

MIGRATION AND JIHADI TERRORISM IN EUROPE

Abstract. *This article aims to answer the research question of whether a relationship exists between migration and jihadi terrorism in Europe. The core argument is that increased migration from mainly Muslim countries has added to the risk of jihadi terrorism in European countries. The phenomena of homegrown extremism within immigrant communities, the cross-border movement of radicalised individuals, and the return of foreign fighters have all raised the likelihood of Islamic terrorism in Europe. The research results suggest that while migrants coming from terrorist-prone states are an important vehicle through which terrorism is manifested and diffused, there is an even bigger threat of jihadi terrorism from radicalised individuals within European immigrant communities.*

Keywords: *migration, radicalisation, terrorism, jihad, Europe*

Introduction

Conflicts, political repression, poverty, natural disasters and famine in much of the developing world have all contributed to the displacement of millions of people across the globe. Many of these migrants have begun seeking shelter in Europe in the hope of finding better living conditions and a favourable security environment. Migration flows from Europe's east and south have led to heavy migratory pressures on European countries, which are still struggling with integrating the second and third generations of post-World War II migrant travellers. The migrations of late also raise major security concerns because Europe has in recent years experienced both a wave of jihadi terrorism that emanated from domestic Muslim immigrant communities and the possible infiltration by homegrown and newcomer terrorists who could take advantage of the migrant routes as their path into Europe.

This article aims to answer the research question: Is there a causal relationship between migration and jihadi terrorism in Europe? The primary argument is that increased migration from mainly Muslim countries has

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added to the risk of Jihadi terrorism in European countries. The phenomena of homegrown extremism within immigrant communities, the cross-border movement of radicalised individuals, and the return of foreign fighters have all raised the likelihood of Islamic terrorism in Europe.

The study's focus is analysis of migration as a process of the spatial cross-border movement of people, terrorism as a mode of political violence, the causes of discontent among Muslim immigrants, and the roots and projection of jihadi terrorism in Europe. It is a qualitative type of study where both descriptive and analytical methods are used. The research data employed for this analysis come largely from an extensive collection of material and information extracted from various sources such as books, journals, reports, documents and articles.

The research results suggest that migrants who stem from terrorist-prone states and move to Europe are an important vehicle through which jihadi terrorism is manifested and diffused. However, the research shows that a bigger threat arises from militant Islamists from radicalised individuals within immigrant communities in Europe than from those returning from foreign battlefields or arriving from third countries for the very first time. Only a minority of terrorist plots or attacks involve newcomers posing as refugees or asylum-seekers.

This research aims to improve understanding of terrorism and to provide a clear understanding of the migration-jihadi terrorism relationship in Europe. Its results should give a constructive framework for understanding today's terrorist threats, which will continue to be a serious challenge for international security in the near future.

Migration and security

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States drastically changed the traditional concept of security, mostly based on a paradigm related to interstate conflict. Since those attacks and following several terrorist acts in the West, the security paradigm has become greatly influenced by non-state actors like al-Qaeda and later the "Islamic State". Moreover, given that most of the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks in Western countries emanated from a Muslim country or a Muslim immigration community in the West, discussions on contemporary security threats have inevitably included the potential security challenges created by migration.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of "migrant" on the international level, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as a person who moves away from his/her usual place of residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes

several well-defined legal categories of people, such as: migrant workers; persons for whom particular types of movement are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, like international students (Glossary on Migration, 2019: 132).

The factors that lead to migration vary. An unfavourable economic situation, unemployment, political or religious discrimination, deviation from the values system within the community, poor personal development conditions, and natural disasters are all factors that encourage migration. Attractive factors include better employment opportunities, higher earnings, greater opportunities for professional advancement and development, improved living conditions, dependence on family members, and wishes and needs to join the new environment and its attractiveness (Mesić, 2002: 294). Migration driven by the needs of existential and better living is an increasingly common form of migration, incentivising the path towards richer countries. Modern migration has been spurred by globalisation and its processes, making the movement of large numbers of people from one geographical area to another more frequent. Accordingly, massive and uncontrollable migration has become a reality of today and a major security issue.

There is also a distinction between internal and external migration. Internal migration takes place within state borders, while external migration occurs outside the state boundaries towards other countries as the final destination. This article focuses on external and international migration because such migration is directly related to the security aspect due to the large inflows of both legal and illegal migrants. The latter are a security phenomenon of the contemporary age since illegal migrants are associated with cross-border organised crime, smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism (Dragović, 2012: 13). The fact that many countries in the West have applied stricter migration policies in recent years means the phenomenon of illegal migration has increased in size significantly.

