

## SMA Reach-back

To what extent do **populations maintain positive views of ISIL** or ISIL's ideology, particularly in European, N. African, and Arabian Peninsula countries most associated with foreign fighter flows into Syria and Iraq? What are the general perceptions associated with ISIL endorsed themes, to include:

- 1) *desire for re-establishing the Caliphate;*
- 2) *imposition of Shariah law;*
- 3) *belief that the Ummah/Islam is under attack from the West;*
- 4) *low tolerance for non-Sunni Muslim ethno-religious groups; and*
- 5) *negative disposition towards gender equality?*

### Executive Summary

There is ample evidence that by and large Muslim populations in the MENA region and Europe do not view ISIL favorably (see QL 3). However, there are many similarities and a few significant differences among these populations regarding the credibility and salience of many of the messaging themes that ISIL espouses.

### Arabian Peninsula

In Syria and Iraq, one of the largest groups of foreign fighters come from Saudi Arabia, raising questions about the overall level of support for ISIL among the general population. Generally, Sunnis in the Arabian Peninsula support Salafist and Islamist political agendas but reject ISIL's claims to political and religious legitimacy (Lynch; Aguero). According to Tom Lynch, Distinguished Research Fellow at National Defense University, political Islam, which seeks to introduce conservative Islamic practices into the political sphere, is far more popular than the implementation of ultra-conservative Salafism as espoused by ISIL.

Most Sunni Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula do not believe a caliphate is necessary to implement conservative Muslim political and social thought (Aguero). However, they share some of the same grievances about government that gave rise to ISIL in Iraq and Syria. An Anonymous academic, argues that the Arab Spring showed that populations in the Arab world are rejecting what they see as a dysfunctional system of governance across the region. There is a demand for greater participatory governance, social justice, and better economic opportunities. At the same time, however, they are supportive of the implementation of Sharia law, including low tolerance for gender equality and non-believers (Anonymous; Aguero). But it is important to keep in mind, particular in Muslim-majority countries, that Sharia is considered to be a way of life, not merely a legal code (Aguero). According to a 2014 Pew poll,<sup>1</sup> making Sharia the law of the land has 74 percent support in the MENA region.

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<sup>1</sup> Lugo, L. (April 30, 2013). The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society. [survey]. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/>

Populations in the Arabian Peninsula strongly oppose westernization and modernization, seeing it as an attack on Sunni Muslim unity and heritage. Lynch argues that these populations can be animated towards short-term support for violent causes when they perceive non-Sunnis or non-Muslims to be attacking fellow Sunni Muslims. This helps explain why groups like ISIL can gain meaningful, short-term support in moments of perceived danger for Sunni Muslims. For example, 83% of Saudis consider Western cultural invasion to be a very important or important problem (Moaddel, 2013; Agüero). Furthermore, 84% of Saudis also ascribe to the belief that the Ummah and/or Islam is under attack by the West.

In the past, Salafists from the Arabian Peninsula have provided material and financial support to Salafist jihadi groups opposing Bashar al Assad in Syria, according to Lynch. This anti-Assad support has also aided the rise of ISIL both directly and indirectly. Most Salafist support for ISIL has withered but some support still finds its way to ISIL.

Mia Bloom, an expert on the nexus between women and terror, noted that ISIL is careful to shape its messaging in ways that resonate best with various female population groups. English messaging focuses on giving women in the West a frontline role in the combat, such as the Al-Khansaa Brigade. Meanwhile, Arabic messaging offers women more socially acceptable roles as wives and mothers. This is particularly the case in messaging to women in Tunisia where women are seeking romance and adventure (at a time when marriages are delayed due to poor economic conditions). In Saudi Arabia, the messaging is more about empowering women by showing women in ISIL-controlled territories (in full niqab) driving cars.

Dr. Lynch concludes that the bottom line is that the depth and durability of conservative Islam in the Arabian Peninsula means that even if ISIL is degraded or defeated, the preconditions for another Salafi jihadist group to rise in its place will remain present for the foreseeable future.

## Europe

Muslim populations in Europe overwhelmingly reject ISIL's ideology and violent tactics (see Quick Look 3). However, a small percentage of Muslims—particularly youths—actively or passively support ISIL's ideology and political objectives according to Marc Pierini, a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe and former career EU diplomat.

What we know about support for ISIL in Europe is that most supporters are relatively young (between 18-30 years of age), have experienced an identity crisis, are disconnected from their communities, and are marginalized within their own European societies, which have failed to integrate their cultural preferences into the European social fabric. In Britain, sympathizers tend to be highly educated while sympathizers in France and Belgium are often school dropouts, delinquents, have family problems, and face social exclusion and isolation, according to Pierini. What is also common among supporters of ISIL in Europe is that many of them have a superficial understanding of Islam, and are perceived by ISIL recruiters to be easy to co-opt and indoctrinate according to Pierini.

Many Muslim families in Europe still hold traditional values even decades after living in Western Europe—according to Pierini and Mark Caudill of the USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning—including negative disposition towards gender equality and

belief that Muslims are under attack from the West. What is clear, though, is that there is a generational divide where youth have a greater sense of frustration with their place in society compared to their parents. This is due, in part, to record high youth unemployment in Europe.

Among disaffected youth in Europe, the Caliphate has appeal, according to Pierini and Raffaello Pantucci of RUSI. The Caliphate provides disaffected youth with a purpose, a sense of belonging, and an outlet for their frustrations, outlined Pierini. Recruitment of young Europeans by jihadist movements abroad is not new (e.g., Afghanistan), but the scale is unprecedented due in large part to ISIL's massive and modern propaganda campaign layered upon economic and social frustrations of Europe's Muslim youth.

The appeal has waned in some degree as ISIL loses territory, Pantucci wrote. Its visible loss has led to a gradual loss of appeal and is one of the reasons for the reduction of foreign fighters from Europe.

What is dangerous is that ISIL is intentionally seeking to exacerbate tensions between mainstream and Muslim communities in Europe, according to Pierini. They do this through recruitment of European youths as foreign fighters, facilitate attacks that exacerbate anti-Muslim sentiment, and actively nurture sectarian divides between these two communities. This inculcates a growing sense of uncertainty and powerlessness in the face of repeated ISIL-supported attacks and is shifting a segment of society towards extreme right/xenophobic political parties and movements. The migration/refugee crisis out of Syria exacerbates these tensions, Pierini argues.

## Africa

Like most of the Muslim world, support for ISIL in Northern Africa is quite low (Feuer). In 2014, an International Republican Institute poll found that only one percent of respondents believe that Tunisians should be joining Daesh. However, aspects of ISIL's ideology finds broader support in Tunisia, especially when expressed in generic terms, including the incorporation of Sharia law, a nostalgic approval of the idea of a Caliphate—even though there is little support for the erosion of the nation state, and a belief that Islam is under attack from the West.

Similarly, there is very little support for ISIL in the Sahel, but other Islamist extremist groups do operate in the area, according to Paul Melly, a Sahel expert at Chatham House. In general, popular support for extremists groups in the region is strongly driven by local conditions and politics rather than ideology. Another characteristic of extremist groups in the Sahel is their more extensive ties and crossover between extremist groups and criminal organizations. The largest transnational group in Mali is al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), but it is largely considered a foreign organization that does not match well with the local population's Sufism. Other groups operating in the area, who draw support based on ethnic or familial ties, is Haut conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA) and Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO). Aside from

familial or ethnic ties, other reasons that individuals join these groups include poor economic opportunities, anti-state ideas, and the breakdown of traditional society.

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## SME Input

### Prioritized List of Study Topics Organized by Study Approach

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To what extent do populations maintain positive views of ISIL or ISIL's ideology, particularly in European, N. African, and Arabian Peninsula countries most associated with foreign fighter flows into Syria and Iraq? What are the general perceptions associated with ISIL endorsed themes, to include: 1) desire for re-establishing the Caliphate; 2) imposition of Shariah law; 3) belief that the Ummah/Islam is under attack from the West; 4) low tolerance for non-Sunni Muslim ethno-religious groups; 5) negative disposition towards gender equality?

*ANSWER: Anti-western views and assimilation challenges in European states are playing a central role followed closely by the Caliphate utopia. In Arabian peninsula, sectarian issues, class divisions and a perceived threat from western secular ideals to Islamic worldview helps ISIL recruitment. Poor justice system has more to do with ordinary peoples' grievances against ruling classes than other factors mentioned in the question. It is a common belief in countries such as Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and Jordan that somehow US is involved in supporting ISIL. And this flawed narrative is gaining ground.*

*In the Arabian peninsula, sectarian issues, class divisions and a perceived threat from western secular ideals to Islamic worldview helps ISIL recruitment.*

### Views of ISIL Ideology

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The area that has the largest degree of support for ISIL and, by proxy, their ideology is Syria, where 21% of those polled expressed a favorable opinion of ISIL (Galka, 2015; Mauro, 2015). 2015; Mauro, 2015; Withnall, 2015). The next most supportive areas are Nigeria (14%), Tunisia (13%), Senegal and Malaysia (both 11%). In 15 other polled nations the level of support was under 10% (Galka, 2015). This level of support should not be seen as support for ISIL proper, and thus representative of the total strength of ISIL or their ideology, but rather as the total size of their possible resource pool not their actual level of material support. Even in a country with 9% ISIL ideological support (Pakistan), and a population 178 million Muslims, there has only been ~70 foreign fighters that have traveled to ISIS controlled territory to fight (Galka, 2016). An analogy might be to think how many people support a political ideology, vs how many people vote for that ideology, vs how many people volunteer to support that ideology vs how many people are actively employed by a political party espousing that ideology.

With regard to the specific questions being asked, various data sets will be utilized and there may be instances where certain questions have either no information, or only one survey was available. Each of the questions below will be answered separately, followed by a conclusion that will attempt to determine the common elements of this support.

### **What is the desire for re-establishing the Caliphate? Almost negligible.**

There is no desire for a Caliphate as popularly imagined as either a religious dictatorship or a Ummah-wide governmental/regulatory body. With regard to a religious dictatorship governed by Sharia, in historical Islam, prominent Muslim theologians-cum-political theorists relaxed some of the alleged principles of caliphate in favor of recognizing the sultan's discretionary power, which amounted a *de facto* admission of the reality of secular politics (Moaddel, 2013, page 60). With regard to being bound to a Ummah-wide governmental/regulatory body, the majority of respondents defined themselves primarily as a citizen of a state instead of a Muslim. This is true in Egypt (52%), Iraq (57%), Lebanon (60%), Saudi Arabia (48%) and Turkey (44%). The two states where this is not true are Pakistan (70% defined themselves as Muslim) and Tunisia (59% defined themselves as Muslim) (Moaddel, 2013). Additionally, 51% of Egyptians, 69% of Iraqis, 80% of Lebanese, 9% of Pakistanis, 72% of Tunisians, and 76% of Turks strongly agree or agree that their country would be a better place if religion and politics are separated (Moaddel, 2013). This would lend credence to an argument that there is NOT a majority seeking the return of any form of a Caliphate.

