

Hanga Horváth-Sántha:

RADICALIZATION INTO SALAFI JIHADISM: SOME PATTERNS AND PROFILES IN EUROPE 2015–2017¹

ABSTRACT: Understanding the dynamics, trigger factors and root causes of violent extremism leading to acts of terrorism has been subjected to vast research for the past decade. In this regard, the notion of radicalisation has been especially debated and contested by various researchers, leaving one sole ground to base all other theories upon: there is not one single pathway to terrorism, but there are many and the root causes vary heavily. Whilst radicalisation may occur among various ethnic and religious groups, this article will specifically focus on radicalisation processes leading to violence-promoting Islamist extremism (Salafi-Jihadism) in the European context and will be delimited to the examination of persons who have committed crimes of terrorism in Europe during the past two years. The reason for this rather slim scope is to examine whether the different types of acts of terrorism and the radicalisation processes behind (as far as they are known) differ from earlier experience with this type of violent extremism in European states with regard to the significantly shrunken time of the radicalisation process, the modus operandi, the selection of targets and the potentially different motives. The fact that some of the perpetrators entered Europe as asylum seekers and supposedly became radicalised on their way or upon arrival to the host society makes the issue even more delicate, however, so far they constitute a group neither to be underestimated, nor overestimated. The article attempts to increase the understanding of the phenomenon of violent radicalisation in the light of the recent Jihadist-inspired attacks. The analysis of the terrorist activities and the pathways of radicalisation contain important information also with regard to the question of how to prevent individuals from joining terrorist organisations. Here it has to be stated already in the beginning that not only do the underlying causes vary from individual to individual and that correlation in itself does not necessarily equal causation, but the field of research itself is a constantly growing and developing one and every piece of information may be important to be able to strengthen and enhance a fact-based preventative work. Considering that the article is based on open source information, the persons who have been convicted for having plotted crimes of terror will not fall under the analysis presented in the article.

KEYWORDS: jihadism, radicalisation, salafi

INTRODUCTION

In his ground-breaking paper from 2003 on why people join radical Islamist groups Quintan Wiktorowicz identified four key processes that would all increase the likelihood of a person to be drawn to radical Islamism and to – at a certain point – participate in its activities:

¹ The article was submitted in June 2017.

cognitive opening (i.e. being receptive to adopt new ideas and beliefs), religious seeking (seeking meaning within a religious framework), frame alignment (the narrative presented by the radicals “makes sense” and appears tempting to the seeker) and socialisation (the manner in which the religious education and activities are conducted facilitate indoctrination).² Analysing some of the profiles of the most recent terrorists who committed violent attacks justified by Jihadist ideology against civilians in Europe, it becomes clear that the radicalisation processes remain quite similar to the ones described by Wiktorowicz 14 years ago in the context of seeking answers to the question why persons from the Western societies are drawn to join the global radical Islamist movement called Al-Muhajiroun. The profiles examined in this article illustrate several or all of the above listed key processes leading to the execution of terrorist attacks in the name of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (hereinafter: ISIS), but with the worrisome difference that the radicalisation process of the perpetrators occurs in a manner even more difficult to detect for security and intelligence services.

Acts of terrorism committed by terror cells or lone actors such as the ones in London on June 5, in Manchester on May 26, Stockholm on April 7, in London on March 26, in Berlin on December 12 and in Nice on July 14 of last year seem to suggest not only a somewhat new way of carrying out attacks on European soil, but also a shift regarding the selected targets towards mass social events, such as concerts and markets. Attacks such as the mentioned ones will inevitably lead to large-scale public debates on freedom and security as well as to why the security services failed to disrupt the attacks, but the trends of the latter suggest that more attacks of this type – in some cases not even requiring any special skills or very detailed planning, not even an own vehicle or advanced explosive devices for that matter – are likely to occur, aggravating the possibility of surveillance and intelligence gathering necessary to prevent an attack. Yet, the possibility of more sophisticated attacks like the one in Manchester suggests that despite the shift towards simpler means there still exist the will and capacity to commit more coordinated and complicated attacks. Other factors, such as the accelerated radicalisation process, the existence or non-existence of well-established networks around the perpetrators acting on their own as well as the interaction and inspiration online also contribute to the aggravated reality security and intelligence agencies face in detecting potential acts of terrorism at an early stage.

VIOLENT RADICALISATION

Since the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005 the concepts of “home-grown terrorism” and “radicalisation” have been present not only in terrorism research, but unfortunately also in the everyday lives of many European citizens. Similar to other terms within social science, the notion of radicalisation has been heavily debated in the field of research on terrorism. However, in order to be able to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible the selection of a working definition is absolutely crucial. Many attempts have been made to find an exhaustive description, induced by scientific as well as policy-related interests, and some of them will be presented briefly in the chapter below.

As a first benchmark, it is important to note that the process of radicalisation may be violent or non-violent (cognitive), although both may equally threaten the social cohesion,

² Wiktorowicz, Q. “Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam”. Paper presented at The Roots of Islamic Radicalism Conference, Yale University, USA, 8-9 May 2004. <http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf>, Accessed on 5 June 2017.

integration and the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic or religious groups in a society.³ Cognitive radicalisation is often referred to as “the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order, and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system”,⁴ and violent radicalisation occurs with the additional step: the actual use of violence springing from the cognitive radicalism. In defining non-violent radicalisation another relevant broadening of the concept is brought forward by the Dutch intelligence and security service (AIVD), which defines it as “the (active) pursuit of and/or support to far-reaching changes in society which may constitute a danger to (the continued existence of) the democratic legal order (aim), which may involve the use of undemocratic methods (means) that may harm the functioning of the democratic legal order (effect).” Supplemented by: “a person's (growing) willingness to pursue and/or support such changes himself (in an undemocratic way or otherwise), or his encouraging others to do so”.⁵ The question of the triggering or catalysing factors to the additional step has been analysed by a variety of disciplines, but it becomes clear that radicalisation is a gradual process that occurs in a person's life with individual causal factors paving way for what some scholars call “cognitive opening”, resulting in the receptivity for accepting radical ideas and violent solutions.⁶

One of the most complete definitions is the one by Charles E. Allen, former Under Secretary of Homeland Security for Intelligence and Analysis, who described radicalisation as “the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change”.⁷ Through this definition, Allen wished to – among other objectives – make clear the distinction between radicalisation and terrorism (as not all radicalisation may lead to acts of terrorism), yet also highlight the similarities regarding the social patterns in both cases. As early as 2007, Allen underscored the role of charismatic persons in the radicalisation process as well as the role of the Internet.⁸ As one of the hotbeds of radicalisation Allen mentions prisons, which, in the past couple of years have truly become one of the most significant places to radicalise and recruit new members to the Jihadist ideology in (Western-) European prisons.

The definition of violent radicalisation (as the terrorist attacks examined all demonstrate that the line between the cognitive and the violent radicalisation has been in place) used in this article will be most similar to the one cited above by Allen, the notion will entail the socio-psychological process through which an individual becomes susceptible to adapt a system of extremist views and beliefs and – eventually – becomes prone to use, support, or finance acts of violence as a method to reach political or ideological goals.

³ Velhuis, T. and Staun, J. “Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model”. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, The Hague. October 2009. https://www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import/islamist_radicalisation.velhuis_and_staun.pdf, Accessed on 3 March 2017.