The effects of migration processes vary from country to country and may be positive or negative. While economic growth, job vacancies, closing skills gaps, and networking are some of the positive effects of migration, pressure on public services, strained national resources, depressed wages, integration difficulties and friction with the local population are some of their negative impacts on host countries. However, in recent times the negative impacts of migration have been closely associated with religious and ethnic tensions, violence, and terrorism.

The many terrorist attacks in European cities perpetrated by radical Islamists with their roots in domestic migrant communities have drawn attention to the issue of migration as a security problem. A glimpse at the

profiles of the attackers and their accomplices reveals a group of individuals born and raised in Europe who joined the ranks of terrorists. Many of them travelled to the Middle East and North Africa as foreign fighters to join the local jihadi groups there. Still, the problem is far broader as it involves radicalised individuals who, after having fought in the MENA warzones, return home to carry out terrorist attacks. Besides homegrown terrorists who travelled back and forth between the MENA region and Europe, some attackers were newcomers, radicalised prior to or after to their entry to Europe, who had taken advantage of the migrant routes to reach Europe which they view as a theatre of operation against the 'far enemy'. Both homegrown and foreign terrorists have exploited the flow of refugees as a new mode for entering Europe, which has raised concerns about the possible infiltration of migration routes by Jihadi terrorists.

Terrorism

Terrorism as a mode of political violence is an old and omnipresent phenomenon. Yet, despite terrorism having a very long history, there is still no agreed definition of the term. Walter Laqueur wrote that a comprehensive definition was virtually impossible to arrive at due to the great variety of circumstances in which this type of violence has appeared and the numerous and oft-competing political causes relied on by those who use it (Laqueur, 1977: 5). Nevertheless, for a better understanding of the phenomenon, it is useful to mention a few attempts at a definition by relevant terrorism experts.

Paul Wilkinson described the term as the "systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to serve political ends" (Wilkinson, 2006: 15). Bruce Hoffman defined terrorism as "violence – or, equally important the threat of violence – used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim" (Hoffman, 2006: 2–3). Jessica Stern regarded terrorism as "an act or threat of violence against noncombatants with the objective of exacting revenge, intimidating, or otherwise influencing an audience" (Stern, 1999: 11). The working assumption made in this article is that terrorism is deliberate violence or the deliberate threat of violence against the innocent to inspire fear so as to achieve political ends.

While violence is a crucial component of terrorism, it is not an end in itself, but a tool for advancing a higher, political goal. Terrorists are always driven by political ends, even when motivated by religious, economic or social reasons. Terrorism – in the most widely accepted contemporary use of the term – is fundamentally and inherently political. It is also ineluctably about power: the pursuit of power, the acquisition of power, and the use of power to achieve political change (Hoffman, 2006: 2).

Although it is a political concept, terrorism is not an ideology. Ideology provides a sense of meaning to terrorists and motivates them to undertake acts of violence. Terrorism is a tactic. It can be used on its own or as part of broader unconventional warfare.

Terrorism also entails psychological warfare. Terrorists desire to create a long-term atmosphere of fear in a targeted community. Fear is the primary psychological weapon of terrorism. Terrorists want to create and exploit a climate of fear among the targeted group of people. If people become terrified, they become immobilised, incapable of mounting a coherent response to the dangers they are confronting. They may very well blame their government for its inability to eliminate the danger to public safety (Weinberg, 2005: 5).

Terrorism is a tactic used by both state and non-state actors. It can be employed by desperate and weak minorities, by states as a tool of domestic and foreign policy, or by belligerents as an accompaniment in all types and stages of warfare (Wilkinson, 2006: 15–16). For that matter, most common types of terrorism are: national-separatist, left- and right-wing, issue-oriented, state-sponsored, state, and religious terrorism. Religious terrorists are a self-appointed collection of fanatics who use violent acts under the cover of a holy war to further what they see as divinely commanded purposes. This type of terrorism is particularly dangerous due to the fanaticism of those who practise it and their willingness to create mass casualties and sacrifice themselves for the cause.

There is no magic formula for explaining why people choose to become terrorists. However, the characters and motives of those who participate in terrorist groups and organisations can generally be traced to young people who are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to initiate fundamental political change. The militant Islamists of today come from a wide demographic range, including university students, families with an impoverished background, highly educated professionals, married men in their late forties, and rarely women.

The processes by which individuals become integrated into terrorist groups include: far-reaching isolation from the outside world and third persons, the gradual constructing of rigid images about friends and enemies, complete emotional and cognitive subordination to a certain community in the organisation, development of its own style of living and speaking, fixation on particular symbolic connections and rituals (a cult of martyrs, an oath of revenge), and finally pseudo-judgement not only against their enemies but also against any 'traitors' in their own ranks (Waldmann, 2001: 475).