This can be seen when there is some significant support for a Western political model in many of the countries surveyed. The percentage of citizens strongly agree or agree with the desirability of having a Western political model for their country varies from 26% of Pakistanis to 63% of Lebanese, with 33% of Egyptians, 45% of Iraqis, 47% of Tunisians, and 44% of Turks as well (Moaddel, 2013).

There is also very strong support for democracy where 91% of Egyptians, 86% of Iraqis, 88% of Lebanese, 88% of Pakistanis, 88% of Lebanese, 86% of Iraqis, 76% of Saudis, 91% of Tunisians, and 84% of Turks strongly agree or agree with democracy as an ideal form of government (Moaddel, 2013). Democracy, however, has a different meaning for different sections of the populations in these countries. Many of the people who favor the democratic political system at the same time believe in Islamic government, consider the implementation of only the Sharia as the characteristic of a good government, or prefer having the army rule. Thus, support for democracy often means support for an illiberal democracy (Moaddel, 2013, pg 73).

### **What is the desire for the imposition of Sharia law? There is a desire for increased Sharia.**

Sharia is considered to be a way of life, not merely a legal code. The legalistic aspects of Sharia are generally only highlighted when examining the level of punishment for an offense, rather than the criminality of the offense itself. For example, alcohol consumption is a crime under Sharia, which carries with it a penalty of some number, generally 80, lashes. Alcohol consumption was also a crime in the United States from 1920 to 1933, and public intoxication is currently illegal in the United States. Additionally, adultery is illegal under Sharia and is also illegal in 21 of the United States and under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, but again, it is the degree of punishment that differentiates the two legal systems.

It must be understood that Sharia is already in effect or has a high degree of influence in multiple countries such as Egypt, Mauritania, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Maldives, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and certain regions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the United Arab Emirates. Additionally, many states utilize Sharia for family law such as Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Gambia, Libya, Morocco, Somalia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Oman, and Syria. Indeed, there are some states where Sharia family law is available as a legally binding recourse for Muslim minorities if both parties agree. The states offering this are Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, India, Israel, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.

With the previous information in mind, the question is more appropriate when rephrased as “What is the desire for a more strict interpretation of Sharia, or the inclusion of more Sharia into the legal code?”

*The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society* Pew Research Center survey finds that support for making Sharia the law of the land is often higher in countries where the constitution or basic laws already favor Islam over other religions (Lugo, 2013). Majorities in such countries say Sharia should be enshrined as official law, including at least nine-in-ten Muslims in Afghanistan (99%) and Iraq (91%). By comparison, in countries where Islam is not legally favored, roughly a third or fewer Muslims say Sharia should be the law of the land. Support is especially low in Kazakhstan (10%) and Azerbaijan (8%) (Lugo, 2013). Relatively few Turkish Muslims back enshrining sharia as official law (12%), most likely due to the strong history of secular government enacted by President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Lugo, 2013).

Support for making Sharia the law of the land is highest in South Asia (median of 84%). Medians of at least six-in-ten Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa (64%), the Middle East-North Africa region (74%) and Southeast Asia (77%) also favor enshrining Sharia as official law. In Southern and Eastern Europe states (18%) and Central Asian states (12%), far fewer Muslims say Islamic law should be endorsed by their governments (Lugo, 2013). Overall, Muslims who want Sharia to be the law of the land in their country often, though not uniformly, are less likely to support equal rights for women and more likely to favor traditional gender roles (Lugo, 2013).

### **What is the belief that the Ummah/Islam is under attack from the West? A popular one.**

The popularity of the idea that the Ummah and/or Islam is under attack by the West is a popular one. This can be observed by the fact that 85% of Egyptians, 79% of Iraqis, 70% of Lebanese, 95% of Pakistanis, 84% of Saudis, 84% of Tunisians, and 72% of Turkish strongly agree or agree that there are conspiracies against Muslims (Moaddel, 2013). Additionally, 85% of Egyptians, 80% of Iraqis, 64% of Lebanese, 30% of Pakistanis, 83% of Saudis, 54% of Tunisians, and 83% of Turkish consider Western cultural invasion to be a very important or important problem (Moaddel, 2013). Even though many Muslims enjoy Western pop culture, a clear majority of Muslims in most countries surveyed think that Western entertainment harms morality in their country. In four of the six regions at least half of those who say they enjoy this type of entertainment also say Western cultural imports undermine morality; specifically sub-Saharan Africa (65%), South Asia (59%), Southeast Asia (51%) and the Middle East-North Africa region (51%) (Lugo, 2013).

### **Is there a low tolerance for non-Sunni Muslim ethno-sectarian groups? Decreasing tolerance.**

In 2013, only seven of the 38 countries where the question was asked, at least half of Muslims describe conflict between religious groups as a very big national problem, and in most cases worries about crime, unemployment, ethnic conflict and corruption far outweighed concerns about religious conflict (Lugo, 2013). The survey asked in particular about relations between Muslims and Christians. In nearly all countries, fewer than half of Muslims say that many or most members of either religious group are hostile toward the other group. In five countries, however, more than three-in-ten Muslims describe many or most Christians as antagonistic toward Muslims: Egypt (50%), Guinea Bissau (41%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (37%), Chad (34%) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (31%). And in three countries similar percentages say many or most Muslims are hostile toward Christians: Guinea Bissau (49%), Chad (38%) and Egypt (35%) (Lugo, 2013). This information is somewhat analogous to the idea that there is a conspiracy against Muslims referenced in question number 3.

Three years after the previous information was gathered, Arab youth felt that there was much less tolerance than in 2013. In 2016 47% of Arab youth felt that Sunni-Shia relations had worsened over the past five years (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2016). The results were understandably higher in Yemen (88%), Jordan (84%), Libya (75%) and Iraq (62%) due to the eruption of massive violence along ethno-sectarian lines after the previous survey (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2016).

### **Is there a negative disposition towards gender equality? It is lessening.**

Arab youth have a desire to see their personal freedoms increased. This averages 67% agreement across the MENA with the statement that, "Arab leaders should do more to improve the personal freedom and human rights of their people" (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2016). The rate of agreement in the GCC is 74%, in the Levant and Yemen 57% and 68% in North Africa (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2016). Across the MENA, 66% of male youth and 68% of female youth agreed with the statement that, "Arab leaders should do more to improve the personal freedom and human rights of women" (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2016).

With regard to specific rights such as female dress codes, the role of a wife, divorce, and inheritance rights, there is widespread difference of opinion. Generally, most Muslims support a woman's right to choose to be veiled. This view is especially prevalent in Southern and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Southeast Asia (Lugo, 2013). Sub-Saharan Africa is the one region surveyed where most Muslims do not think women should have the right to decide if they wear a veil (Lugo, 2013). A recent survey from the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research conducted in seven Muslim-majority countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey), finds that most people prefer that a woman completely cover her hair, but not necessarily her face. Only in Turkey and Lebanon do more than one-in-four think it is appropriate for a woman to not cover her head at all in public (Moaddel, 2013). In general, Muslim women voice greater support than Muslim men for a woman's right to decide whether to wear a veil in public (Lugo, 2013).

With regard to the role of a wife, Muslims in most countries surveyed say that a wife should always obey her husband. In 20 of the 23 countries where the question was asked in 2013,



at least half of Muslims believe a wife must obey her spouse. Muslims in South Asia and Southeast Asia overwhelmingly hold this view. In all countries surveyed in these regions, roughly nine-in-ten or more say wives must obey their husbands. Similarly, in all countries surveyed in the Middle East and North Africa, about three-quarters or more say the same (Lugo, 2013). At least half of Muslims in 13 of the 22 countries surveyed say a wife should have the right to divorce (Lugo, 2013).

In 12 of the 23 countries surveyed in 2013 about inheritance rights, at least half of Muslims say that sons and daughters should have equal inheritance rights. Most Muslims in Central Asia and in Southern and Eastern Europe hold this view, including 88% in Turkey and 79% in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In these regions, Kyrgyzstan is the only country where fewer than half (46%) support equal inheritance rights (Lugo, 2013). In South Asia and Southeast Asia, opinion differs widely by country. More than half of Muslims in Indonesia (76%), Thailand (61%) and Pakistan (53%) support equal inheritance rights, but fewer than half do so in Bangladesh (46%), Malaysia (36%) and Afghanistan (30%) (Lugo, 2013). Across the Middle East and North Africa, fewer than half of Muslims say sons and daughters should receive the same inheritance shares. Palestinian Muslims (43%) are most supportive of equal inheritance rights in this region, while support is low among Muslims in Morocco and Tunisia (15% each) (Lugo, 2013).

## **Conclusions**

The primary drivers of ideological support for ISIS appears to be economic, while the primary driver of active, material support for ISIS appears to be cultural isolation. There is almost negligible desire for re-establishing the Caliphate. There is a desire for an increased application of Sharia, and the belief that the Ummah/Islam is under attack from the West remains a popular one. There is decreasing tolerance for non-Sunni Muslim ethno-sectarian groups, especially in active conflict areas such as Iraq, Libya and Yemen. Finally, there is lessening opposition to gender equality as Arab youth comes of age.

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## Response to Quick Look Question 4

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Mia Bloom: So, Quick Look number 4. Okay, so, “To what extent do populations maintain positive views of ISIL or ideology, particularly in European, North African, and Arabian Peninsula countries most associated with foreign fighter flows into Syria and Iraq? What are the general perceptions associated with their endorsed themes: desire for re-establishing the Caliphate, imposition of Shariah law, belief that the Ummah/Islam is under attack, low tolerance for non-Sunni Muslim ethno-religious groups, and negative disposition towards gender equality?” I see. So, all of those are under section Quick Look 4.

Sarah Canna: Right, and I was thinking that you could take a look at this from either a gender perspective or from a regional perspective.

Mia Bloom: Okay, well, I’ve got 2 different projects with Minerva?? right now. One of them is looking at ISIS’s sort of telegram online dark web kind of stuff, which is why I sent that link about ISIS in Africa. In one of the conversations, it was interested in Africa. So, I think that was why I sent that.

Sarah Canna: Right.