⁴ Vidino, L. and Brandon, J. “Countering Radicalization in Europe”. ICSR King's College. 2012. 9. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ICSR-Report-Countering-Radicalization-in-Europe.pdf>, Accessed on 5 June 2017.

⁵ AIVD. “Background of jihad recruits in the Netherlands”. 2004. 13–14. <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2004/03/10/background-of-jihad-recruits-in-the-netherlands>, Accessed on 8 June 2017.

⁶ Wiktorowicz. “Joining the Cause...”.

⁷ Allen, Ch. E. “Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland”. Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, 14 March 2007. <https://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/testimony/270.pdf>, Accessed on 5 June 2017.

⁸ Allen. “Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland”.

THE IDEOLOGY JUSTIFYING ATTACKS AGAINST CIVILIANS

This chapter will briefly discuss some of the religiously inspired and ideological justifications through which militant Islamist organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS justify their use of violence against civilians. One of the justifications is the one of *jihad*, being one of the most heavily debated notions not only in contemporary terrorism research but also among the general public in the context of Jihadist-inspired attacks against the West. As a result of the lack of a clear hierarchy among the religious scholars today, jihad has been authorised by a wide range of religious leaders for a wide range of purposes,⁹ including resistance, liberation and terrorist organisations, to justify their causes and to recruit followers.¹⁰

Technically the word in itself means war in the way of God. In modern times, jihad can be pursued according to two different interpretations: either as the way of striving towards a good life in consistence with the faith (the greater *jihad*), or the way to struggle against the enemies of Islam (the lesser *jihad*) in a holy war.¹¹ The holy war in its turn can be either offensive, i.e. for the purpose of spreading the faith or expanding the (Muslim) state, or defensive, i.e. in response to attacks by invaders (such as the Crusaders around 900 years ago).¹² According to a majority of Islamic scholars it is incumbent to all Muslims to wage jihad against outside forces invading Muslim territories for the sake of protection of the faithful as well as for the survival of the global Muslim community (the *ummah*).¹³ In the terms of Islamic law, offensive jihad can only be declared by a legitimate religious-political authority while the defensive jihad needs no authorisation. The interpretation of *jihad* as a religious duty and moral obligation for every Muslim became prevalent during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when jihadis relied extensively on the works of medieval scholars such as Ibn Talmiyya and Ibn Nuhaas al-Demyati, trying to resurrect the idea of active participation in the defensive *jihad*, which was later extended by scholars linked to al-Qaeda to justify attacks against the United States.¹⁴ For this, however, it needed to be proven that the United States in fact is an occupying force, for which the American troops in Saudi Arabia (authorised by the Saudi King Fahd to repel Saddam Hussein) served as an argument. The defensive argument was further stressed by Osama bin Laden in an interview in 1998, in which he claimed that “[w]e ourselves are the target of killings, destruction, and atrocities. We are only defending ourselves. This is a defensive jihad. We want to defend our people and our land. That is why we say, if we don’t get security, the Americans, too, would not get security. This is the simple formula that even an American child can understand. Live and let live.”¹⁵

Hence, in the context of terrorist attacks against Western targets the interpretation of defensive holy war is the most commonly used, and violence against civilians is justified with a doctrine of “proportional response”, i.e. when the non-Muslims kill Muslim civilians it becomes permissible to attack their civilians in return.¹⁶ Among the conditions to

⁹ Miskel, J. F. “Terrorism”. In Birx, J. H. (ed), *21st Century Anthropology*. California: SAGE Publication, Inc, 2010, 1007–1015. 1011.

¹⁰ Esposito, J. *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 24.

¹¹ Miskel. “Terrorism”. 1011.

¹² Miskel. “Terrorism”. 1011.

¹³ Wiktorowicz, Q. “A genealogy of Radical Islam”. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28:2. 2005. 75–97. 83.

¹⁴ Wiktorowicz. “A genealogy of Radical Islam”. 83–84.

¹⁵ As quoted in Esposito, J. *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. 24.

¹⁶ Wiktorowicz. “A genealogy of Radical Islam”. 89.

kill civilians the most cited conditions in the justification of al-Qaeda was that the enemy had killed Muslim civilian on purpose and that civilians had assisted the enemy in “deed, word or mind”.¹⁷

This type of argument is frequently used by ISIS as well: the alleged mistreatment of Muslims, where the non-military is seen as complicit and hence, legitimate targets for acts of violence. In the rhetoric of ISIS the term “Crusaders” is often used as an instrument to describe the West and its actions, revoking the above mentioned defensive war for the protection of Islam.¹⁸ The term is frequently used in their online propaganda magazine, public statements, videos, relentlessly aiming to maintain the “us-and-them” worldview, thereby portraying Islam as constantly being under threat and humiliation. As part of the defensive war against this proclaimed enemy the “crusade civilians” are seen as legitimate targets through association with the governments they elected,¹⁹ but also as part of the retaliation for “[t]heir planes do not distinguish between civilians and combatants, man or woman”.²⁰ Since 2016 – coinciding with the losses on the ground – the ISIS has specifically called upon attacks against civilian targets in Europe as well as in the United States. The late spokesperson Abu Muhammed al-Adnani (killed in an air strike in May 2016) proclaimed in the Turkish version of their magazine *Konstantiniyye* that “[b]lood has no value in the countries of the crusaders and that there are no innocents there”.²¹

The attack in May 2017 on the Manchester Arena horrified many as several of the victims were children, and yet it was not the first time that Islamist extremists targeted children.²² The justification of attacks against children is also to be found in the argument accentuated already by al-Qaeda, according to which tactics prohibited for Muslims become legitimate if the enemy uses the very same ones.²³ “It is allowed for Muslims to kill protected ones among unbelievers as an act of reciprocity. If the unbelievers have targeted Muslim women, children, and elderly, it is permissible for Muslims to respond in kind and kill those similar to those whom the unbelievers killed.”²⁴

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMMIGRANT BACKGROUND?

Undoubtedly home-grown radicalisation and terrorism remain high on the security agenda of several European states,²⁵ especially considering the increased and continued recruitment

¹⁷ Wiktorowicz. “A genealogy of Radical Islam”. 89.

¹⁸ Goutham, K. “ISIS and the Crusades”. Dartmouth University. 16 May 2016. <http://sites.dartmouth.edu/crusadememory/2016/05/16/isis-and-the-crusades/>, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

¹⁹ Goutham. “ISIS and the Crusades”.

²⁰ Statement by Abu Muhammed al-Adnani in May 2016 calling for attacks on military and civilian targets in the West. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-islamicstate-idUSKCN0YCOOG>, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

²¹ Bulut, U. “Islamic State Calls for Attacks on Civilians in Europe and America”. Clarion Project. 21 August 2016. <https://clarionproject.org/islamic-state-calls-attacks-civilians-europe-and-america/>, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

²² The most infamous of these attacks is the one on the school of Beslan in 2004. Other examples: <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/23/us/manchester-terror-other-children-attacks-worldwide/index.html>, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

²³ Wiktorowicz. “A genealogy of Radical Islam”. 90.