Sources of discontent among muslim immigrants

Muslim communities in the countries of Western Europe have their origins in Europe's labour shortages and immigration policies of the 1950s and 1960s. Millions of immigrants from Muslim countries streamed into Western Europe in the hope of escaping the grinding poverty of their homelands and because Europe was offering employment as the result of the longest boom in the continent's history (Laqueur, 2004: 59). Most of these immigrants performed well during the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, the oil crises in the 1970s changed much of that. The rise in oil prices was reflected in double-digit inflation and a sudden, massive increase in unemployment, which immediately affected workers without qualifications, namely, immigrants. European governments took measures to restrict immigration with a view to reducing unemployment; they also counted on the probability that those finding themselves out of work would go home. However, the immigration structures had the opposite effect: immigrants realised they would be better off being unemployed in Europe than unemployed at home (Kepel, 2002: 192). In time, they brought their families over and became permanent. While many European Muslims have become successful in their new homes, many others have remained jobless and poor.

Most of such immigrants settled in cold city ghettos. Although many immigrants had been placed there by public authorities, many others chose to live in these locations on their own. Some of these areas are vibrant, growing ethnic neighbourhoods, yet many are breeding grounds for social alienation or worse, with high levels of unemployment, crime, poverty and hopelessness (Masci, 2005: 10). In Europe's deindustrialising economy, a lack of education, often exacerbated by poor language skills, put the opportunities of finding higher-wage, entry-level work beyond the reach of many Muslim immigrants and their children. This means that Muslim unemployment rates tend to be very high. The House of Commons warned in a 2016 report about the 12.8% unemployment rate among the UK's 2.7 million Muslims, compared with 5.4% among the general population (The Independent, 11 August 2016). In 2009, the "Sensitive Urban Zones" in France, in which many immigrants reside, had an unemployment rate of around 18.6% compared to the national average of 9.8%; for young people in those neighbourhoods, the rate reached 43%, which added to strong perceptions of discrimination (Kepel, 2011).

Many members of the second and third generations of Muslim immigrants have not been motivated to better themselves through education, improve their life chances through learning and work, and increase their life chances through integration, which have all hindered their social mobility. A data set on immigrants living in France shows that children from Muslim

immigrant families achieve a lower education level on average than children from non-Muslim immigrant families (Mitrut and Wolff, 2013: 7). More broadly, in most European countries Muslims have a lower education than non-Muslims. The biggest gap is seen in Germany where Muslims, on average, have 4.2 fewer years of schooling than non-Muslims. Further, the surge of Muslim refugees into Europe during 2015 and 2016 may have increased the ratio of Muslims with fewer years of schooling to non-Muslims in several European countries (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Locked in their ghettos, they have shown little interest to embrace the local values, practices and traditions. Many immigrants have held no wish to be integrated into a society whose basic values they do not share, with cultural traditions they do not appreciate, and to emulate a way of life many aspects of which they abhor (Laqueur, 2007: 211). Moreover, they have transformed some of their ghettos into 'no-go' areas for white Europeans and even for the police, who fear the local community's hostility (Masci, 2005: 10).

The desire to escape the poor social conditions, accompanied by a thirst for adventure and action, has turned a significant minority of young immigrants towards street violence, gang membership, and criminal activity. According to many reports, the Muslim contingent among young offenders has been up to 80% in parts of Britain and France (Laqueur, 2004: 61–62). Muslims in places like Belgium and France, the disenfranchised, poor, isolated, and ostracised, make up a disproportionate share of those who are incarcerated. In France, Muslims account for just 8% of the overall population and yet make up 60% of the prison population (Quartz, 31 March 2017). Prisons are important vectors in the process of radicalisation. Notably, one of the masterminds behind the Paris terror attacks of 13 November 2015 was a Belgian jihadist who is believed to have been radicalised in prison. In addition, the perpetrator of the Copenhagen attacks in Denmark on 14 and 15 February 2015 had also been released from prison several weeks beforehand and was reportedly radicalised there. Other individuals involved in committing these atrocities were also found to have spent time in prison (Dougdale, 2017).

Deviant behaviour among young immigrants is also an expression of rebellion against perceived social injustice and the hostile attitude of the domicile population. The forces of law and order in France, Britain and Germany, as well as the education and justice systems, have been held responsible for immigrants' failures at school, their problems with finding work, the high incidence of police harassment they have experienced (Kepel, 2002: 196–197). Some commentators believe the violence in the *banlieue* and the great enthusiasm shown for Osama bin Laden after 11 September 2001 was a revolt against an unjust and racist society (Laqueur, 2004: 63).