Mia Bloom: One of the things that we're getting with regards to gender is very different messaging that it's going out to the European women as it's going out to the Arab women. So, some of the stuff that ISIS is financing explicitly in Arabic is a very different kind of picture than what is readily available on telegram for an English speaking audience. The English speaking audience, the women in particular, are getting the sense that being a foreign fighter involves fighting and that, when they go to Syria or Iraq, they'll have a much more frontline role. In Arabic, it's crystal clear that they're never going to have that role. In Arabic, they make it clear that, for the most part, their role will be that of a wife, mother, "domestic goddess" to quote Rosanne (in other words, homemaker). They don't emphasize the role of the Al-Khansaa Brigade in the Arabic materials. In fact, the only thing that I've seen that was clearly directed towards Arab speaking countries in the Arabian Peninsula was an ISIS woman, fully nikab, gloved hand and everything, driving, and this was sort of to say, "See. Here, you get to drive." So, a lot of what has been directed in Arabic towards the Arabian Peninsula is about an individual level of empowerment, not as a fighter, but you can do far more with your life. I think that they're trying to appeal to sort of the Saudi or Imarabi?? girls who are bored and want to feel more significant in what they're doing. They're saying, you know, that you may not even be able to leave the house, but what you'll be able to do is more significant than what you're going to be doing in the gulf, where you're also not able to leave the house.

Sarah Canna: Can I ask a really basic question? So, are they doing their messaging, I presume to the Arabian Peninsula and Arabic, but to the European population, are they doing that mostly in Arabic?

Mia Bloom: No. To the European population, it's overwhelmingly in French and in English. I mean, they're online in 25 different languages that I've found in Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish. So, they're doing it a lot of different \_\_\_ lately. They're targeting each group in its own language and are very often using girls from that country as recruiters.

Sarah Canna: Is that because they're targeting kind of second generation immigrants who maybe speak French better than Arabic or...?

Mia Bloom: Yeah, pretty much. I mean, they are targeting people who are Arabic, and we know that the women from Bradford or the women from Leon or Paris or wherever, they really speak hardly any Arabic. They may have the occasional Arabic word, \_\_\_\_\_, you know, SWT. They won't even say it in Arabic; they'll say SWT. They barely speak, I mean if anything, the Punjabis and those originally from Pakistan, they speak sort of a heavily accented midlands English accent with the occasional Urdu/Arabic word peppered in, but they're not fluent, and very few of them can read and write.

Sarah Canna: Mhmm.

Mia Bloom: So, the stuff that's in Arabic is really directed towards Arabic speakers because they don't expect that the, you know, midlands Muslim population speaks enough Arabic to be on the chat rooms in Arabic. Those would be in English.

Sarah Canna: What about northern Africa? Do you know what the messaging there is like to women in particular?

Mia Bloom: So, we only have some reports from Tunis of targeted recruitment of girls for this jihad al-nikah, which is this idea that the girls would travel to Syria in order to support the fighters, like comfort women kind of support, but that's for the most part. Other than that first wave that left in 2012, most of the north African women are leaving with entire families. They're going with fathers, husbands, and brothers. They're going with family units. The ones that were targeted individually were targeted early on for this role as a comfort woman where there has been a bit of a backlash about this jihad al-nikah: whether it's considered basically a form of prostitution.

Sarah Canna: Right, I was just wondering what the appeal would be to young women.

Mia Bloom: Well, they weren't thinking that they would be passed around like a marijuana cigarette. They thought that they would go and find a mujahedeen?? husband, and keep in mind that the cost of marriage is very expensive in most of these north African countries, so marriage is delayed. If you're going to stay in Tunis and you're 18, you're going to end up with a 45-year-old guy or you go to Syria and you'll find a guy your age because they've built up this romanticized version of the mujahedeen?? in Syria. But this would have been in 2011/2012 before ISIS was as big as it is now. So, many of the girls went off, and it was different groups; it wasn't just ISIS. We only have little bits and pieces of information about their experiences because there was a cleric in Tunisia when some of the girls came back with harrowing stories of having been passed around and then impregnated or some had gotten STIs. It wasn't what they expected it to be. So, we don't have a lot of information on individual girls that are going. The Tunisian government also hasn't been great about sharing the data.

Sarah Canna: So, if I was going to really dumb this down and summarize it, I would say that in Saudi Arabia, women are responsive to messaging that emphasizes empowerment. Women in North Africa, originally, it was a way to find a spouse...

Mia Bloom: ...well, it was adventure and romance.

Sarah Canna: Adventure and romance.

Mia Bloom: ...and altruism. All of the underpinning elements for all of this is altruism. They're appealing to women's sense of wanting to do good, wanting to be important, significant, to make a difference. They fine tune the message a little bit because when telling a woman in Tunisia that she can drive, she's like, "Mhmm," but telling a woman in Saudi that she can drive, well, now it looks like the jihad is empowering women in a way that the regime doesn't.

Sarah Canna: Mhmm. That makes a lot of sense. No one's going to do anything without feeling that they're in the right, but it seems that in Northern Africa, it's more of a transition to entire families going over.

Mia Bloom: Yeah, so that's one of the reasons why, you know, the problem has been the focus on the female foreign fighters overwhelmingly the western ones, ones like Aqsa Mahmood or Hoda Muthana from Alabama, in other words, these women from western countries. The vast majority of foreign fighters as you know are actually from the more local countries, and the vast majority of the women are also local Syrian women or women that came over with their entire family units. So, we don't have an accurate depiction

because there has been this fetishizing of ‘why would a woman leave North America or northern Europe to go to Raqqa when you have all of these other benefits, and it’s built an assumption that it’s better for women in the west. So, there are very different kinds of messaging to target different kinds of girls, and a lot of the times, they’ll use a local interlocker. In other words, they’ll use a French girl to recruit other French girls, they’ll use a Tunisian girl to recruit other Tunisian girls, they’ll use an Italian woman who actually lives in Saudi Arabia to recruit Italian girls. They’re being recruited in their own languages, and in order to do so, they have frames of reference that...you know if I was to say to you Jaffa cakes and piji?? chips, it would mean nothing, but if I was talking to a British girl, she would know exactly what I was talking about. So, all the frames of references, the things in order to build up rapport and foster trust...it almost requires some local knowledge.

Sarah Canna: So this actually bleeds into the next question, which is how these populations receive the messaging. It’s really interesting to see that a lot of people who are volunteering tell us how people receive messaging on social media and even via text, but we never have anyone talking to us about how person-to-person people get recruited, and I wonder how important that is in these populations.

Mia Bloom: Well, it’s very important, and you know, you can have people in the chat rooms, but until you get that individual recruiter who starts making the arrangements, it’s all just fantasy. You know, it’s all just blowing off steam and saying stuff online that you might not say regularly because online, you have this anonymity. You know, you can be posting under an assumed or false name. So, you really do need to have that recruiter who just comes in at some point in the conversation and starts making the arrangements because these things can’t happen without that point person.

Sarah Canna: Now, do you find it...

Mia Bloom: ...so, at some point it will be offline. At some point, it will be like you’re in the chat room, and then someone will be like, “You know, let’s set up a private conversation where we’ll start making arrangements...what do the roots look like?” The other thing that they’ve disseminated in a variety of languages, including a sample in English, was a sort of step-by-step what to do, what to wear when you travel, how to tell people, how to accumulate the money. When I found this one thing, as I was reading it, they were making reference to...I think they said jumper, which is sweater in British language, and they used a particular book store. So, as soon as I realized it was in UK, I sent it to M5 and I said, “Okay, this is the step-by-step instruction manual that we found online,” and it was very much written by somebody that was British for a British audience. It included a what to do and what not to do, what kinds of behaviors to engage in.

Sarah Canna: Was the list specific to women or just anyone who was going over?

Mia Bloom: I think it was specific to any. It wasn’t specific for women; it was for anyone. In fact, it might have been the one that I found was specific to men because it also said ‘don’t be fooled by the girls who are just going to retweet you and be your fans,’ and you know, ‘don’t be lulled in by that.’ It was actually quite antagonistic towards the fangirls. So, I think it was for guys. But, you know, my first instinct was, because we found it (I think I found it in December), we have contacts. We have equally good relationships with security services in the US as we do with the UK, having had MOD funded projects when we were at Penn State. So, you know, I was like, “I know who to send it to.” I don’t know what they did with

it, and they don't write me back to tell me what. In the same way, I turned it over to the FBI, and I don't know what Mark is doing with it, footedly say no??? or I sound out to somebody that there were specific threats that an ISIS contact gave a journalist, and I was like "Okay, and here is the journalist's phone number." So I, personally, at that point, I would pick up and call and be like, "You know, I'd rather prevent something than predict it and be right." I would like to prevent as many bad things from happening. I contacted Brandy Dinini in Boston because one of the threats was Boston. So, I was like, "Tell Carmen" (she's the AG, Carmen Ortiz). We've worked with a bunch of these pilot programs and worked with different parts of the country. If I'm on telegram, and I see something, I do say something. I take a screen capture, and I send it. So, \_\_\_ has never been mentioned interestingly.

Sarah Canina: I have one last question before I let you go. So, going back to the recruitment thing. I just wanted to follow up with the one-on-one in-contact recruitment. Do they use formal recruiters to recruit females?

Mia Bloom: So, they use female recruiters to recruit the young girls. I think my explanation for it is that we've probably done an adequately good job of warning young teenage girls of talking to strange men on the Internet. So, their guard is down when it's a British girl, and she's talking with Aqsa Mahmood because she doesn't see Aqsa Mahmood as a threat, whereas she may have seen some old dude as being sketchy.

With the older women...so, let me step back for a second. We've identified within the western women that are coming from Europe and the United States and Canada, there are two very different types of girls that they're going after. They're going after these young, high achieving girls, maybe girls from Muslim backgrounds who don't know very much about Islam. So, these would be like the Benthall Green Academy girls; girls who are very young, and they'll use women as...in the literature on online grooming for pedophiles, it's called the deviant peer. In other words, the kid looks at this person as just some slightly cooler, older person and not someone who's potentially a threat. It's someone who's not going to be creepy. They also go after some much older convert women. That's more like a match.com, and they're directly in touch with guys. It's very romantic, and right away, it's about finding a mujahedeen?? husband. So, you have the Sally Jones type; she's the British ex-punk rocker, married, \_\_\_ or even Shenna Morine colony?? from Colorado.