²⁴ “Why we fight America”, Al-Qaeda spokesperson explains September 11, as quoted in Wiktorowicz. “A genealogy of Radical Islam”. 90

²⁵ Kis-Benedek, J. *Dzsihádzizmus, radikalizmus, terrorizmus*. Budapest: Zrínyi Kiadó, 2016. 50.

of Muslim immigrants in Western countries by militant Islamist groups.²⁶ The deliberate targeting of second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants in mainly non-Muslim countries with their recruitment and propaganda both al-Qaeda affiliated organisations as well as ISIS are seeking to exploit the loss of identity, purpose, and values that may be prevalent among certain members of these groups. It is estimated that around 5,000 recruits from Europe and the United States have travelled to Syria or Iraq to fight for groups such as ISIS,²⁷ where the violent radicalisation may proceed further and where they potentially become equipped to carry out attacks in Europe. However, there must be a “dark number” of travellers to the aforementioned destinations who have not yet been detected.²⁸ Drawing so called foreign fighters is an increasingly important and essential component in ISIS’ military strategy, especially as the organisation is facing sustained pressure due to the air strikes in Iraq and Syria, as the foreign recruits tend to be more zealous than the local fighters and can thus contribute to the further radicalisation of the conflict.²⁹ Upon arrival the newcomers are put in different types of training camps where they receive both military as well as ideological training.³⁰ Due to the military training in the use of weapons and explosives, the combat experience, the prolonged ideological indoctrination as well as the potentially lower threshold towards the use of violence, the foreign fighters in most cases pose a serious threat to their country of departure.³¹ In the case where foreign fighters return with the intention of committing violent attacks in the Western world their experience can lead to more lethal attacks compared to those carried out by first-time domestic terrorists.³² Research on foreign fighters carried out by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague in 2016 based on open source information as well as questionnaires to 23 EU Member States indicated that an average of 30% had already returned to their country of departure.³³ According to an analysis by Hegghammer (2013) of Islamist attack plots in Western countries between 1990 and 2010, he found evidence for a ‘veteran effect’. Not only would the presence of a veteran (a domestic person with experience as a foreign fighter) increase the probability of an attack, but it would also double the chance that the attack would be lethal.³⁴ As the multiple

²⁶ “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2017”. Europol. 2017. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2017>, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

²⁷ “Terrorism Situation...”. 12.

²⁸ „Terrorism Situation...”. 12.

²⁹ Gartenstein-Ross, D., Barr, N. and Moreng, B. “The Islamic State’s Global Propaganda Strategy”. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. March 2016. 13. <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Gartenstein-Ross-IS-Global-Propaganda-Strategy-March2016.pdf>, Accessed on 20 May 2017.

³⁰ Kis-Benedek, J. “Tendencies in the policy of the Islamic State”. *Defence Review* 144. Special issue 2016/1. 2016. 40–51. 50. http://www.honvedelem.hu/container/files/attachments/58745/defence_review_2016-1..pdf#page=42, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

³¹ “Terrorism Situation...”. 14.

³² Yusoufzai, K. and Emmerling, F. “Explaining violent radicalization in Western Muslims: A four factor model”. *Journal of Terrorism Research* 1/1. February 2017. 68–80.

³³ Ginkel, B. van and Entenmann, E. (eds). “The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union – Profiles, Threats & Policies”. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. April 2016. 3. https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf, Accessed on 20 May 2017.

³⁴ Hegghammer, T. “Should I stay or Should I go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists’ Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting”. *American Political Science Review*. February 2013. http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Should_I_stay_or_should_I_go.pdf, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 clearly demonstrated, all of the perpetrators identified so far had been foreign fighters and residents of the EU prior to joining ISIS.³⁵

Hence, the radicalisation process of persons with immigrant background born and raised in (Western) Europe joining militant Islamist groups has been subject to vast research in the past couple of years. One of the most important questions have been to what extent religion, identity and ideology (and the interplay thereof) have an impact on the process of accepting violence as legitimate means. And whether any of the mentioned factors play a particularly important role.

A study conducted in 2015 among 198 Muslims in the United States focusing on the role of cultural identity in the radicalisation process found that immigrants who could neither identify with culture, nor the heritage they were living in (a phenomenon the researchers called ‘*cultural homelessness*’) felt marginalised and insignificant.³⁶ The marginalisation resulted in a lack of sense of belonging, which could be exploited by groups affirming their self-worth and offering them a firm identity.³⁷ The study also found that the marginalisation in combination with experience of negative events such as discrimination, humiliation, or a loss of job could make things worse in a sense that the person in question would more easily find relief in radicalism, promising sense of belonging as well as a life purpose. Other research suggest that in times of stress of uncertainty there is a tendency to identify with the one part of the identity that is perceived to be under the fiercest threat or attack,³⁸ which may be an important factor in understanding the turn towards a violent and fundamentalist form of Islam among second and third generation immigrants in Western Europe. Considering the fact that the Muslim population in Europe is steadily growing and that Muslims in Europe at present are already much younger than the median for all Europeans,³⁹ there is an urgent need to discuss the question of identity as a prominent issue among Muslim communities in Europe, especially as the efforts to find a balance between a Western identity and a religious and/or ethnic identity inherited through the family may occasionally lead to an identity crisis.

PROFILES OF JIHADIST-INSPIRED TERRORISTS IN EUROPE 2015–2017

The following chapter will give a brief description and analysis of some of the most recent jihadist-inspired terrorist profiles having committed acts of terrorism in Europe during the past two years. The selection is mainly based on information available in online sources, as the biggest obstacle from a methodological point of view when describing radicalisation into violent extremism and terrorism is the lack of primary sources. The analysis of the terrorists’ background exposed some characteristics shared by all – as well as with other terrorists in other groups throughout the world. Common factors seem to be the question of identity and belonging, the seeking for higher purposes, the criminal lifestyle, earlier experiences with violence (and, hence, the relatively low threshold towards the use of violence), the full em-

³⁵ Gartenstein-Ross et al. “The Islamic State’s...”. 14.

³⁶ Lyons-Padilla, S. et al. “Belonging nowhere: Marginalization & radicalization risk among Muslim immigrants”. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 1(2). 2015. 1–12.

³⁷ Lyons-Padilla et al. „Belonging nowhere...”. 2.

³⁸ Maalouf, A. *On identity*. London: Random House, 2011.