Into this volatile mix comes the centrality that Islam holds in the lives of so many European Muslims. The first-generation immigrants were broadly secular, and those who were religious were rarely hard-line in their beliefs and practices (Malik, 2015). In the late 1980s, however, the question of religion became more important for younger Muslims. This growing religiosity was accompanied by a rejection of secular Europe's liberal values, which has increased tensions concerning religion. When on Valentine's Day in 1989 Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* calling on "all zealous Muslims" to kill the author of *The Satanic Verses* Salman Rushdie and his publishers, thousands of British Muslims went onto the streets in support of the imposition of Islamic blasphemy laws in Britain. In 1991, Rushdie's Italian translator was stabbed and beaten up in his apartment in Milan. In 1993, the Norwegian publisher of *The Satanic Verses*, William Nygaard, was shot three times outside his house in Oslo. In Britain, two bookshops were fire-bombed for stocking the book. Other shops, including a London department store that housed a Penguin bookshop, had bombs planted in them (Murray, 2018: 134, 136).

The trend of rejecting secularism has continued. A survey conducted in 2016 found that 29% of the 3 to 4 million Muslim people in France felt that the Islamic legal and moral code of sharia is more important than French secular law. One-quarter of Muslims were hard-line, made up of "mostly young, low-skilled people with low levels of participation in the labor market" living on the outskirts of cities. This group approved of the burka, polygamy and the superiority of Islamic law (The Financial Times, 18 September 2016).

The overreaching consequences of the minimal spatial, social and cultural contact of many Muslim immigrants with their host society has led to fragmented societies and alienated minorities. Western Europe now plays host to an often-disconsolate Muslim offspring, who are its citizens in name but not culturally or socially. Many of its members are willing to integrate and trying to climb up Europe's steep social ladder. Still, many younger Muslims reject the minority status to which their parents acquiesced (Leiken, 2005).

Finally, since 2001 some young Muslims' attitudes to Western society have further hardened. Many of them have shared the fear that the West has proclaimed Muslims as enemies. The USA's declaration of a war on terrorism followed by the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq deepened convictions that the West was embarked on a crusade against Muslims and Islam itself.

While Europe is still struggling with the integration of the second and third generations of the original migrant travellers, the continent is facing a new challenge caused by a new influx of immigrants from the Middle East, Asia and Africa. In recent years, hundreds of thousands of immigrants have come to Europe in search for better living conditions, job opportunities, benefits, and social services. However, suffering from unresolved asylum

claims, a lack of language proficiency, unaffordable housing, inadequate financial resources, limited access to education, and unsuccessful labour market integration, many of the newcomers have seen their prospects dwindle, their economic and social mobility grind to a halt, and their expectations dashed. Data show that only one-quarter to one-third of the newcomers in Germany would join the labour market over the ensuing 5 years, and “for many others we will need up to 10” (The Financial Times, 22 June 2017). In Sweden and Norway, foreigners are three times more likely to be jobless than local people (The Financial Times, 26 March 2017).

Placed in refugee shelters, the most vulnerable of them experience physical, emotional and sexual abuse by other immigrants, which is deeply rooted in the sense of power inequalities between men and women, and mature and younger men, as well as hatred towards sexual minorities. In Germany, a crowd of up to 2,000 men sexually assaulted and robbed around 1,200 women in the main square outside the central railway station and cathedral of Cologne and in the adjoining streets on New Year’s Eve 2015 (Murray, 2018: 2004). In Sweden, an asylum-seeker who was sentenced for beating a fellow gay refugee in an asylum centre was outraged that Sweden protects homosexuality, and that they all should be killed by slaughtering”, according to court documents (CBSNEWS, 22 February 2016). These immigrants showed no regard for their victims or the law.

Besides power inequalities, the newcomers have brought several ancient animosities with them, as seen in the upsurge of anti-Semitic violence in Europe such as the rise in attacks on Jews by young Muslims. In the years of the mass immigration, attacks on Jews began to increase everywhere. According to a body that records attacks in France, the BNVCA ..., the number of recorded anti-Semitic attacks in France doubled between 2013 and 2014 alone, reaching 851 incidents in that year (Murray, 2018: 149-150).

It has become apparent that many of those arriving from conservative Muslim countries are bringing many social and religious views with them that are inappropriate for their new context. They are experiencing a new cultural environment that makes their integration into the host societies extremely challenging. Conflicting norms and values can give rise to feelings of rejection and a negative image of others. Further, significant discrepancies between their expectations and the reality can create the belief that this new society is not treating them fairly. Feeling disappointed, even those willing to accommodate to the new cultural environment might begin to suspect the values of this new society. Disappointment can easily lead to frustration and anger towards the host country. The most dangerous response to this is an aggressive reaction through violent activism. This is something that Europe has already experienced.