So, there are different age groups. One is very young; partly, it's because they think western Muslim women in the west, even though they're Muslim, you've got to get them young before they've been spoiled. They're looking, and they'll be explicit about it, for virgins. They're looking for girls who are bint, which is untouched and unsullied. They're looking for unsullied girls, but they're also looking for these western convert women for other reasons. Now, according to one in here, it was because you know, they know how to please a guy...really sketchy stuff. We're more likely to see these older women, these convert women, directly in communication with men. You're more likely to see the 15, 14, and 13-year-old girls not in communication with men but in communication with other girls. The British girls are talking to Aqsa Mahmood, the Scottish radiology student who disappeared, and the American girls might be talking to Hoda Muthana from Alabama. In other words, it's because those friends will reference things that they can share. You know, with an American girl, they might be talking about music or the Kardashians, with the British girl, EastEnders. You know, those things don't resonate in the same way. That's why I was giving you the Jaffa cakes as an example; nobody here knows what a Jaffa cake is, but if you were a British girl, you totally know what a Jaffa cake is. So, everything is just slightly

different (the music is different, the celebrities are different, the snack foods are different) so that they're able to relate, and it's the exact same process that we see with the pedophiles. They're trying to create...they're fostering trust with the target, so that the target goes back to the Internet, is communicating almost exclusively with them, is keeping secrets from the parents so that the parents won't know what's going on, and it's about creating a little mini world. For example, the girl that was interviewed by Rukmini Callimachi in Washington State. She was older and a convert, and she was directly in touch with a male recruiter who she thought she was really good friends with who was trying to set her up with a 40-year old something guy. As compared to we know Aqsa Mahmood's involvement with the Benthall Green Academy girls and with the precursor, the first girl from that \_\_\_ that left. So, this is how we differentiate, at least it's how I have differentiated. We may have some exceptions, \_\_\_ is really on the cusp because she was a convert, but she was 19, so she was directly in touch. But, we know that some Anna Erelle, who was a French journalist, pretended to be a convert named Melodie who was young, maybe 17 or 18, and she was directly in touch with an amir. So, you know, there may be some tiny exceptions along the fringes. When they're 17 years old, they may be in touch. When they're 13, 14, 12, 11...it's a girl that they're going to be in touch with because again, the 11-year-old is going to automatically have their guard up with an adult male.

Sarah Canna: It's all about trust.

Mia Bloom: It's about fostering trust and developing this rapport and secrecy and all of these other things.

Sarah Canna: Alright, well, Mia, I'm going to let you go, but thank you so much for this. I think that you've provided a really unique aspect that we're not getting from anyone else.

## Response to Quick Look Question 4

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**Abstract:** Muslims have not fully embraced the modern West's progress-driven secular ethics and continue to subordinate reason to faith. Many are alienated from their own culture amid feelings of inferiority and anxiety vis-à-vis westerners. Some reject both the West and contemporary Muslim societies by embracing what they imagine were the guiding principles of Islam in its infancy.

- Muslims across the globe aspire to live in a single polity following established Islamic ideals.
- Most oppose the harsher aspects of Islamic law but regard Shari'a as a moral consensus harmonizing divine writ with human capacities.
- Many see the modern West as a symptom of the immorality they fear could consume the planet but for Islam.
- Muslims do not hold tolerance and diversity to be unambiguously positive.
- They are similarly ambivalent with respect to gender equality.

## A Shared Worldview

This query assumes there is ideological separation between populations from countries associated with foreign fighter flows into Syria and Iraq and the foreign fighters themselves. In fact, in most cases, the populations and the foreign fighters that come from these populations share a common worldview. The difference is one of degree, not kind.

Despite their diversity, Muslim cultures—irrespective of locale—share a fundamental premise distinguishing them from western cultures: Ethics are the province of God, not man. The guiding values by which most Muslims strive to live their lives have not been secularized. Failure to appreciate how different the western worldview is from those of more traditional societies, including those where Islam predominates, prevents a clear understanding of what drives members of those societies.

*The guiding values by which most Muslims strive to live their lives have not been secularized.*

## Of Bees and Balances

The modern world westerners inhabit, physically and mentally, is the ethical inverse of the Old World. In tracing the West's transformation, Harvard University Islamic Studies Professor Abdolkarim Soroush writes that "the values that preceded, caused, and sustained the development of the West were not the result of a conscious world-historical project," among whose authors he includes Bacon, Luther, and Machiavelli. Nonetheless, these and other groundbreaking thinkers opened Pandora's Box by asking whether (and subsequently how) the ethics that had guided the West for millennia could be harnessed to serve the cause of human happiness in this world vice solely assuring salvation in the next.<sup>2</sup>

By examining values through the lens of reason instead of faith, westerners began rationalizing behaviors that heretofore were considered sinful. Dutch physician Dr. Bernard Mandeville's 1705 book *The Fable of the Bees* was instrumental in driving this process, according to Soroush:

"The gist of his thesis is that a society consists of two groups, not unlike a beehive. On one side stand the hardworking, righteous, noble, and productive members. On the other side lay the pompous, idle, and slothful nobility, the class of gluttony and deception. In his story, one day the idle nobility decides to become truly noble by emulating the good workers, and this causes the downfall of that society. No longer did art find enthusiasts or artists patrons. Mandeville concludes that there is an affinity between 'private vices and public goods.' The subtitle of his book reads: *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue.*"<sup>3</sup>

This, Soroush continues, gave rise to the idea of progress:

"It is thanks to selfish profit seekers that business is lively. Those who hunger for power and ostentation stoke the fire of politics and the seekers of vanity and fame keep the flame

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<sup>2</sup> Soroush, A. (2000). Trans. by Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri. *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of 'Abdolkarim Soroush*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 40-41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.



of the academy and library aglow. It is the efforts of those who have a love of the worldly pleasures that enrich and improve this world.”<sup>4</sup>

Utilitarianism was born. Private vices—greed, lust, pride, etc.—were transformed into public goods that fueled the progressive furnace, thereby producing greater happiness in this world for greater numbers of people. The next logical step was for the private vices to be viewed as private goods. Westerners, maintains Souroush, emerged

“from the shadows to embrace ambition openly, to haggle and to unabashedly strive for the worldly glory of high corporate and political office. Freed from internal constraints of traditional piety, the new humanity kept order (political and legal) through the natural play of checks and balances.”<sup>5</sup>

This is the ideological context within which the West has regarded the world for more than two centuries. The fact that it developed gradually over time has hindered a full appreciation for what a fundamental shift in outlook it represents. It also has made it difficult for westerners to comprehend the seemingly illogical resistance of some cultures, including those of the Muslim world, to embrace fully the idea of progress.

### **Resistance and Hypocrisy**

Muslim resistance derives, in part, from history. While the West pursued the idea of progress, Islamic cultures continued to prize piety. Reason and logic, cast in Islam as useful tools for trying to discern God’s intent, are human properties and therefore limited and imperfect. God orders, man obeys; believers do not ask, let alone expect an answer to, the question “why.” Even where Muslim leaders and governments agree progress would benefit their societies, they are playing catch-up and lack the capacity to engineer changes that occurred organically over hundreds of years in the West.

For many Muslims, the West’s progressive enterprise is morally suspect. Each good it produces seems to come freighted with at least one evil: freedom of expression and pornography, high technology and nuclear weapons, material comfort for some at the cost of exploiting others. Small wonder the nation-state, a means of organizing societies that arguably is the paramount achievement of western culture, provokes less enthusiasm than cynicism in the Islamic world.

There is more than a little hypocrisy in the Muslims’ viewpoint. In truth, they have coexisted with the West long enough and absorbed sufficient aspects of its worldview to become hybrids: One foot in the pietistic past (the tenets of Islam remain a primary source of law) and the other in the progressive present (nearly all Muslims reside in nation-states). Their existential ambivalence manifests in a profound sense of alienation from their own culture amid feelings of inferiority and anxiety vis-à-vis westerners. Implicitly or explicitly, many define themselves by how much westernization they will tolerate. Others have gone further, rejecting both the West and contemporary Muslim societies by embracing what they imagine were the guiding principles of Islam in its infancy.

### **Back to the Future**

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

Salafism, the conscious emulation of supposed early Islamic behaviors and mores, has captured the imagination of Muslims exasperated by their cultures' inability to compete effectively in the progressive arena. Rather than maintain, like many of their co-religionists, that the Islamic world's clear deficiencies bespeak a noble refusal to sacrifice morality on the altar of progress, Salafis turn the argument on its head: The present can be used to reacquire the ethics of the past. While modern concepts like freedom of speech involve moral choices (how much pornography is acceptable?), contemporary artifacts are value-neutral: Social media and smart phones can be used to stanch or spread the faith.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims reject the Salafis' enterprise, particularly in its most extreme (Islamic State, al-Qa'ida) forms. They are appalled by the violence and carnage committed in the name of a faith they regard as a counterweight to unfettered materialism, and see the extremists' embrace of western technology as a dire threat: With the West and Islamic terrorists using advanced weapons and media against one another, moderates like themselves are caught in between.

A generational issue is at play. Older Muslims are aware that the Salafis' combining of high-tech with black-or-white revivalism has piqued the interest of many young people. Some of the latter blame their societies' shortcomings on the failure of their parents' flaccid faith to stand up to what they have been taught is a hegemonic West bent on usurping God by annihilating Islam, the last bastion of traditional ethics. Youthful rebellion combines with utopianism and moral outrage in the cauldron of jihad.

*Even with the moderate majority, the ideals championed by the Salafists have resonance.*

### **But for Islam**

That idle, disaffected, and frustrated young people are enthused by the idea of reconstituting the Caliphate and imposing a puritanical interpretation of Shari'a (meaning the way of Islam, but generally used as a synonym for Islamic law) is not surprising. The urge to set matters aright is a universal human impulse, one cynical and/or maniacal leaders have used to lure youth into committing to a variety of isms over the course of human history (tribalism, nationalism, Communism, etc.). What disappoints many in the West is the apparent inability, or perhaps disinclination, on the part of mature Muslims to curb the enthusiasm of their progeny.

The fact is that, for even the moderate majority, the ideals championed by the Salafists have resonance. Do most Muslims endorse the IS caliphate? No, but many hold out hope that—someday—Muslims across the globe might live in a single polity that follows established Islamic ideals. Do they seek the imposition of Shari'a? No, not in the sense of imposing brutal *hadd* penalties (stonings, amputations, beheadings).<sup>6</sup> But yes in the form of an inchoate, elusive moral consensus that somehow would harmonize divine writ with human capacities, producing justice and moderation in all things.

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<sup>6</sup> Contrary to Islamic State and other extremists' oft-repeated use of beheadings and other gruesome punishments, mainstream Muslims hold that the extremely high evidentiary standards required to impose the *hadd* penalties—four credible eyewitnesses to the act of penetration in cases of adultery or fornication, for example—should ensure they rarely, if ever, are imposed.

That Islam is under assault is not in dispute for most Muslims. The question is by whom and to what degree. The modern West is seen by many as a symptom of the immorality they fear could consume the planet but for Islam. For them, western secularization is the handmaiden of a cosmic evil bent on ensuring the victory of godlessness. Others, including the Salafis, detect greater collusion between the West and satanic forces rendering western culture a legitimate target for any and all means required to hasten Islam's ultimate triumph. Ironically, such reasoning epitomizes Machiavelli's ends-justify-the-means argument.