³⁹ “5 facts about the Muslim population in Europe”. Pew Research Center. 19 July 2016. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/19/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>, Accessed on 13 June 2017.

bracement of the ideology and justification as presented by ISIS leading to indoctrination and fearless hatred towards what is interpreted as “the enemy”. Several of the profiles underline how young men with a history of petty crime become increasingly violent – a behaviour that is later legitimised and further fuelled by jihadist ideology. Most of them were radicalised through social network or family members, confirming what scholars observed long ago, namely that the network channel remains one of the most important sources of recruitment.⁴⁰ Already in the analysis of the Madrid bombers in 2004 scholars wrote about the importance of interpersonal links among the persons in the jihadist milieu, also illustrated by the case of several of the profiles listed in this brief analysis.⁴¹

Brahim and Salah Abdeslam (Paris, 2015 November 13)

On November 13, 2015 several persons committed multiple attacks throughout eastern and northern Paris killing 131 and wounding 368 persons. The attacks took place on several geographical locations (Stade de France Soccer Stadium, Rue Bichat, Rue de la Fontaine-au-Roi, Rue de Charonne, the Comptoir Voltaire restaurant at Boulevard Voltaire and the Bataclan theatre) almost simultaneously and consisted of shootings, suicide bombings and a suicide hostage barricade. The modus operandi recalled the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, where Lashkar-e-Taiba hit multiple civilian targets with gunfire as well as suicide bombings almost simultaneously.⁴² Brahim Abdeslam was one of the gunmen in the 11th and 12th *arrondissements* in Paris and the one who blew himself up at the restaurant on Boulevard Voltaire, while Saleh Abdeslam escaped the attacks. Little is known as to his motives why he did not carry out his part of the mission. His suicide vest was later found in a trash can along with a cell phone. He managed to avoid law enforcement in the Molenbeek suburb of Brussels for almost four months, until getting caught by Belgian police in March 2016. Molenbeek has been held as one of the hotbeds of Jihadist radicalisation in Western Europe. With a population of almost 100,000 with 30 percent being of foreign nationality and 40 percent of foreign roots, it has functioned as an operational and logistical hub for the terrorist cells which carried out the attacks in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in 2016.⁴³ ISIS claimed responsibility in a video released after the attacks, announcing in French that “[a]s long as you keep bombing you will not live in peace. You will even fear travelling to your market.”

Brahim and Salah Abdeslam were French nationals of Moroccan origin growing up in Molenbeek. Salah Abdeslam had a history of criminal activity, and served time in prison for robbery in 2010 together with his childhood friend Abdelhamid Abaaoud (below). After the prison sentence he worked for Belgium’s public transportation system STIB-MIVB as a mechanic, a job from which he was fired from later. According to some sources he was discontinued from the job due to regular absence, but the woman he was briefly engaged to claimed it was due to criminal activity and a prison sentence.⁴⁴ A couple of months before

⁴⁰ Alonso, R. and Reinares, F. “Magreb immigrants becoming suicide terrorists: a case study on religious radicalisation processes in Spain”. In Pedahzur, A. (ed), *Root Causes of Suicidal Terrorism – The globalization of martyrdom*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 191.

⁴¹ Alonso and Reinares. „Magreb immigrants becoming...”. 191.

⁴² Nance, M. *Defeating ISIS: Who they are, how they fight, what they believe*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016. 140.

⁴³ Nance. *Defeating ISIS*... 145–146.

⁴⁴ “Salah Abdeslam’s Ex Fiancée Speaks Out”. *Flanders News*, 24 February 2016. <http://deredactie.be/cm/vrt-nieuws.english/News/1.2581476>, Accessed on 15 June 2017.

the attack, a video footage of the two brothers showed a rather secular lifestyle: the two of them dancing, drinking and flirting with women at a nightclub and according to some of their friends they used to smoke hashish as well. Hence, the radicalisation process of the two brothers has puzzled scholars and analysts paving way for several theories. According to some the secular behaviour may be an example of *taqiyya*, or calculated pretence, when the “warrior” tries to melt in with the enemy to avoid detection.⁴⁵ In an interview with the Belgian broadcaster RTBF the elder brother of Brahim and Salah, Mohamed Abdeslam told the journalists that he had not apprehended any signs that may indicate radicalisation, rather he believed it to be a matter of manipulation. He stated though that Salah had begun to pray a couple of months prior to the attack and that he had stopped drinking alcohol, but claimed that these signs did not cause any particular reaction in the family.⁴⁶ Another theory was brought forward by Salah Abdeslam’s ex-fiancée who claimed that he was radicalised when his childhood friend Abaaoud went to Syria.

Since his arrest in March 2016 Salah Abdeslam has been silent and non-cooperative with the legal system, hence, exact details regarding his radicalisation process remain somewhat unknown. But following the patterns of other young men coming from similar background (second-generation immigrants growing up in a suburb with a large immigrant presence and with a history of crime, violence and unemployment) it becomes clear that there may have been a certain breeding ground for the radicalisation process. The prison sentence as well as a close friend travelling to the conflict zone in Syria to wage *jihad* may have further accelerated the process in a violent direction.

Abdelhamid Abaaoud

The dual Belgian-Moroccan citizen Abdelhamid Abaaoud is believed to have been the leader of the terrorist cell committing the attacks in Paris. He was a third-generation immigrant born in the Anderlecht neighbourhood of Brussels in Belgium and the eldest of six children.⁴⁷ He was enrolled in a prestigious Catholic school of Brussels but was expelled after one year due to disruptive behaviour and poor academic achievements.⁴⁸ Following the expulsion he joined local gangs of youngsters among several of the later co-perpetrators in the Paris attacks where to be found (including the Abdeslam brothers). Abaaoud had an early criminal record and was sentenced to prison several times for theft, violence and resisting police officers between 2006 and 2012.⁴⁹ He caught the eye of the Belgian security service in 2013 after a trip with six other young men to Syria, to which he later travelled several times. Probably in order to avoid Belgian security services Abaaoud faked his own

⁴⁵ Cottee, S. “Europe’s Joint-Smoking, Gay-Club Hopping Terrorists”. *Foreign Policy*, 13 April 2016. <http://foreign-policy.com/2016/04/13/the-joint-smoking-gay-club-hopping-terrorists-of-molenbeek-abdeslam-radicalization/>, Accessed on 15 June 2016.

⁴⁶ “Paris attacks: Abdeslam brothers ‘were manipulated, not radicalised’”. BBC, 22 November 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34895294>, Accessed on 5 June 2017.

⁴⁷ Vlierden, G. van “Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud”. *CTC Sentinel* 8/11. November/December 2015. 30. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CTCSentinel-Vol8Iss112.pdf>, Accessed on 15 June 2017.

⁴⁸ Vlierden. “Profile...”. 30.

⁴⁹ Vincent, E. “Ce que les services belges savaient d’Abdelhamid Abaaoud”. *Le Monde*, 20 November 2015. http://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/20/abaaoud-ce-que-les-services-belges-savaient_4814101_4809495.html#ZUPuVud15TepHuOU.99, Accessed on 15 June 2017.

death and returned to Belgium (Verviers) in 2014, with the intent to coordinate an attack, which was foiled in January 2015. He managed to escape the police and returned to Syria, where he gave an interview to the *Dabiq* magazine, the online propaganda magazine of ISIS. The topics included how he had managed to get back to Europe, set up a safe house, obtain weapons and escape Western intelligence.⁵⁰

According to Abaaoud's father the radicalisation commenced while he was serving the last term in prison, however, the details remain unclear. What is known is that after prison, Abaaoud fell in the circles around a known veteran from the Afghan *jihād*, Khalid Zarkavi, recruiting persons in Molenbeek to the Syrian *jihād*.⁵¹ Abaaoud's background illustrates the story of a young troublemaker with an immigrant background involved in petty crime who at a young age had already displayed a disruptive and violent behaviour. This violent and deviant behaviour later became legitimised by the jihadist ideology espousing more violence as legitimate means, where Abaaoud could advance in the ranks and obtain capacity to coordinate sophisticated attacks.