The roots of radical Islam in Muslim communities

In the Muslim ghettos all around Western Europe, where the social and psychological conditions have been ripe for extremism to grow, many young immigrants have become vulnerable to jihadist propaganda. The propagandists of radical Islam have promoted the idea that Islam is the only true religion and that the creation of an Islamic order is a divine commandment. This doctrine is based on theological puritanism and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. Radical Islamists aim to purge the infidel and the deviant from Muslim society and to construct a proper Islamic order under a restored caliphate modelled on the first Islamic State established by Muhammad in the seventh century. This caliphate would be based on God's injunctions set out in the basic texts of Islam, Quran and the Sunna (the words and deeds of the Prophet) where religion, politics and all other aspects of human life would be governed through sharia (Islamic law) (Kuntić, 2018: 38).

In the mindset of radical Islamists, this aim can most likely only be achieved through violent struggle, a jihad. Even though the meaning of "jihad" is not always clear, for radical Islamists it chiefly means a holy war against all those who they designate as enemies of Islam. Sayyid Qutb, a radical thinker whose writings have greatly influenced all prominent jihadists, including Osama bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, said that offensive jihad, as an armed struggle in the defence of Islam, is incumbent upon all Muslims. "The white man in Europe or America is our number-one enemy", emphasised Qutb in his writings. As Qutb saw it, offensive jihad constitutes the very essence of Islam and its universal role in the world (Gerges, 2005: 8).

The doctrine of radical Islam started to gain ground in Europe in the 1980s with the influx of a new generation of radical preachers coming from Muslim countries. Whether Shia or Sunni, they were inspired by the Iranian Revolution that had transformed the country into an Islamic republic. The Iranian Revolution in Iran has been held up as an example to Muslims throughout the world, exhorting them to reassert the fundamental teachings of the Qur'an and to resist the intrusion of Western – particularly the USA's – influence on the Middle East (Hoffman, 2006: 90).

This period coincided with the dissemination of state-sponsored mosques, prayer rooms and cultural centres built for Muslim immigrant communities in Europe. Teheran used these religious facilities as important conduits of political and revolutionary ideology among the Shia diaspora in Europe. At the same time, the Saudi-inclined Muslim World League had begun to open offices in Europe with a view to financing the building of mosques through a local association whose economic dependence they

hoped would evolve into ideological support for Wahhabism (Kepel, 2002: 194). Many of these mosques and prayer rooms were quickly taken up by the radical preachers who have turned them into propaganda centres and incubators for a new generation of jihadists in the heart of Europe. Disguised as religious dignitaries, these preachers openly preached violence against the Western world and its allies in the Middle East. Muslims and Islamic organisations which tried to project a moderate image were labelled traitors and apostates (Laqueur, 2004: 6).

Meanwhile, the 'information revolution' has offered Muslim extremists a new platform for indoctrination, propaganda dissemination, radicalisation, communication and collaboration. In recent years, militant Islamic groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS have enlisted thousands of homegrown terrorists and foreign fighters through their online activities and posted numerous propaganda materials and videos calling for attacks in the West.

All of these jihadi propagandists have promoted a return to fundamentalist Islam, which has become an appealing alternative to all the shortcomings of immigrant communities. Islam has been the solution to all of their problems. It has become a source of identity, meaning, stability, legitimacy, development, power and hope. "Islam is for them a way of asserting themselves on the margins of French society", stated a report from 2016 (The Financial Times, 18 September 2016). Trying to redeem themselves from crime, drugs or gangs, to escape from their empty lives, earn power and respect, or to give their lives a new meaning, many young Muslim immigrants have become more receptive to radical Islamist ideas. Joining radical groups, they have found friends, respect and identity. In the words of a former Islamist Ed Hussein, "cut off from Britain, isolated from the Eastern culture of our parents, Islamism provided us with a purpose and place in life. More importantly, we felt as though we were the pioneers, at the cutting edge of this new global development of confronting the West in its own backyard" (Husain, 2007: 73-74).

That was certainly the case for the jihadists who organised and carried out some of the deadliest terrorist plots in Europe, such as the Kouachi Brothers, al-Qaeda-linked operatives involved in the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attack, or Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the mastermind of the 2015 Paris terrorist attack. A look at their profiles reveals they were immigrants coming from communities where social, economic and/or political exclusion is higher than the average. Many terrorists involved in recent attacks were young men with criminal records who had served jail terms that had nothing to do with terrorism. Several of the terrorists involved in the *Charlie Hebdo* and Bataclan theatre attacks were common criminals who became radicalised in prison. A report by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) found that more than half of known European jihadists had a criminal

history, making them easy fodder for ISIS recruiters offering 'redemption' in the name of jihad (The Independent, 23 May 2017).