### **Faith Trumps Reason**

As concepts, tolerance and diversity derive from secular ethics. Both are reasonable, logical ideals for westerners (and others) who see the world in live-and-let-live terms. For Muslims anchored to the traditional worldview, however, tolerance and diversity are not unambiguously positive. Many continue to utilize the five-part Islamic categorization of moral obligation, distinguishing between activities on the basis of whether they are forbidden, objectionable, permissible, commendable, or obligatory. Moderates refer to various *ahādīth*—narrations of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds<sup>7</sup>—to cast tolerance of non-Muslims as permissible, commendable, or even obligatory. Salafis cite others in arguing that such forbearance is either objectionable or forbidden.<sup>8</sup>

And what of gender equality? Few Muslims, even in the West, are completely comfortable with the idea of male-female equivalence. Most regard the sexes as fundamentally different physically and therefore equipped for different tasks in this world. Many also believe men and women possess unique minds, distinct ways of looking at and solving problems, and therefore see value in recognizing and utilizing these differences.

Polls consistently show that Muslim women want greater opportunity to use their talents and education outside the home. The same surveys indicate that women as well as men continue to view the latter's primary role as bearing children and taking care of their families. This apparent contradiction reflects the aforementioned one-foot-in-the-past-one-in-the-present dichotomy of Islamic societies. It also may be seen a tacit acknowledgment that although Islam imposes greater gender differentiation than some in a given society may regard as just, most are willing to subordinate their reason to faith. If any one thing can be said to distinguish Muslim cultures from our own, that is it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Thousands of *ahādīth* (singular = *hadith*) on a wide range of subjects were related by the Prophet's relatives and companions following his death in 632 CE. Islamic scholars and jurists developed methods for determining the authenticity of these narrations, including by examining the reliability of their transmitters through the ages. Although there is consensus on the validity of some *ahādīth*, many are contested to this day.

<sup>8</sup> Kadri, S. (2012). *Heaven on Earth: A Journey Through Shari'a Law from the Deserts of Ancient Arabia to the Streets of the Modern Muslim World*. New York: Straus and Giroux, p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> Poll Finds Muslim Women Admire Western Values, But Don't Want to Imitate Them. (2009, October 31). Retrieved from <http://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2006-06-06-voa48/322871.html>; Crabtree, S. (2012, April 2). Two-Thirds of Young Arab Women Remain Out of Workforce. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153659/two-thirds-young-arab-women-remain-workforce.aspx>; Most Muslims Want Democracy, Personal Freedoms, and Islam in Political Life. (2012, July 10). Retrieved from <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/07/10/most-muslims-want-democracy-personal-freedoms-and-islam-in-political-life/>.

## Response to Quick Look 4

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It is important to acknowledge the evolution of the relationship between VEOs, potential recruits and the wider public both inside and outside areas controlled by ISIL. For example, during the early days of JN and even ISIL, the wider public view among many within Muslim – and not just Sunni – community was that these VEO groups appeared to be a religious (but not extremist) platforms against the oppressive tyranny of the Assad regime. As such, although it seems hard to believe it now, many of those who joined ISIL in 2013 were religious but more motivated by a humanitarian desire to help those in need.

Another category, and one that has grown stronger over time - is the opportunist. Here, recruits are primarily – but again not solely - driven by the need to win tangible or non-tangible rewards. One obvious example includes financial incentives and booty for those lacking means to get wealth. A second is power and status for those who lacked it. These two account for the strongest opportunistic motivators and apply to a range of recruits. For example, ISIL approached certain individuals belonging to more downtrodden tribes in Deir Ezzor and ‘empowered’ these to gain greater local control. The benefit of this type of recruit is that he or she can be persuaded to leave ISIL if other opportunities present themselves. Herein lies a challenge – how to ensure that tribes supportive of ISIL will not face revenge attacks if they leave, and how to ensure that individuals who leave ISIL will not face heavy punishment, including marginalization from society. Other salient rewards that have motivated recruits include: Redemption and forgiveness (often for former criminals seeking a second chance to ‘make it right’), access to Paradise (for those convinced by VEO religious narratives), Camaraderie and heroism (for those who identified with the energy of the Arab Spring but felt the need for a more radically religious approach) and sex (for those attracted by the idea of the availability of women or Jihad husbands)

The next category is the ideologue. This recruit acts primarily out of a desire to inspire and spread a ‘correct’ version of Islam. It is noteworthy that the ideologue may restrict his objective to countering western and ‘Zionist’ governments, seeing these as aggressive entities that threaten the existence of Islam. However, the more radical ideologue will expand his or her definition of the enemy to include other Arab and Muslims governments

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and nations, accusing these of straying from the right version of Islam. These types of ideologue are revolutionaries imbued with a sense of moral and religious righteousness echoed in some of the Wahhabi teaching (such as the legitimacy of labeling other Muslims takfiris). Other drivers include: a desire for revenge, an eagerness for justice as they perceive it, sectarianism, the sense that Islam today is corrupt and that a return to the purity of early Islam is the only solution, etc.

Given the different categories, the demographic background of an individual attracted to a VEO also shows great variety. For example, it is true that those in poorer communities (particularly those that exist surrounded by visibly wealthier communities) are more susceptible to feel indignation and frustration at their life situation. Likewise, they may lack a religious or mainstream education that inculcates a sense of critical thinking. Both of these aspects will make them more susceptible to some of the narratives implied by the abovementioned observations (access to wealth, access to justice, divine calling, Paradise etc.). However, it is also clear that recruits include unemployed youth that have received a good education, and even men who are married and have children.

Perhaps rather than trying to establish the ratio of 'types' of recruit, it would be better to focus on programming that will more likely lead to a change in behavior. Here, the opportunist stands out as more 'low-hanging fruit' than the ideologue. The former displays a much greater elasticity of affiliation, and I believe that co-opting these will help starve VEOs of the 'oxygen' they need.

## Response to Quick Look 4

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In Tunisia and Morocco, the two countries responsible for the largest outflow of foreign fighters to Syria, Iraq, and more recently Libya, the populations' views of ISIL's activities tend to be very negative. In Tunisia, for example, an internal poll conducted by the International Republican Institute in 2014 found that only 1% of respondents believed Tunisians should be joining Daesh. However, aspects of ISIL's ideology find support among these populations, especially when framed in general terms. If asked whether Islamic law (sharia) should form the basis of legislation, majorities would respond in the affirmative to the extent sharia is understood as a set of principles intended to establish justice. (When sharia is framed as a set of specific punishments for acts such as theft, support for "the imposition of sharia" among populations of northwest Africa tends to drop, though support remains high in countries to the east, such as Egypt.) Likewise, the Caliphate retains significance in the collective memory as a period of flourishing in the Muslim world, even if there is little expressed desire to eliminate nation-states and re-establish an empire. The notion that Islam/the Muslim world is under attack from the West resonates strongly throughout the region, due in part to lingering resentment over the colonial past and in part to governments' promotion of such conspiracies. In my travels to the region, I have found little intolerance for non-Sunni communities, although in Salafi communities (which number around 17,000 in Tunisia and 10,000 in Morocco), anti-Shiite sentiment is stronger. These societies are generally conservative in their views of gender relations, even if small

but effective women's rights movements have successfully lobbied for laws increasing gender equality in the political realm.

## Response to Quick Look 4

Anonymous Academic

It is very difficult to assess with accuracy the level of support and sympathy for ISIL's views and ideology among European and Middle Eastern populations. In fact, any serious study that aims to measure the patterns of ISIL's "popularity" among target populations should be based on reliable and quantifiable data. However, what we often glean from the abundant open sources regarding the involvement of European citizens in terrorist activities in their countries or across Europe is that most perpetrators are relatively young (between 18 to 30 years of age), have experienced a crisis of identity, are disconnected from their communities, and are marginalized within their own European societies, which have failed to integrate their cultural references into the European social fabric. Seemingly, ISIL can comfort them and provide them with a sense of purpose and community to remedy their meaningless lives. Such measures mitigate their disillusionment, boosts their self-esteem, and empowers them to redress their perceived "moral bankruptcy." Whether converts to Islam or descendants of second or third generation immigrants, these militants hold a very superficial understanding of Islam and are therefore seen by ISIL as religious novices who are very easy to co-opt and indoctrinate. By recruiting youths from Europe's Muslim communities, ISIL aims to exacerbate anti-Muslim sentiment in European societies through further exclusion and stigmatization. More importantly, ISIL's European network, beyond its operational value, has been actively nurturing sectarian divides between European communities and their religious minorities.

In contrast, the attitude of individuals in the Arab world who either expressed support for ISIL by joining the movement or by failing to oppose it when it occupied their towns in Iraq, Syria or Libya, should be understood as a response to the dysfunctional systems of governance across the region. ISIL is not only a criminal organization using a theological discourse that revolves around an "authentic representation of Islam" to achieve its strategic goals across the region, it is also seen as an alternative to miscarried governance and to the failure to create local societies based on participatory governance, citizen rights, equal opportunities, social justice, respect of human rights, adequate education, job opportunities, and decent standards of living. Instead, the post-colonial Arab state epitomized authoritarianism, corruption, police brutality, denial of citizenship, cultural alienation, and systematic violation of its citizens' rights as a mode of governing. ISIL built its "legitimacy" as a "state in waiting," in the terms of Yezid Sayigh, seeking to appropriate the monopoly representation of political Islam. ISIL's legitimacy is also a result of the Arab state's failure to deliver a legitimate system of governance to its citizens that involves feasible socioeconomic development and equitable treatment based on citizenship rather than on ethnic and sectarian background. Furthermore, there is evidence that foreign military interventionism in the Arab world, including the U.S. led-war in Iraq, deeply destabilized the region and was a major driver in the rise of ISIL. The Israeli aggressions against Palestinians and other Arabs as well as the occupation of Arab territories aggravated these trends.

## Response to Quick Look 4

Dr. Thomas F. Lynch III<sup>10</sup>

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This response addresses Arabian Peninsula countries.

The people in Gulf Arab States (Arabian Peninsula) maintain negative views about the desirability of a Caliphate. A vast majority are opposed to the use of violence or terror to attain political objectives. In the main, they do favor adherence to Shariah law and hold negative beliefs toward gender equality. They fear westernization and modernization as an attack on Sunni Muslim unity and heritage and can be animated to short-term support for violent causes when they perceive non-Sunnis or non-Muslims to be attacking fellow Sunni Muslims. These trends help explain why Salafi jihadist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) can gain meaningful short-term support in moments of perceived danger for Sunni Muslims. The trends establish the reasons that ultra-conservative Salafi beliefs remain viable across the Arabian Peninsula and the more prominent Islamist agendas sustain broad popular support in many Gulf Arab States.