Ibrahim and Khalid al-Bakraoui (Brussels, 22 March 2016)

On 22nd March 2016 three persons blew themselves up in Brussels, two at the departure hall of the Zaventem International Airport and one at the Maelbeek metro station at the city centre, killing 31 and injuring more than 270 persons. The persons were identified as the brothers Ibrahim and Khalid al-Bakraoui (29 and 27 years old) of Moroccan origin, born and raised in a working-class neighbourhood of Brussels (Laeken). Both brothers had an early criminal debut and long criminal records prior to the terrorist attack, Khalid had participated in carjacking at least four times, in an armed bank robbery in 2009, and Ibrahim had been the lookout at a robbery attempt in 2010 whereby he shot a policeman in the leg with a Kalashnikov. Ibrahim was sentenced to nine years in prison for attempted murder, but was released on parole after four years.⁵²

The case of the al-Bakraoui brothers is also interesting considering the fact that they committed the attack only three days after Saleh Abdeslam, the only known surviving terrorist from the Paris attacks in November 2015 (above). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, which was not the first of its kind in the Belgian capital. ISIS had attacked Brussels previously; in May 2015 a person linked to the terrorist organisation (Mehdi Nemmouche) killed four persons and injured several others in the Jewish Museum of Brussels. Some evidence seem to suggest that the al-Bakraoui brothers felt forced to act quickly after the capture of Abdeslam; police found a note in the bin of a laptop of the elder brother claiming that he felt he was hunted and "no longer safe" and feared "ending up in a cell like him" (Abdeslam).⁵³ When police raided the apartment of the al-Bakraoui brothers they discovered a makeshift bomb factory as there was 15 kg of explosives, 150 litres of acetone, 30 litres

⁵⁰ 7th issue of the *Dabiq* magazine.

⁵¹ Vliedren. "Profile...". 30.

⁵² "Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui: From Bank Robbers to Brussels Bombers". *The New York Times*, 24 March 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/world/europe/expanding-portraits-of-brussels-bombers-ibrahim-and-khalid-el-bakraoui.html>, Accessed on June 5 2017.

⁵³ Chisafis, A. "The men in a top floor who sowed terror in Brussels". *The Guardian*, 24 March 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/23/brussels-attacks-schaerbeek-flat-coordinated-atrocities-plotted-el-bakraoui>, Accessed on June 5 2017.

of hydrogen peroxide, detonators, a suitcase filled with screws and nails.⁵⁴ Both Bakraoui brothers are also believed to have been plotting another attack in which radioactive material would have been scattered over a populated area, including the kidnapping of a nuclear expert to build a dirty bomb.⁵⁵

The details of the radicalisation process are not fully known, however, the life stories are quite similar to the above mentioned profiles. Interestingly, the 14th edition of the Dabiq propaganda magazine released after the Brussels bombings had an entire section dedicated to the alleged dreams of Khalid al-Bakraoui. According to the article, he had three dreams leading to the execution of the attack, the first one during his imprisonment and the two others after the Paris attacks. In the dreams described the first is a wake-up call to become more religious and in the two latter ones a pathway to martyrdom appears, potentially suggesting that there may have been someone in his immediate surroundings picking up on these dreams and trying to encourage and further radicalise him.⁵⁶

Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel (Nice, 14 July 2016)

On Bastille Day 2016 a man drove a 19-tonne lorry into the crowds gathered to celebrate the French national holiday at the Promenad des Anglais in the Riviera city of Nice, killing 86 and injuring more than 450 others. The man was identified as Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, a 31 year-old Tunisian with a French residence permit. He moved to France in 2005, and married a French-Tunisian cousin with whom he had three children. According to his father, Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was suffering from a mental illness causing him a nervous breakdown, and he had been to a psychiatrist as well as had received medical treatment prior to his move to France.⁵⁷ Neighbours described him as a loner with a history of violence, alcohol and drugs and who – after his divorce – according to François Molins, French prosecutor assigned to the case, also indulged a wild sex life including both men and women.⁵⁸

An interesting statement regarding his radicalisation process was made by the then French Minister of Interior Bernard Cazeneuve, who claimed that the perpetrator “appeared to have been radicalised very quickly”.⁵⁹ ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack saying that Lahouaiej-Bouhlel acted in response to its calls to target civilians in countries that are part of the international coalition against them.⁶⁰ According to the prosecutor and the police, Lahouaiej-Bouhlel had given expression to a recent interest in radical Islamism, searching the web for verses of the *Qur’an*, nasheeds (Arabic chants) with jihadist propaganda as well as videos of fatal traffic accidents, and articles on recent attacks (such as the one in the gay

⁵⁴ Chisafis. “The men in...”.

⁵⁵ Webb, E. and Sutton, R. “An Enduring Threat: Europe’s Islamist Networks Then and Now”. The Henry Jacksons Society, Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism. 2016. 9–10. <https://relayto.com/the-henry-jackson-society/92ha81N0>, Accessed on June 5 2017.

⁵⁶ “The dreams of a Brussels bomber”. The Bored Jihadi Blog. 1 April 2016. <http://boredjihadi.tumblr.com/post/142889314077/three-dreams-of-a-brussels-bomber>, Accessed on 14 June 2017.

⁵⁷ Chazan, D. “Bastille Day terrorist was radicalised within months and sent £84,000 to his Tunisian family days before attack”. *The Telegraph*, 17 July 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/16/bastille-day-terrorist-was-radicalised-within-months-and-sent-84/>, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

⁵⁸ Chazan. “Bastille Day terrorist...”.

⁵⁹ Chazan. “Bastille Day terrorist...”.

⁶⁰ “Who was Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel?”. BBC News. 19 July 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36801763>, Accessed on 20 June 2017.

nightclub in Dallas, where a gunman who proclaimed allegiance to ISIS shot 49 persons).⁶¹ Investigators also found violent content related to militant Islamism and the flag of ISIS on his computer. Lahouaiej-Bouhlel had an earlier police record from the years between 2010 and 2016 for threatening behaviour, violence and petty theft.

The case of Lahouaiej-Bouhlel illustrates how mental illness can play a significant role in the radicalisation process. In his case, the history of violence and threatening behaviour, as well as the negative experience from the divorce, and the unemployment may have contributed to the search for alternative – and radical – solutions and new purposes. Considering what is known about the rather short period of time during which the radicalisation process occurred, and the fact that he was not known to the French authorities as a potentially violent Islamist, it becomes increasingly important to focus on awareness-raising measures regarding the early signals of potential transformations and a changed behaviour as were voiced – with hindsight – by neighbours and others in the perpetrator's immediate surroundings. Although the details on the true ideological and/or religious conviction of Lahouaiej-Bouhlel will probably remain unknown, it is important to bear in mind how the rhetoric of radical Islamist groups propagating violence as a legitimate solution may attract persons with psychological problems, seeking for alternatives to channel personal traumas, failures and frustration.