The often-poor integration of Muslim immigrants has created a large pool of disaffected people, who make easy prey for jihadi propaganda. All of the attackers were members of a new class of a radicalised young generation of Muslim immigrants who appeared on the European scene and joined the ranks of terrorists. Believing that jihad against the West had become every Muslim's personal duty, this new network of radicalised youth embraced terrorism and turned Western countries into domestic war zones. Reasons for such attacks could always be found, being explained as: punishment for participation in the US-led war on terrorism, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, the alleged persecution of local Muslim minorities, or the intervention of the Western coalition against jihadists in Iraq and Syria. It is thus no surprise that those countries with the heaviest military involvement in the Muslim world have been the most targeted.

Manifestation of jihadi terrorism in Europe

Military conflicts have always had a great impact on the internalisation of jihadi terrorism. The Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989), the Bosnian War (1992–1995), the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan (2001) and the invasion of Iraq (2003) altogether witnessed the influx of tens of thousands of foreign fighters who, convinced that Islam is itself under attack by non-Muslim armies, wanted to join a jihad against the infidels. Finally, the Arab Spring created a space for new fronts in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen. The Syrian Civil War was the breaking point for many Muslims who became convinced that non-violent change of repressive and corrupt Arab regimes is impossible. Vivid accounts of the atrocities of the Assad regime strengthened in many young Muslims in the West the belief that the Sunni uprising had to be supported with more than just words (Schmid, 2016: 39).

The spillover of the Syrian Civil War offered Sunni jihadists from around the world an opportunity to establish a foothold in the heart of the Middle East. When the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed the establishment of a caliphate in Iraq's second-largest city of Mosul in June 2014, thousands of Muslim fundamentalists and extremists flocked to the first Islamic state in modern history. More than 40,000 foreigners from 110 countries are estimated to have migrated to Iraq and Syria to join the jihadist group (The Guardian, 22 May 2018). After 2014, about 6,000 European Union residents left their home countries to join the ranks of ISIS, accompanied by around 1,000 people from the Western Balkans.

All of them were eager to perform a *hijrah*, a migration to the caliphate modelled on the Prophet Muhammad's exile along with the early Muslim

community from Mecca to Medina in 622. All of those who travelled to the Islamic State, male and female, young and old, from the UK and elsewhere, repeated the same stock phrases: about the caliphate's legitimacy, the historical confrontation between Muslims and the West, the decadence of European society, Muslim solidarity, their desires for martyrdom, and the legitimacy of the executions of captured "spies" (Burke, 2015: 213).

When ISIS called for a war against the "armies of Rome", the phenomenon of these foreign fighters became a significant security problem for Europe. Some 1,500 of the over 6,000 men and women who went to Syria from Western countries have, after a 'tour of duty', returned from the caliphate. A few have in the meantime engaged in acts of terrorism at home. They are *hijrah* migrants, who turned into terrorists or at least joined a jihadist organisation which engages in acts of terrorism. Those of them who returned to Europe not out of disillusionment but with the intention to conduct attacks in their country of origin are returnee migrants turned terrorists, serving as the fifth column of the Islamic State in the West (Schmid, 2016: 42).

Hijrah migrants are seen as a threat for several reasons. First, they are battle-hardened fighters, equipped with new skills and radical ideology, which enhances their capability to carry out terrorist attacks. Second, a substantial number of them have stayed active members in extremist networks at home. Third, as such people hold the prestige of having fought on the battlefields and are often treated as heroes, they can play a crucial role in influencing young people and attract quite a following. Thus, foreign terrorist fighters could be the element that allows a sudden and dramatic increase in the ability of jihadists to launch attacks in the West.

After declaring its caliphate in June 2014 and until February 2018, ISIS had conducted or inspired more than 140 terrorist attacks in 29 countries other than Iraq and Syria, in which the carnage it caused took a much deadlier toll. Those attacks killed at least 2,043 people and injured thousands more (CNN, 12 February 2018). Research by Lorenzo Vindino, Francesco Marone and Eva Entenmann revealed that 63 attacks between September 2014 and late August 2017 are considered to be acts of jihadist terrorism in the West (BBC, 30 August 2017). Two-thirds (64%) of those perpetrators were citizens of the country under attack, with others being either legal residents or legal visitors from neighbouring countries.