The governments and people of the Gulf Arab States express low support for the methods and techniques of the Salafi jihadist ideology of ISIL. They express uniform dismay at the extreme violence and gore practiced by ISIL in Syria, Iraq and across the wider Middle East. They are wary of the self-declared Caliphate by Iraqi Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, uncertain about its legitimacy and its prospects for survival. The Saudi Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh and other Sunni Arab Gulf clerics branded ISIL as “enemy number 1 of Islam,” in mid-2014 shortly after al-Baghdadi declared the Islamic State Caliphate.<sup>11</sup> Public opinion polls in late 2014 found that ISIL had a mere 5% support in Saudi Arabia, with similarly low numbers assumed present in the other Gulf Arab States.<sup>12</sup>

However, many people in the Gulf Arab states believe in the tenets of Salafism, the ultra-conservative Sunni Muslim ideology that, although non-violent in the main, shares a number of religious beliefs with the extremely violent ideology of Salafi jihadism practiced by ISIL (and by al Qaeda). Modern Salafism is based on an austere reinterpretation of Islam, calling for Sunni Muslims to return to the original teachings outlined in the Koran and the practices of the Prophet Mohammed as understood by the earliest generations of Islam.

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<sup>10</sup> See short author biography on page 26.

<sup>11</sup> “ISIS is enemy No. 1 of Islam,’ says Saudi Grand Mufti,” *Al Arabiya (English)*, August 19, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/08/19/Saudi-mufti-ISIS-is-enemy-No-1-of-Islam-.html>.

<sup>12</sup> See David Pollock, *ISIS Has Almost No Popular Support in Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Lebanon* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute, October 14, 2014), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/isis-has-almost-no-popular-support-in-egypt-saudi-arabia-or-lebanon>.

From the Salafist perspective, non-Islamic thought – including Westernism, modernism and Shiism - has contaminated the message of "true" Islam for centuries, and this excess must be jettisoned for a proper Islamic way of life. Salafists' desire uniform implementation of restrictive Shariah law and eschew gender equality. Salafists have low tolerance for non-believers and what they decry as insufficiently conservative or "impure" fellow Sunni Muslims. Most Salafists revere past Muslim Caliphates. However, most are unconvinced that a wider Caliphate is necessary. Many believe that properly configured national governments can protect Salafist interests from the encroachment of modernity and Muslim "non-believers." Most Salafists are organized around popular local imams, preachers and social groups. In recent times, Salafists have formed political parties to safeguard their interests. Salafist political parties exist in Kuwait and Bahrain (and in Egypt). Salafists in other Gulf Arab States gain and maintain political influence through community and religious groups with reach into the powerful ruling families and state bureaucracies of the region's autocratic governments. Salafists from the Gulf Arab States have provided material and financial support to Salafi jihadists militant groups opposing Bashar al Assad in Syria. From 2011-2014, this support was broad and somewhat indiscriminate – an emotional reaction to the brutal crackdown against Syrian Sunni communities that began during 2011 by the Assad government in its fight against the Arab Spring uprisings. This intemperate support for Sunni Muslim communities under government assault in Syria aided the rise of ISIL in direct and indirect ways. Since late 2014 and the declarations by prominent Sunni Muslim clerics and Gulf Arab governments against ISIL, most Salafist support for ISIL has withered. Nonetheless, analysts agree that some Salafist financial support still finds its way to ISIL from unreformed Gulf State donors or from ISIL predation of donations to other Sunni militia groups fighting in Syria.

Islamism is a far more popular modern Sunni Islam ideology. Islamism seeks to introduce conservative Islam into the political sphere. Islamists are known for forming political parties, participating in elections, and pushing for constitutional reform. The most notable Islamist political party is the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. Islamists target governments, universities, and any other institutions into which they can integrate the major features of Islam: Shariah law, solidarity of the Sunni Muslim Ummah, and adherence to largely segregated gender roles. Islamists are not inclined toward widespread violence, and do not look for a new Caliphate. Like Salafists, many Gulf Arab State Islamists provided material and financial support to Salafi jihadist militias in Syria from 2011-2014 as an emergency response to the fierce "assault on fellow Sunni Muslims" by Bashar al Assad's Alawite government. Islamists across the Gulf also heeded the Sunni clerical backlash against ISIL of late 2014, although some material support from Islamist charities in the Gulf has been documented as still going Sunni militias in Syria and even to ISIL.

Although Gulf Arab State populations have a very negative view of ISIL and its ideology of Salafi jihadism, a majority of Gulf Sunni Arabs do align with two schools of Sunni religious thought with common, fundamentalist but non-violent themes: ultra-conservative Salafism, and conservative Islamism. Neither school believes in re-establishing the Caliphate. Both oppose violence absent an extraordinary threat to the community of the Sunni faith



(Ummah). However, both view conservative Sunni Islam, the imposition of Shariah law, and firm limits on the encroachment of western mores and modernism as desirable in political life. The depth and durability of these popular views to the questions that Gulf Sunni Arabs face in the conduct of everyday life make it certain that even should ISIL meet its demise, the preconditions for another Salafi jihadist group to rise in its place will remain present for the foreseeable future.<sup>13</sup>

## Popular Support for Extremist Groups in the Sahel

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### Introduction

A range of militant or extremist groups are active in the Sahel, most significantly in north-east Nigeria and in Mali, but with tentacles extending into other countries. The extent to which they have genuine local roots varies – as does the extent of popular support they enjoy.

Brief mention will also be made of other armed groups active in the region but focussed on secular goals and without an ideological jihadist agenda, or else focussed primarily on criminal activity.

The picture is clouded by a degree of overlap in membership between jihadist and non-jihadist groups and the extent to which many individuals may move between groups or remain involved with two or more factions simultaneously. This applies both to ordinary fighters and possibly also some leading figures, who may participate in a peace process while in fact still dabbling in jihadist violence or criminality.

### Jihadist factions

***Al-Qaeda au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI – or AQIM)*** developed as an outgrowth of the 1990s conflict in northern Algeria between a secular state and Islamist radicals. Faced with a peace amnesty backed up by tough government military action, some Algerian militants moved south into the Sahara and over the border into Mali – where the state and security forces were much weaker and poorly equipped to stop them.

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<sup>13</sup> For greater detail on these conclusions and their implications see Thomas F. Lynch III, *The Islamic State as Icarus: A Critical Assessment of an Untenable Threat*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (WWICS), October 2015; Thomas F. Lynch III, *The U.S. Military and Countering ISIS*, Middle East Institute – Policy Memo, October 1, 2015; and, Thomas F. Lynch III, *Sources of Terrorism and Rational Counters*, TRENDS Working Paper – 01/15, January 2015.

The leaders of AQMI and many of the fighters were Algerian, but they began to develop connections with local Arab or Tuareg tribes in the Malian Sahara – in some cases taking wives from local Arab or Tuareg families. Thanks to the money they were earning from hostage taking and drug trafficking, they also had the financial resources to lubricate these local ties; it is reported that in some cases they provided medical or other essential services that the state had failed to provide in this region – which is remote from most of Mali; but full details have not emerged and this presence did not amount to overall territorial control or the total displacement of the state.

A constellation of jihadist groups occupied northern Mali in 2012-13.

Of these, AQMI was predominant in the Timbuktu region, and probably attracted most publicity, because of its hostage taking and its attacks on libraries and tombs in Timbuktu. It did manage to recruit some local sympathisers – such as Ahmed Al-Faqi Al-Mahdi, recently convicted at the ICC for damage to historic saints tombs in the city. The group may also have recruited some local guides and drivers in Mali; it had the money to pay local recruits much more than they could earn from alternative legitimate pursuits.

However, AQMI continued, overall, to be viewed as a largely foreign organisation and it appears to have attracted little popular support in Timbuktu – where the tolerant Sufi interpretation of Islam, influenced by mysticism and with great reverence for numerous saints, is strikingly different from the fundamentalist austere purist Wahabi beliefs of jihadist AQMI.

However, the period 2011/12 did see the emergence of one major jihadist faction that is essentially Malian in nature – ***Ansar Dine*** (or Eddine). This armed group was founded by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a Malian from the noble Ifoghas strand of Tuareg, from Kidal region in north-east Mali. The group has drawn many of its recruits from among Malian Tuareg, particularly Ifoghas, from this region.

*(It should not be confused with the domestic non-violent religious movement in Bamako of the same name, which had in fact been founded earlier.)*

Iyad Ag Ghaly was already prominent in Kidal region, in business, as a former leader in the separatist azawad rebellion and later as a mediator in disputes between the Malian government and re-emergent local separatists before a new crisis developed in late 2011. But he formed Ansar Dine around the end of that year, after being rejected in a bid to become the leader of the secular separatist Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA). He recruited among kinsmen and other fellow Ifoghas.

After the French-African military intervention of 2013, Ag Ghaly went underground, but even today he remains an influential figure who may even have had some influence over the negotiation of the Algiers Accord, last year's peace deal between the government and separatists. There have been unsubstantiated reports that Ag Ghaly may benefit from the protection of the Algerian authorities; his whereabouts are variously reported as in the Tinzaouten area – twin communities of the same name either side of the border between north-east Mali and southern Algeria – or southern Libya.

Ag Ghaly certainly appears to benefit from a degree of connection or tolerance among senior figures in parts of the separatist alliance (the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad, CMA) particularly the Haut Conseil de l'Unité de l'Azawad (HCUA). The latter is essentially drawn from the Ifoghas.

There is a substantial degree of overlap and two way traffic between the separatists, particularly the HCUA, and the jihadists. The HCUA is nominally signed up to the peace deal, but Cheick Ag Aoussa, the HCUA chief of military staff – killed when his car was blown up as he returned from an arms control meeting with the UN peacekeepers in Kidal on 8 October 2016 – is believed to have maintained close contacts with Ag Ghaly. Malian sources also claim Ag Aoussa was a leading commander of the January 2012 Aguelhok massacre, when a Malian army garrison that had surrendered were murdered in cold blood by separatists and/or jihadists.

Many fighters move back and forth between public allegiance to the HCUA – in the hope of benefitting from the material incentives offered under the peace and disarmament process – and continued involvement in jihadist violence. In recent weeks, jihadists have been relatively brazen and open about their continued activity, which suggests they still benefit from degree of at least tacit acquiescence in north-east Mali, particularly the Kidal and Tin Essako areas; many of those engaged in this violence appear to be Tuareg from this region.

Conditions are rather different elsewhere in northern Mali -- in Timbuktu, Gao, Ménaka, Tessalit or Taoudenni – where the social/ethnic composition of the population is mostly non-Ifoghas and where there appears to be relatively little support for Ansar Dine.

However, it would be quite wrong to view jihadism in Mali as a purely Ifoghas phenomenon. There are commanders and fighters drawn from other strands of the population too.