Anis Amri (Berlin, 2016 December 19)

On 19 December 2016 a man deliberately drove a hijacked truck into a Christmas market at the Breitscheidplatz in Berlin, killing 12 persons and wounding 48. This was the first confirmed ISIS-inspired attack on German soil which resulted in fatalities.⁶² The perpetrator was identified as Anis Amri, a 24 year-old man of Tunisian origin, who had entered the country as an asylum seeker in 2015. Amri was one of nine children who according to his father grew up as a troublemaker, dropping out of school, living of occasional jobs, and eventually turning to alcohol and drugs.⁶³ Using the turmoil around the revolution in 2011 he escaped a prison sentence for having stolen a vehicle by fleeing the country and left for Italy. According to a spokesperson for the Italian state police, Amri entered the country without any ID and claimed to be a 16-year-old minor. Italian authorities ordered his deportation but the Tunisian authorities refused to accept the request referring to the lack of proper documentation. Nor did the Tunisian authorities respond to the request to send him travel documents. After having attacked a staff member of the refugee shelter and started a fire at the shelter Amis was – together with four other Tunisian asylum seekers – sentenced to four years in prison for damaging state property, assault and arson in 2011.⁶⁴ He was released in 2015 and left for Germany through Switzerland, where he applied for asylum. Between July and December 2015 Amri would register as an asylum seeker at least five times under different names and use altogether 14 identities while being in Germany.⁶⁵ The asylum application was denied

⁶¹ „Who was Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel?”

⁶² Heil, G. “The Berlin attack and the ‘Abu Wala’ Islamic State recruitment network”. *CTC Sentinel* 10/2. 2017. 1. https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss228.pdf, Accessed on 20 February 2017.

⁶³ Heil. “The Berlin attack...”. 1.

⁶⁴ Heil. “The Berlin attack...”. 1.

⁶⁵ Heil. “The Berlin attack...”. 2.

and the deportation process had commenced but could not be completed due to the fact that Amri's identity could not be fully established.⁶⁶ According to German security officials Amri was on the radar of the German law enforcement authorities not only for having searched for a gun, but for being in contact with ISIS operatives abroad as well as radical Islamists in Germany, including a network recruiting for ISIS in Germany.⁶⁷ The network was organised around a Salafi preacher, an Iraqi national known as Abu Walaa, who together with four other suspects were arrested one month prior to the Christmas market attack. According to news sources Amri's name was mentioned several times in the 345-pages of investigation.⁶⁸ According to the investigative file, police informants had passed on information about the members of the network discussing to commit attacks, where one possible method mentioned was driving a truck full of gasoline into a crowd. The radicalisation process is believed to have commenced while he was in prison in Italy. According to a report for the Italian Committee for Strategic Anti-Terrorism Analysis (CASA), Amri was considered to be a dangerous person and the leader for the Islamists in prison. He had reportedly threatened and attacked staff members and threatened to decapitate a Christian inmate. During his stay in Germany he attended classes at "Madrasa Dortmund", a Qur'an school in Dortmund, which was where he first got in touch with the above mentioned Abu Walaa-network.

Through its affiliated Amaq news agency ISIS claimed to have inspired the attack and that Amri was a "soldier of the Islamic State" acting in response to the call for committing attacks in the West. For days after the attack Amaq released a video of Amri pledging allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi vowing to "slaughter crusaders who are shelling Muslims every day".

Anis Amri constitutes a so far fairly rare example of a person with a troublemaker background who entered the European Union as an asylum seeker who demonstrated violent behaviour already in the country where the asylum application was filed. The radicalisation most probably took place in the Italian prison, thus confirming the existing knowledge on prisons' being one of the most significant hotbeds for Jihadist recruitment in Europe. The almost immediate way into a like-minded group in another Member State of the EU (Germany) shows how these ties and networks function without borders. The case also illustrates one unfortunate consequence of the failure to return declined asylum seekers to their country of origin – especially of those who pose a security risk.

Khalid Masood (London, 22 March 2017)

On March 22 a man drove into pedestrians outside London's Palace of Westminster, resulting in four fatalities and more than 50 injured persons. The attacker was later identified as Khalid Masood, a 52 year-old man born in Kent. According to information from the Metropolitan Police he used numerous aliases throughout his life, but Khalid Masood was the name he took after having converted to Islam.⁶⁹ Masood had several convictions, the

⁶⁶ Berlinger, J. and Smith-Spark, L. "Berlin Christmas market attack suspect: Who was Anis Amri?". CNN. 23 December 2016. <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/12/22/europe/anis-amri-berlin-christmas-market/>, Accessed on 10 January 2017.

⁶⁷ Heil. "The Berlin attack...". 1.

⁶⁸ Berlinger and Smith-Spark. "Berlin Christmas market...".

⁶⁹ Casciani, D. "London attack: Who was Khalid Masood?". BBC. 26 March 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-39373766>, Accessed on 15 April 2017.

earliest from the age of 18, when he was charged for criminal damage. Later he served several sentences in prison for a wide range of crimes, including grievous bodily harm, assault, and possession of an offensive weapon.⁷⁰ At one occasion he was involved in – among other troubles – a serious attack allegedly in a pub preceded by racist provocation, where he stabbed a man in the face, for which he was sentenced to two years imprisonment. After prison he moved away from his village, leaving wife and children behind, and started using steroids and cocaine. According to persons from his new environment, he had a bad temper and after another incident by which he stabbed another person in the face, he was sentenced to prison yet again. The time of the conversion to Islam is not known, but according to an interview with a childhood friend given to *The Independent* it took place sometime while he was incarcerated. This would be in line with the radicalisation patterns of several other known terrorists who at some point during their time in prison became susceptible to the violent Jihadist ideology offering redemption, status and new goals.⁷¹ In 2004 he married a Muslim woman of Pakistani descent and in the following year he wanted to take a position as English teacher at the General Authority of Civil Aviation in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.⁷² The travel to live in Saudi Arabia may be interpreted as a typical pattern of a convert who seeks opportunities to live and work in an Islamic country in order to fully embrace their new faith and way of life.⁷³ Masood moved back in the UK in 2010 and settled in Luton, well known for its links to militant Islamism. On March 22 he hired a car and drove into pedestrians killing four people.

Rakhmat Akilov (Stockholm, 7 April 2017)

In November 2014 the 39-year-old citizen from Uzbekistan applied for residence permit in Sweden but was denied in June 2016.⁷⁴ The Migration Court did not grant the leave to appeal and Akilov was to be deported, but went underground. The deportation order was sent to the police in February 2017. On April 7 Akilov stole a truck and drove into the largest shopping street in central Stockholm, the Swedish capital, killing four people and injuring 15 others. Akilov was arrested a couple of hours after the attack and later confessed guilty. According to information leaked from the interrogation, Akilov claimed to be a member of the Islamic State and that he was proud over his deeds.⁷⁵ The motive for his attack was supposedly “for what Sweden is doing to his country” (i.e. since the end of 2014 Sweden has participated in the international coalition against the Islamic State in accordance with a Government decision,

⁷⁰ Dearden, L. “Khalid Masood told friend ‘I want some f***ing blood, I want to kill someone’ before converting to Islam in prison”. *The Independent*, 25 March 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/khalid-masood-adrian-elms-ajao-westminster-london-attacker-isis-prison-radicalisation-want-blood-a7650276.html>, Accessed on 15 April 2017.

⁷¹ Basra, R., Neumann, P. R. and Brunner, C. “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures”. ICSR King’s College London. 2016. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf>, Accessed on 15 April 2017.

⁷² Casciani. “London attack...”

⁷³ Questions by converts on where to move to live under Islamic law are subjects to many discussions online, eg. <https://www.quora.com/If-I-want-to-move-to-a-Muslim-country-and-start-a-new-life-which-country-would-you-recommend>.