Analysis by Petter Nesser of 75 ISIS plots in the West revealed that at least one-third of them involved a foreign fighter – an individual who has gone abroad to train or fight in a terrorist safe haven. However, this figure is probably low as extremists are increasingly taking steps to hide their communications, while in recent cases the involvement of a foreign fighter was often unclear until weeks or months into an investigation. Roughly half of these

cases involved “returnees”, foreign fighters who came home from ISIS safe havens to launch the attacks themselves (Schmid, 2016: 43).

A 2018 report by EUROPOL states that the jihadists who conducted terrorist attacks in the European Union in 2017 were mainly home-grown, meaning they were radicalised in their country of residence without having travelled to join any terrorist group abroad (EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018). The profiles of the Paris attackers and their accomplices reveal a group of individuals with roots in Europe, many of whom had travelled to the Middle East as a “foreign fighter” (Funk and Parkes, 2016: 1).

A series of terrorist actions in Europe also demonstrates that many of those terrorists had close connections with jihadist organisations in the MENA region. According to Simcox, between January 2014 and December 2017, out of 32 plots featuring refugees or asylum-seekers, 21 had known ties to a designated terrorist organisation. In 18 plots, these ties were solely with ISIS (Simcox, 2018: 6).

A consideration of the profiles of the jihadists who organised and carried out the 2015 Paris attack reveals that some had direct links with ISIS. At least four out of seven terrorists graduated from ISIS training camps in Syria. Moreover, the mastermind of the attack, Abdel Hamid Abaaoud, was the leader of the Verviers cell of returned Syrian jihadists. Two of the airport and Metro attacks in Brussels in 2016 were perpetrated by terrorists who had fought in Syria. A shooter at the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014 also spent 1 year in Syria, while a perpetrator of the Manchester Arena bombing had travelled back and forth to Libya. Further, the Kouachi brothers had secretly travelled to Yemen and been trained as fighters by al-Qaeda.

Some of the jihadists had weaker connections with ISIS, such as the terrorists behind the Barcelona and Cambrils 2017 attacks who are believed to be young men brought together and radicalised in Ripoll, Spain by a local imam of Moroccan roots with suspected terrorist links. In June 2018, a Tunisian linked to ISIS was apprehended in Cologne for allegedly producing ricin to be used in a possible attack. Five Tajik members of an ISIS cell accused of planning attacks on US forces stationed in Germany in 2020 had received instructions from ISIS leaders based in Syria and Afghanistan.

Still, it must be stressed that most of the deadly plots in Europe have been carried out independently by individuals without any known operational connection to a jihadist group. Of the attacks that have hit the West since June 2014, less than 1 in 10 was carried out under the direct orders of the ISIS leadership. During or before the attack, 6 out of 10 perpetrators had pledged allegiance to a jihadist group, almost always ISIS, which frequently claims responsibility (BBC, 30 August 2017). Although ISIS’ influence can be seen in many attacks, a direct operational connection between the group and the terrorists cannot be verified.

The recent attacks in Europe have mainly been committed by lone individuals who have not been to a conflict zone – but who may have been inspired by terrorist propaganda and/or the extremist narrative, as well as by other successful attacks in the world (EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018). Such was the case of the 2016 Nice lorry attack, the 2013 shooting spree in Toulouse, the 2016 Berlin Christmas market attack, and the 2017 London Bridge attack. In the case of the 2020 Vienna terrorist attack, the perpetrator was an Austrian-North Macedonian dual citizen and an ISIS sympathiser born in Austria, radicalised at a local mosque as a teenager and further by ISIS' online propaganda, and convicted for attempting to join ISIS, who managed to kill 4 and wounded over 20 people.

These episodes demonstrate that jihadi sympathisers who have never spent time in a foreign conflict zone or been trained for terrorist attacks can be as dangerous as a team of highly trained militants.

Meanwhile, an immigration wave has created a real opportunity for ISIS to infiltrate jihadists into Europe. In 2016, the CIA stated that the terrorist group's official strategy was to hide its operatives among refugees entering Europe and the USA via human flows out of the MENA region. One of the strategy papers captured from ISIS made it clear that the refugee stream into Europe was to be used to infiltrate terrorists. "We have sent many operatives to Europe with the refugees. Some of our brothers have fulfilled their mission, but others are still waiting to be activated", an ISIS commander said in an interview over an encrypted data service (Newsweek, 27 April 2017). Between January 2014 and December 2017, there were 194 publicly disclosed Islamist terror plots or acts of violence, with only 16% involving refugees or asylum-seekers. During this time, there was a minimum of 32 plots featuring refugees or asylum-seekers that were either foiled or took place (an average of 8 per year), which featured a total of 44 refugees or asylum-seekers. Twenty-one of the 32 plots had known ties to a designated terrorist organisation (Simcox, 2018: 2, 6).