In the Gao region, the most prominent jihadist faction during 2012-13 was the ***Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO)***. This was sometimes described as the “black Al-Qaeda” – which was something of a caricature but did reflect the fact that MUJAO seemed to recruit more local people, particularly of darker skinned sub-Saharan ethnicities from the Niger river valley. This may in part have been the result of a long tradition of adherence to Wahabi religious traditions in some villages near Gao.

The French-African military intervention of 2013 ended MUJAO's control of the area. But jihadist fighters remain active. Subsequently, the Algerian jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar – who had gradually broken away from mainstream AQMI – formed a new group drawn from his fighters and the residue of MUJAO; this faction, ***Al-Mourabitoun***, is widely suspected of involvement in some of the recent spectacular urban jihadist attacks in Bamako, Ouagadougou or Grand Bassam. If true, its ability to stage these may have been helped by a capacity to recruit black recruits who are less noticed in the big West African cities. But there is little evidence of generalised popular support for Al-Mourabitoun, either in these cities or in the Gao region of Mali.

The picture is complicated by the persistence of drug smuggling, which is highly lucrative. The big urban attacks clearly are motivated by jihadist terrorist ideology.

Even so, among the wider population in Gao, there is widespread resentment of the armed groups, whether jihadist, criminal or separatist. Recently, there were street demonstrations

by local protesters angered by the possibility that, under a plan to decentralise more power to regional councils, the government might seek to draw armed groups into the peace process by giving their senior figures many of the seats in new nominated transitional councils. Many Gao residents are angered by this possibility.

Meanwhile, some recent attacks in the rural Sahel – for example, near Téra in western Niger in March 2016 – have been seen by local observers as less motivated by ideology than by a desire to capture weapons from the security forces. (Thanks to the international security operation in the Sahara, it has become much harder to smuggle weapons into Mali from southern Libya).

However, ethnic motivations and generalised anti-state ideas also come into play.

The authors of a 6 October attack on the troops protecting the Tazalit refugee camp in western Niger, executed the 22 members of the Nigérien security forces they had captured, even though there was no military reason to do so. The killings may have been motivated by ideology or by ethnic factors (e.g.: Tuareg antipathy towards southern Nigérien soldiers), but this has yet to be clarified.

There is a long history of jihadist raids into western Niger, even as far as Niamey, to attack security force posts, refugee camps, or kidnap westerners. Evidence appears to suggest that these are often carried out by militants operating from neighbouring eastern Mali, and a significant proportion of these are local, sometimes also involved in narcotics trafficking, for which Gao has been a hub.

Although identified jihadists have often been local Arabs or Tuareg, there are some indications they may also have recruited fighters from other ethnic backgrounds. They appear to benefit not so much from generalised popular support as from the acquiescence of some local Gao region individuals who may turn a blind eye or alternatively be employed as drivers or look-outs

So in this region the jihadist operators do appear more local than in Timbuktu region.

Elsewhere in Mali, there is some evidence that jihadist groups have attracted some recruits from the Sahraoui population (in Western Sahara or Sahraoui refugee camps in Algeria). This may reflect the fact that many young Sahraouis in refugee camps in Algeria are unemployed and disillusioned, rather than widespread popular support for an ideological agenda; but this remains to be clarified.

However, further south, in central Mali, there is a clear overlap between local grievances and popular support and the emergence of jihadist ideas as a motivator for violence. Much of Mopti region has become highly insecure, with numerous attacks over the past two years.

Many have been claimed by the Front de Libération du Macina (FLM), a local group inspired by the jihadist preacher Amadou Koufa. Many local youths, particularly from the Peul ethnic group, have become involved.

However, the violence also reflects pressures on land and a breakdown of the traditional arrangements for resolving disputes between Peul pastoralists and settled farming populations; there also appear to be other grievances at play, over the governance by some local elected officials, the poor quality of some local services or heavy-handed security crackdowns and human rights abuses by the Malian army. Criminality may also be a factor.

The violence in central Mali is essentially local; there was a recent attack on Nampala, where the FLM was joined by fighters who had come from northern jihadist groups, but that is not typical; most attacks appear to be staged by disenchanting local youths, motivated by a mixture of local grievance and a touch of ideology; in numerical terms, these groups may have recruited at least several hundred fighters, but it's not clear whether or not these youths have much support beyond their own numbers, or how far their wider communities support them.

There have been local mediation efforts in central Mali by community leaders, leading Peuls and others, who have persuaded significant numbers of fighters to promise to lay down their arms. But it remains unclear how far this process has actually been implemented; certainly some attacks have continued into mid-late 2016.

## **Response to Quick Look 4**

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Q4: European populations remain interested in the Caliphate, but its visible recession on the battlefield means ISIL holds a lot less attraction than before. The establishment of the Caliphate was a visible radicalizer amongst a niche of European Muslim populations, and helped strengthen the flow of fighters heading to Syria and Iraq. Its visible loss has led to a gradual loss of appeal and is one of the reasons for the reduction of travellers to a trickle. The larger concepts remain of interest, but they no longer so clearly have a home in ISIL.

## **Perceptions of ISIL in Selected EU Countries**

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### **Abstract**

- Among the European Union countries providing most ISIL fighters, there is a significant difference in social-economic background of ISIL sympathizers: British sympathizers seem to be mostly highly-educated people providing for ISIL's policy planning and communications needs; sympathizers from France and Belgium are

mostly found in young adults (mostly male, but not exclusively) with a background of school dropouts, petty delinquency, social exclusion, family problems, and vulnerability to propaganda.

- A generational gap is observed in France and Belgium: most young people (18-30 age-bracket) hail from hard-working families, most often of Maghreb origin (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia), with no previous records of radicalization and a desire for inclusion in the society and social promotion for the next generation. This “pull factor” doesn’t play for younger, frustrated generations.
- In France and Belgium, the level of religious education/knowledge among ISIL sympathizers is generally very low and mostly recent. There is generally no knowledge of the Arabic language, other than superficial. More sophisticated motivations such as establishing a Caliphate, imposing Sharia law or the Sunni-Shia divide seem to largely escape this group of sympathizers/recruits.
- The attractiveness of ISIL as a war organization seems to be focused on recent recruits among young people looking for a “place in the society” or for a personal project (some have even declared that they saw the jihad in Syria as “an adventure”), in the context of a society perceived as rejecting young Muslims.
- In domestic political terms, the main consequence in Western Europe is not just a Muslim/non-Muslim divide in the society but also a rise in xenophobic/racist ideologies and political movements.

## Background

Some of ISIL-promoted themes, such as the belief that Muslims are under attack from the West or a negative disposition against gender equality might resonate with a large proportion of the Muslim population in Western Europe. This is linked to the traditional way of life that many Muslim families maintain, even after decades of living in Western Europe (e.g. role of mothers traditionally limited to running the home, without working outside and with limited exposure to social life). In these Muslim families, the general political perception of Western policies vis-à-vis the Muslim world has been negatively influenced for decades by a) the Israel-Palestine conflict and b) by Western interventions in Arab and Muslim countries (French colonization of the Maghreb, intervention in Egypt in the 50s, Algerian independence war, or more recently the 2011 intervention in Libya).

But, until recently, these negative perceptions did not translate in more than general frustration. The fact that these frustrations morphed into political/terrorist activities (for the younger generation) is a more recent phenomenon and illustrates a profound generational gap between those young adults who are currently the ISIL’s sympathizers (or operatives) and their parents. It is striking to witness how distraught parents appear to be when confronted with news that their sons (and sometimes daughters) have left for Syria or have committed terrorist acts in European countries.

Recruitment of young Europeans by jihadist movements abroad is not a new phenomenon per se (e.g. Afghanistan) but the scale is unprecedented, probably due to a massive and modern propaganda and also to accumulated economic and social frustrations of young Muslims in France and Belgium.

It is worth underscoring the demographic and employment aspect of the situation of young Muslim in Western Europe. Previous generations of migrants from MENA were actually filling a gap in the job market which led to a somewhat better societal integration. That pull

factor has disappeared as youth unemployment levels hit record highs in Europe and the situation of the most marginalized only got worse. The sense of economic security and opportunity enjoyed by previous generations was leading to integration, while the frustrations of younger generations lead to the opposite phenomenon and to sensitivity to radical propaganda.

#### Perceptions of ISIL's Ideology by Young Muslims in France and Belgium

Apart from a limited group of older propagandists and recruiters, it appears that the level of religious education among young ISIL sympathizers is generally very low (some media even mentioned that 70% of French jihadists were "atheists", an assertion hard to document). Themes such as re-establishing the Caliphate or imposing Sharia law, and even more remotely intolerance against Shia Muslims, seem to be perceived in a very general manner, and they are certainly not themes backed by any real degree of understanding of the Quran and the other fundamentals of Islam.

The vast majority of ISIL sympathizers in France and Belgium seem to be receptive to its ideology mostly for reasons pertaining to their personal place in the society: belonging to the working class, being often confined to less affluent neighborhoods, being tempted by "easy money activities" (petty thefts, soft drugs dealing), they end up associating with marginal groups in the society, with little or no future than repeated arrests, judicial processes and short terms in jail (where radicalization occurs).

In such a context, belonging to (and eventually fighting for) a "single nation for all Muslims" (the Caliphate) may suddenly appear as a "life project" worth cutting off with family and friends and, ultimately for a fraction of this group, worth launching oneself in either jihad in Syria, violent attacks at home, or both in succession.

An important element of ISIL's propaganda in France and Belgium lies in the messages specifically addressed in 2014 to French sympathizers. On 22 September 2014, a jihadist known by the name of

Abu Mohammed al-Adnani asked ISIL's followers to target French citizens, civilian or military, by any means (stone, knife, car, push from high building, strangulate, poison). A similar message was broadcasted in French by a masked jihadist on 19 December 2014 (who also invited followers to imitate Mohammed Merah, the jihadist who killed French soldiers and Jewish teacher and pupils in the cities of Montauban and Toulouse in 2012). These messages echoed tragically on 14 July 2016 when a jihadist drove a truck into a crowd in Nice, killing 84 and wounding 331.

#### Perceptions of ISIL's Ideology by the General Public

An important consideration in assessing the perceptions of ISIL's ideology by the general public in France and Belgium is a) the total rejection of the ideology's violent aspects, including by a portion of the Muslim citizens, b) a growing sense of being powerless in front of repeated attacks, especially in 2015 and 2016, c) a definite sense of frustration with the authorities in front of a perceived lack of efficiency, d) a growing shift of a segment of the public toward extreme right/xenophobic political parties or movements. In 2016, the coincidence of such attacks with the migration/refugee crisis has provoked amalgams and xenophobic reflexes in a large segment of the population and the political establishment.