⁷⁴ Lundberg Andersson, H. and Syrén, M. “Rakhmat Akilov, 39, misstänks för attacken”. *Expressen*, 9 April 2017. <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/rakhmat-akilov-39-misstanks-for-attacken/>, Accessed on 3 May 2017.

⁷⁵ Lundberg Andersson and Syrén. “Rakhmat Akilov...”.

mainly through non-combatant military personnel supporting the Kurdish armed forces in northern Iraq) and furthermore he claimed to have received the order to carry out the attack directly from ISIS.⁷⁶ Little is yet known about Akilov's radicalisation process, however, the Swedish Security Service had investigated him previously in the framework of a counterterrorism investigation⁷⁷ and he was also known to the authorities for being a sympathiser of ISIS and Hizb-ut-Tahrir.⁷⁸ It is also known that he had links to an al-Qaeda affiliated group in Syria through a Russian-language social media site. The leader of the group is suspected of having ordered the above mentioned subway suicide bombing in St Petersburg only a couple of days before the Stockholm attack.⁷⁹ During a press conference a week after the Stockholm attack Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov claimed that Uzbekistan's security service had previously passed information on Akilov to partner countries in the West (without identifying the countries by name) and that Akilov was recruited by the Islamic State after he left the country in 2014.⁸⁰ An Uzbek security source claimed that Akilov had attempted to join ISIS, but was arrested on the Syrian-Turkish border and deported to Sweden in 2015. He moved to Turkey in 2012 after a divorce, leaving four children behind. Turkey is among the countries to which Uzbek nationals do not need a visa, and according to sources (i.e. Uzbek nationals living in Sweden) Akilov got in touch with radical Islamists in Turkey.⁸¹ According to the same sources in Sweden Akilov's religious knowledge was at a rather low level, and that he at a certain point started using drugs (mainly cocaine) in Sweden. The case of Akilov comprises a complex interplay between several important underlying causes: is the attack purely to be seen as an ideologically and politically motivated act of retaliation for the on-going situation in Syria, or is it rather to be interpreted as a desperate act for a refused asylum application interpreted through the lens of militant Islamism?

It also has to be noted that the suicide bomber who blew himself up in the subway of St Petersburg one week prior to the attack in Stockholm as well as the person bombing the Istanbul International Airport on New Year's Eve were also Uzbek citizens. Analysts and researchers claim that it is likely that radicalisation into violent Islamist extremism will continue to grow in Central Asia, mainly due to the following factors: societal deprivation combined with an opportunity to rebel used by extremists, a low level of religious knowledge and education combined with strong political views on the repression of Muslims, the exposure to violence, feelings of exclusion and alienation and all the mentioned factors combined with the question of religion.⁸²

⁷⁶ Lundberg Andersson and Syrén. "Rakhmat Akilov...".

⁷⁷ Ranstorp, M. and Gustafsson, L. "Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq – An analysis of open-source intelligence and statistical data". Swedish Defence University, Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies, 2017. 15. <https://www.fhs.se/documents/Externwebben/forskning/centrumbildningar/CATS/publikationer/2017/Swedish%20Foreign%20Fighters%20webb.pdf>, Accessed on 13 June 2017.

⁷⁸ "Misstänkte terroristen Rakhmat Akilov kallar sig sprängexpert". Expressen, 9 April 2017. <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/misstankte-terroristen-rakhmat-akilov-kallar-sig-sprangexpert/>, Accessed on 13 June 2017.

⁷⁹ Ranstorp and Gustafsson. "Swedish Foreign Fighters...". 15.

⁸⁰ "Uzbekistan 'had warned West about Stockholm attack suspect'". *Arab News*, 15 April 2017. <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1084616/world>, Accessed on 3 May 2017.

⁸¹ "Uppgifter: Akilov efterlystes av Uzbekistan". *Svenska Dagbladet*, 12 April 2017. <https://www.svd.se/akilov-radikaliserades-innan-han-kom-till-sverige>, Accessed on 3 May 2017.

⁸² Heathershaw, J. and Montgomery D. W. "Why do Central Asians Join ISIS?". Exeter Central Asian Studies Network. 2015. <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/excas/2015/07/17/isis/>, Accessed on 13 June 2017.

Salman Abedi (Manchester, 22 May 2017)

On the evening of May 22 an explosive device detonated after a concert in Manchester, one of the largest cities in the United Kingdom. The explosion caused 22 fatalities and dozens of injuries, making the attack the most deadly since the London bombings of 7 July 2005. The device was used as a suicide bomb and in the days following the attack Salman Abedi, a 22 year-old man of Libyan descent was named as the perpetrator. According to media sources available, Salman Abedi is the 22 year-old son of Libyan parents who fled from Muammar Gaddafi to the United Kingdom in the 1990s.⁸³ Abedi was born in 1994 as the second eldest child and grew up with his family in Manchester. Apparently, the majority of the family members moved back to Libya leaving Abedi and the elder brother behind. Abedi eventually dropped out from university and some neighbours claim to have noticed the young man becoming more devout and withdrawn.

Regarding the radicalisation process some experts claim that for a long time Abedi had been exposed to radical views from several parties in his immediate surrounding. The father had been a member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a terrorist organisation that had pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and whose aim was to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi and replace his regime with a hard-line Islamic state.⁸⁴ After a failed plot, many of the persecuted members of the LIFG were granted asylum in the United Kingdom on the basis of “our enemy’s enemy is our friend”, as the United Kingdom was an opponent of the Gaddafi-regime.⁸⁵ Some of the Libyans granted asylum moved to Birmingham and Manchester which were both already home to large Arab communities. According to researchers many of the Muslims in Manchester attended the Didsbury mosque, the only Arab mosque in the region and run by the Muslim Brotherhood, thus preaching a fundamentalist form of Islam.⁸⁶ Abedi also attended the mosque; hence the radical views are suggested to have sprung both from his father as well as from the preaching in the mosque. After the family moved back to Libya, Abedi apparently shuttled back and forth between Manchester and Tripoli, not finding a sense of belonging in either country. In his attempt to find both an identity and a community he first joined a violent gang subculture and later embraced the views of ISIS. When and how the radicalisation process commenced remains somewhat unclear, but according to French intelligence sources, Abedi had recently visited Libya as well as Syria. An explanation to the radicalisation process was provided by his sister Jomana, who claimed that Abedi became radicalised when seeing images of the US-lead coalition’s air strikes in Syria. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, reducing the victims to “crusaders”, “polytheists” and “worshippers of the cross”.⁸⁷

The attack was perpetrated right at the main exit of the concert hall as people were leaving after the concert, showing that it is sufficient to select a strategic position in order

⁸³ “What we know about Manchester suicide bomber Salman Abedi”. *The Telegraph*, 26 May 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/26/everything-know-manchester-suicide-bomber-salman-abedi/>, Accessed on 28 May 2017.

⁸⁴ Doward, J., Cobain, I., and Stephen, Q. “How Manchester bomber Salman Abedi was radicalised by his ties to Libya”. *The Guardian*, 28 May 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/28/salman-abedi-manchester-arena-bomber-radicalisation>, Accessed on 28 May 2017.

⁸⁵ Doward et al. “How Manchester bomber...”.

