greater engagement with international partners, including sharing information with jurisdictions likely to be the source or destination of illicit funds in Tunisia, as mentioned above. Tunisia's domestic designations can also serve as the basis for referring individuals and entities for listing under U.N. sanctions or on other countries' sanctions lists.

This review of the development of Tunisia's domestic counter-terrorism financing system demonstrates that authorities no longer see terrorism in Tunisia as primarily a domestic phenomenon, but one that is tied to, influenced by, and fueled by transnational trends. Tunisia's recent progress in building the necessary toolkit not only combats the local threat, but also contributes to global efforts. With its expanding expertise in various ways of combating terrorism, Tunisia can situate itself as a leader in the region and provide guidance and example to others based on its experiences, especially countries (such as Algeria, Sudan, among others) that might have to deal with the dual challenge of transition to democracy and local jihadi mobilization in the future. **CTC**

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