ISIL-inspired attacks have been targeted with the objective not just to terrorize the population, but to attack its open society features and lifestyle (editorial meeting of a newspaper/pubs and restaurants/sport stadium/concert venue in Paris; random travelers in airport and metro in Brussels; crowd attending the National Day fireworks in Nice) and to divide the society according to ethnic/religious lines (military and police of Arab or Black origin/Jewish schoolchildren and teacher/Kosher supermarket in France; Jewish Museum in Brussels).

In other words, it is of paramount importance not to limit an assessment to the phenomenon of European citizens radicalizing due to ISIL's ideology (certainly a most important part of any assessment), but to also consider the societal and political consequences on the wider society in a context where the lack of economic prospects, multiple armed conflicts in the vicinity of Europe, and a wave of migrants and refugees add to the terrorist wave to instill a high sense of insecurity among ordinary citizens and a high fear of the future. In such a context, xenophobic and racist ideologies flourish.



# Author Biographies

## Hassan Abbas

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### Education

- MALD and Ph.D. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University
- LL.M. in International Law from Nottingham University, United Kingdom, as a Britannia Chevening Scholar
- Master's in Political Science from Punjab University (Pakistan)

### Research Interests

- Politics, Security and Religion in South Asia
- Politics, Islam, and U.S. Relations with Muslim States
- Law Enforcement and Police Reforms in Developing States

Hassan Abbas is Professor of International Security Studies and Chair of the Department of Regional and Analytical Studies at National Defense University's College of International Security Affairs (CISA). He serves as a Carnegie Fellow 2016-2017 at New America where he is focusing on a book project on Islam's internal struggles and spirituality narrated through the lens of his travels to Islam's holy sites across the world. He is also currently a Senior Advisor at Asia Society. He remained a Senior Advisor at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (2009-2011), after having been a Research Fellow at the Center from 2005-2009. He was the Distinguished Qaid-i-Azam Chair Professor at Columbia University before joining CISA and has previously held fellowships at Harvard Law School and Asia Society in New York.

He regularly appears as an analyst on media including CNN, ABC, BBC, C-Span, Al Jazeera and GEO TV (Pakistan). His opinion pieces and research articles have been published in various leading international newspapers and academic publications. His latest book titled [\*The Taliban Redux: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier\*](#) (Yale University Press, 2014) was profiled on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart in August 2014. Abbas' earlier well acclaimed book *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror* (M E Sharpe, 2004) remains on bestseller lists in Pakistan and India. He also runs WATANDOST, a blog on Pakistan and its neighbors' related affairs. His other publications include an Asia Society report titled [\*Stabilizing Pakistan Through Police Reform\*](#) (2012) and [\*Pakistan 2020: A Vision for Building a Better Future\*](#) (Asia Society, 2011).

A detailed list of his publications is [available here](#).

## Shane Aguero



Major Shane Aguero is a counter-terrorism strategic intelligence officer with the DIA. He has previously been the Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Joint Intelligence Support Element (JISE) officer in charge, and prior to that he was the US Army Central (US ARCENT) intelligence fusion desk chief for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Major Aguero also has over five years of deployed combat experience in both Afghanistan and Iraq working at all levels from infantry squad to Combined Joint Task Force, with experience conducting joint, special and combined operations. Major Aguero has a Master of Strategic Intelligence from the National Intelligence University, an

MBA from Webster University and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from St. Edwards University.

## Mia Bloom

Mia Bloom is Professor of Communication at Georgia University. She conducts ethnographic field research in Europe, the Middle East and South Asia and speaks eight languages. She has authored several books and articles on terrorism and violent extremism including *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (2005), *Living Together After Ethnic Killing* [with Roy Licklider] (2007) and *Bombshell: Women and Terror* (2011). She is a former term member of the Council on Foreign Relations and has held research or teaching appointments at Princeton, Cornell, Harvard and McGill Universities.



Under the auspices of the Minerva Research Initiative (MRI) of Department of Defense, Bloom is currently conducting research with John G. Horgan on how children become involved in terrorist organizations. Bloom and Horgan's findings will be published in a book for Cornell University Press entitled *Small Arms: Children and Terror* (2016). Bloom has a PhD in political science from Columbia University, a Masters in Arab Studies from the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and a Bachelors from McGill University in Russian, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

## Mark Caudill

**Mark A. Caudill** joined the USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning in January 2015 as a Middle East Subject Matter Expert. He retired from the U.S. Department of State in 2014 following 10 years as a Foreign Service Officer. He served at the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul (2005-07); the U.S. Embassy in Manila (2007-08 and 2009-10); the U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team in Karbala, Iraq (2008-09); and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo (2010-14). Mark was an analyst at the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency during 1990-2004 and served at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait (1992-93) and at the U.S. Consulate General in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (1999-2002). He speaks Arabic, Turkish, and Portuguese. He is the author of *Twilight in the Kingdom: Understanding the Saudis*, published by Praeger Security International in 2006. He holds a B.A. in Liberal Studies from

the University of the State of New York (1987) and an M.A. in Islamic Studies from Middlesex University (2015).

### Alexis Everington



Alexis Everington is the Director of Research for Madison Springfield, Inc. His qualifications include 15 years program management experience leading large scale, cross-functional, multi-national research & analytical programs in challenging environments including Iraq, Libya, Mexico, Syria and Yemen. Alexis advised both the Libyan opposition government during the Libyan revolution of 2011 and its immediate aftermath and most recently, the Syrian opposition military. He has also helped train several other foreign militaries and has taught at the NATO School. In addition, Alexis developed the Target Audience Analysis methodology that is currently employed across the US national security community and has been applied most recently in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Lebanon. His educational credentials include a Master of Arts from Oxford University in European and Middle Eastern Studies and his language skills include a fluency in Arabic, Spanish, French and Italian as well as a proficiency in Mandarin. Alexis is currently leading large-scale qualitative and quantitative primary research studies in Libya, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

### Sarah Feuer



Dr. Sarah J. Feuer, an expert on politics and religion in North Africa, is a Soref Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Feuer, who completed her doctorate in politics at Brandeis University's Crown Center for Middle East Studies in 2014, wrote her dissertation on the politics of religious education in Morocco and Tunisia. A book based on that research is due out with Cambridge University Press next year. Previously, she earned her M.A. in Middle Eastern history from Tel Aviv University and a B.A. in history and French literature at the University of Pennsylvania. She has extensive experience in the region, including stints living in Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. Her most recent monograph for the Washington Institute, [\*State Islam in the Battle Against Extremism: Emerging Trends in Morocco and Tunisia\*](#), examined the involvement of religious institutions in counter-extremism initiatives across North Africa.

## Tom Lynch

**Dr. Thomas F. Lynch III** is a Distinguished Research Fellow for South Asia, the Near East and countering radical Islam in the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) at the Institute of National Strategic Studies (INSS) at the National Defense University (NDU) in Washington, D.C. He researches, writes, lectures and organizes workshops and conferences for Department of Defense customers on the topics of Pakistan, Afghanistan, India & the Subcontinent, the Gulf Arab States, and the past & future trajectory of radical Islam. Dr. Lynch joined NDU in July 2010 after a 28 year career in the active duty U.S. Army, serving in a variety of command and staff positions as an armor/cavalry officer and as a senior level politico-military analyst. Dr. Lynch was a Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff & Deputy Director of the Chairman's Advisory & Initiatives Group; Commander of the U.S. Army War Theater Support Group in Doha, Qatar; Director of the Advisory Group for the Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM); and Military Special Assistant to the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan. He spent 42 of 44 months from 2004-07 on assignment in the Middle East and South Asia supporting OPERATIONS ENDURING & IRAQI FREEDOM.



## Paul Melly



Expertise  
Francophone Africa - e.g. CAR, Guinea, Mali, Congo Brazzaville, Madagascar  
French and EU Africa policy  
Development policy, IMF/World Bank Africa strategy, grassroots development  
Development finance; project and trade financing

## Raffaello Pantucci



Raffaello Pantucci's research focuses on counter-terrorism as well as China's relations with its Western neighbours. Prior to coming to RUSI, Raffaello lived for over three years in Shanghai, where he was a visiting scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS).

Before that he worked in London at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. He has also held positions at the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) and is an associate fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College,

London.

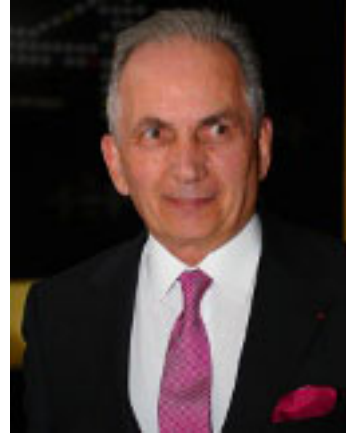
He is the author of *We Love Death As You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists* (London: Hurst, April 2015/US: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), described by *The Financial Times* as 'the most articulate and carefully researched account of Britain's 'suburban terrorists' to date.'

He is currently completing a writing project looking at Chinese interests in Central Asia. His journal articles have appeared in *Survival*, *The National Interest*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, and *RUSI Journal* amongst others, and his journalistic writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Sunday Times*, *CNN*, *Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, *South China Morning Post*, and more.

## Marc Pierini

Marc Pierini is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe, where his research focuses on developments in the Middle East and Turkey from a European perspective.

Marc Pierini was a career EU diplomat from December 1976 to April 2012. He was EU Ambassador and Head of Delegation to Turkey (2006–2011), Tunisia and Libya (2002–2006), Syria (1998–2002), and Morocco (1991–1995). He also served as the first coordinator for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (“Barcelona Process”) (1995-1998) and was the main negotiator for the release of the Bulgarian hostages from Libya (2004-2007).



Marc Pierini served as counselor in the cabinet of two European commissioners: Claude Cheysson, (1979- 1981) and Abel Matutes (1989- 1991). He has published three essays in French: “Le prix de la liberté” (*Actes Sud*, 2008)(also in Bulgarian at *Janet45*), “Télégrammes diplomatiques” (*Actes Sud*, 2010), and “Où va la Turquie?” (*Actes Sud*, 2012)(also in Turkish at *Doğan Kitap*).

Marc Pierini is a member of the International Council of the “Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations” (MuCEM) in Marseille. He is also a member of the Board of Advisors of “Turkish Policy Quarterly”.

## Sarah Canna, NSI



Sarah applies her open source analytic skills to regions of vital concern to US Combatant Commands, particularly the Middle East and South Asia. To help military planners understand the complex socio-cultural dynamics at play in evolving conflict situations, she developed a Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) tool, which is designed to rapidly respond to emergent crises by pulsing NSI’s extensive subject matter expert (SME) network to provide deep, customized, multidisciplinary analysis for defense and industry clients. Prior to joining NSI, she completed her Master’s degree from Georgetown University in Technology and Security Studies. She holds a translation certificate in Spanish from American University and has been learning Dari for three years.