⁸⁶ Doward et al. “How Manchester bomber...”.

⁸⁷ Maher, S. “Inside the minds of ISIS murderers”. *The New Statesman*, 28 May 2017. <http://www.newstatesman.com/world/2017/05/inside-minds-isis-murderers>, Accessed on 30 May 2017.

to cause mass casualties and the perpetrator does not even need to enter.⁸⁸ According to UK-based security experts, the chosen method is worrisome for several reasons. Unlike recent trends in the UK, where terrorist attacks have been carried out with knives or cars, the Manchester attack was carried out with a device requiring not only a certain level of technical expertise, but also a much higher degree of sophistication than the aforementioned selection of weapons.⁸⁹ Another implication that may signal a higher level of professionalism in the construction of the device is the information provided by Manchester Hospital staff to Jane's Terrorism and Intelligence Center (JTIC), stating that they were treating people with shrapnel wounds which may have been caused by nails, ball bearings or other metal objects.⁹⁰ It is still an important question in the on-going investigation whether Abedi acted alone or was part of a larger network.

The radicalisation process of Abedi illustrates how a breeding ground for violent acts may develop through family and the preaching of the mosque attended. From his background and certain life events it may be assumed that Abedi was most probably struggling to find a balance between his Libyan and British roots and heritage, and the absence of important (and moderate) role models supporting him in his efforts may have accelerated the process in the wrong direction.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking back on the past few years it becomes evident that the level of jihadist activity in Europe is on a historically high level.⁹¹ Though it is difficult to predict with certainty how the jihadi milieus and network will develop in the upcoming years, certain trends affecting the development are visible already. These are – as identified by Hegghammer in 2016 – the economic underachievement of a growing young Muslim population in Europe, the return of foreign fighters from conflict zones, continued armed conflicts in the Muslim world, and continued “operational freedom” on the Internet.⁹²

From the modus operandi and terrorist profiles briefly analysed above it is possible to draw the first and obvious conclusion that society will never be able to fully protect itself against such violent events. As the weaponisation of everyday life is neither desirable nor entirely feasible in practice, methods to combat the phenomenon must include a more effective and coherent preventative strategy. Furthermore, some conclusions suggest that we may face new patterns regarding the radicalisation processes as well as the selection of targets, while others confirm existing knowledge on – among others – hotbeds of radicalisation, the potential misuse of the irregular migratory flows towards Europe by persons with malicious intent, and how the Salafi-jihadist ideology continues to attract people with different backgrounds and with different personal motives and underlying psychosocial root causes to justify brutal acts of violence. However, the backgrounds of the perpetrators still show

⁸⁸ Newsome, B. “Manchester: The newest terrorism and the the future of terrorism”. Berkeley blog, 24 May 2017. <http://blogs.berkeley.edu/2017/05/24/manchester-the-newest-terrorism/>, Accessed on 28 May 2017.

⁸⁹ Acton, G. “Sophisticated weapon used in Manchester terror attack is ‘disturbing’, says security expert”. CNBC, 23 May 2017. <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/23/sophisticated-weapon-used-in-manchester-terror-attacks-is-disturbing-says-security-expert.html>, Accessed on 28 May 2017.

⁹⁰ Acton. „Sophisticated weapon...”.

⁹¹ Hegghammer, T. “The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View”. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10/6, 2016. <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/566/html>, Accessed on 12 June 2017.

⁹² Hegghammer. “The Future of...”.

the common feature that the majority of the ones committing attacks in Europe in the name of the self-styled Islamic State are second-generation immigrants with a majority having a criminal past, yet repeatedly confirming the nexus between terrorism and criminality as well as the fact that ISIS is increasingly targeting persons with a criminal record. According to estimates by some researchers, around 50-80% of the Europeans in ISIS have a criminal record, which is significantly higher than in the case of al-Qaeda, where the same figures stand around 25%.⁹³ The listed profiles and the personal links between them also confirm the significance of social as well as family ties in the European radicalisation and recruitment of the Islamic State. Rather than being radicalised by entirely strangers – either physically or online – this pattern is consistent with the research suggesting the importance of close personal ties between the radicaliser and the radicalised.⁹⁴

Potential intelligence failures and a lack of political dedication to firmly address the breeding ground of Jihadist radicalisation have most often been subjects to public debates following the recent terrorist attack across Europe. However, the accelerated radicalisation processes behind the perpetrators' acts as well as the selection of rather simple means in carrying out the attacks pose a new challenge also for intelligence and security services which may face an intelligence and surveillance deficit while continuously being put to the test. Without physical or virtual contact with like-minded persons in a certain cell, or a drawn-out planning preceding an attack, it inevitably becomes increasingly difficult to prevent attacks. However, considering the fact that the majority of the perpetrators mentioned in the study were known to intelligence and security services, the question of why the attacks could not be prevented remains open. This is also true for the above listed two examples of persons entering as irregular migrants who in both cases were known as sympathisers of radical Islamism to the authorities. These gaps need to be identified and filled urgently.

At the same time, the number of plots thwarted is not to be forgotten or diminished either, although these are rarely the ones creating headlines in the media. According to the Metropolitan Police in the United Kingdom, 13 plots have been thwarted since 2013, which means that police have disrupted a terrorist attack every four months.⁹⁵ Further statistics by Member States provided to Europol show that 718 people were arrested on suspicion of jihadist terrorism related offences during 2016, which is a 31-person increase compared to the previous year.⁹⁶

Considering the selection of targets there is an increase in the selection of mass social events (clubs and concerts) where a large number of people are found in a fairly uncontrolled area. The attack on the Bataclan concert hall in Paris in November 2015, the attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida in June 2016 and the attack at the Manchester Area in May 2017, all fit into the jihadist strategy of targeting places of mass gathering and social events – which in the mentioned cases also represent integral parts of “Western culture”. While – according to some security analysts – it is still somewhat rare that cities other than capitals are being targeted due to the capitals' symbolic significance, the question remains

⁹³ Gaub, F. and Lisiecka, J. “The crime-terrorism nexus”. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2017. 1. http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Brief_10_Terrorism_and_crime.pdf, Accessed on 5 June 2017.

⁹⁴ Soufan, A. and Schoenfeld, D. “Regional Hotbeds as Drivers of Radicalization”. In Varvelli, A. (ed), *Jihadist Hotbeds – Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*. Milano: Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), 2016. 29.

⁹⁵ Maher. “Inside the minds of ISIS murderers”.

⁹⁶ Europol. „Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2017”. 22–23.

whether the selection of other geographical locations is a new phenomenon or a pattern here to stay. The Manchester attack represents yet another level of cruelty considering the fact that many of the concert-goers were children (and – as a consequence – several of the victims, too). The deliberate selection of children as targets may not be entirely new in the history of terrorism; we only need to go back a couple of years to 2004 in order to remember the massacre in Beslan, where Chechen terrorists took more than 1,100 hostages, including 777 children, but it is certainly entirely new in the European context. The fact that Salafi-jihadist ideology has its own justification even to why children are also to be considered as legitimate targets makes it even more important, not only for European policy makers but also for intelligence and security services, to understand the role of the ideological and religious arguments in the radicalisation process. Alarmism has never proved to be a feasible way, but neither has the disproportionate underestimation of a growing societal and security problem.

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