How many terrorists have been hidden among immigrants is unknown. In order to avoid detection, returning foreign terrorist fighters take advantage of the porous borders, use stolen passports and 'broken travel' techniques, infiltrate migration routes, and make use of encrypted communications technology (Mehra, 2016: 8). Taking into consideration the territorial defeat of ISIS' self-declared caliphate and its calls for jihadists to target Europe, there are likely dozens of jihadists hidden in the stream of regular immigrants.

A few jihadists who engaged in terrorism in Europe had been registered and finger-printed on Europe's borders, carried residence papers from refugee centres, or sought asylum in Europe. This was the case of some of the November 2015 Paris and the March 2016 Brussels attackers. Moreover, a

jihadist who attacked passengers on a train in northern Bavaria in July 2016 was 17-year-old Afghan asylum-seeker on German soil, a perpetrator of the 2017 Stockholm lorry attack was a rejected asylum-seeker from Uzbekistan, while an Iraqi refugee was jailed for life in March 2018 after having detonated a bomb contained on the London Underground in September 2017. In the case of the Paris attacks, only 4 of the 198 refugees who arrived on the Greek island of Leros on a crisp morning in October 2015 were terrorists, namely just 2%. Yet this 2% was able to carry out an attack that killed at least 130 people (Newsweek, 27 April 2017).

Investigations in several European countries such as Austria, Greece, Italy and Romania do not support the suggestion that terrorists were systematically taking advantage of the migrant flows in 2017 – but they could not rule out the possibility that these flows and/or posing as refugees might be used as a method in the future to enter Europe (EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018). Still, the risk is unacceptably high given the frequency of the attacks and the number of deaths and injuries, even if only a tiny minority of immigrants identify with the jihadi ideology.

Conclusion

Contemporary Europe is faced with several terrorist threats posed by militant Islamists. First, there is the threat of foreign terrorist fighters who travelled to conflict areas in Iraq and Syria and now are seeking to leave the combat zone to return to their home countries. Their combat and operational experience increases the risk of better organised and more spectacular terrorist attacks in Europe. They could also serve as a role model for radicals in Muslim immigrant communities and might be involved in recruiting other extremists. Despite the apparent reduction in travellers, this veteran effect makes foreign terrorist fighters a serious threat to European security.

Second, there is the threat of homegrown terrorists who have never visited a foreign battlefield but are radicalised in their home countries. Data show that most of the attacks in Europe were carried out by individuals who had never been to a conflict zone. These radicals are the biggest source of terrorist threat whether they act as self-radicalised individuals inspired by a militant Islamic ideology or are operatives from domestic jihadi sleeper cells. Further, by linking up with foreign terrorist fighters who hold combat and operational experience domestic terrorists gain additional skills and enhanced capability to commit acts of terrorism. The most lethal jihadi attacks were those where homegrown terrorists worked together with radicalised newcomers.

Third, there is the threat of jihadi operatives from third countries hiding among the flood of refugees and asylum-seekers. Although terrorists' use of

the migrant flows has not been systematic, those operatives who were able to infiltrate into Europe by posing as a migrant or asylum-seeker are a dangerous tool in the hands of jihadists. A certain number of newcomers might also be self-radicalised individuals who sympathise with the jihadist cause or identify with terrorist groups, but have no operational connection to any terrorist organisation. The rates at which any refugee or asylum-seeker has been involved in a terrorist attack is quite low, but even the smallest possibility calls for extreme caution.

Data show that a few terrorist attacks in Europe included foreign-born individuals. The majority of the attacks was perpetrated by European nationals, not foreigners. Moreover, most terrorists were not individuals who had been lured abroad by a group, given terrorism training, and dispatched to Europe with a mission, but Muslims radicalised within their immigrant communities. Such individuals are homegrown terrorists from the second or third generation of Muslim immigrants born as citizens of Europe who became susceptible to the preaching and allure of the more extreme literalists who argue that Islam and the West cannot coexist. European jihadists are mostly made in Europe, not imported.

Although the influence of ISIS is visible in many recent terrorist attacks, what European jihadists generally have in common with the group has been the allure of the radical Islamist ideology and the perception that the West is at war with Islam. It is neither ISIS nor al-Qaeda, but the ideology of radical Islam that connects jihadists of all colours and stripes and inspires them to wage a war against the West. It is the ideology that gives these groups a bottomless supply of recruits and allies among radicalised European-born individuals who have become alienated and inspired by jihadist propaganda in their home countries.

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