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POST-DEFEAT INDETERMINACY FOR ISIS RESIDUALS

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- 5) Foreign terrorist fighter

PREAMBLE

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my lovely husband A. Alperen Kibar.

I have successfully completed my thesis with his support and endless devotion to me and our daughters even in the most unusual times.

Thank you for always being there for us...

R. Meriç Kibar



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AQI	Al-Qaida Iraq
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
EU	European Union
FTFs	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
UN	United Nations
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

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Figure 2.1. Percentage of foreign ISIS affiliates travelled to Iraq and the Syria

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores to what extent the problem of residuals (remaining ISIS affiliated people and its ideology) has been taken into account after the collapse of ISIS, at the international and national level by NATO, EU, UN and US.

In the first chapter, the history, evolution and ideology of ISIS will be discussed. In the second chapter, ISIS people including returning foreign terrorist fighters, remaining ISIS-affiliated people in the post-territorial defeat of ISIS and the conditions of camps and prisons in north-east Syria will be discussed. The third chapter will analyse the efforts and approaches of NATO, EU, UN and US against the threat of ISIS resurrection and the current situation from their perspective will be discussed. The conclusion will examine the effectiveness of post-defeat strategies & policies adopted by EU, NATO, UN and US.

Although the definition of “foreign terrorist fighters” is attributed to people who are not born in Syria and Iraq. This thesis does not aim to study all “the foreigners” and puts the focal point on the ones of European origin.

Key words: ISIS, post-defeat, residuals, remaining people, returnee, returning foreign terrorist, ideology, foreign fighter, foreign terrorist fighter, camps, prisons.

ÖZET

Bu tez, IŞİD'in çökmesinden sonra ortada kalan ancak IŞİD'e veya ideolojisine bağlılığını devam ettiren insanların durumunun NATO, AB, BM ve ABD tarafından ulusal ve uluslararası ne ölçüde dikkate alındığını araştırmaktadır.

Birinci bölümde IŞİD'in tarihi, evrimi ve ideolojisi ele alınmaktadır. İkinci bölümde, geri dönen yabancı terörist savaşçılar, IŞİD'in sahip olduğu tüm toprakları kaybetmesi sonrası IŞİD'e bağlı kalanlar ve Suriye'nin kuzeydoğusundaki kamp ve hapisane koşulları da dâhil olmak üzere IŞİD insanları tartışılmaktadır. Üçüncü bölümde NATO, AB, BM ve ABD'nin IŞİD'in diriliş tehdidine karşı gösterdiği çaba ve yaklaşımlar ele alınacak ve mevcut durum onların perspektifinden tartışılacaktır. Sonuç, AB, NATO, BM ve ABD tarafından benimsenen yenilgi sonrası strateji ve politikaların etkinliği incelenecektir.

“Yabancı terörist savaşçı” tanımı Irak ve Suriye’de doğmamış olan terörist savaşçılara atfedilse de, bu tez, tüm “yabancıları” incelemeyi amaçlamamakta ve Avrupa menşeli olanları odak noktasına koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: IŞİD, yenilgi sonrası, geri kalanlar, geri dönen yabancı terörist, ideoloji, yabancı savaşçı, yabancı terörist savaşçı, kamplar, hapisaneler.

INTRODUCTION

ISIS, formed after the United States invasion of Iraq, is a jihadist extremist group which aims to build a single state ruled by sharia law (Glint, 2014). It represents the post al Qaeda jihadist threat with a greater ambition of forming an Islamic State (Cronin, 2015).

ISIS ideology is adapted from Al-Qaeda's ideology with a vision of an established caliphate and has been developed by various factors (Glint, 2014). The US invasion and occupation of Iraq in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, created a power struggle and fertile ground for the radicalized non-state actors to gain sympathy especially between the Sunni revolutionary jihadists who were disempowered by the Shiites in power (Gerges, 2014). Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Sunni Muslim, was the leader of AQI (Al-Qaeda Iraq). He became the founder of Islamic State, which aimed to break the Iraq secular society and establish his strict version of Islamic law in Iraq (January 2017). After he was killed by US bombing in 2006, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was named as the new leader of the Islamic State (January 2017). Taking-over Mosul in 2014, he introduced ISIS' ideology to the world as the territorial expansion through military means and under an immediately proclaimed caliphate, ruled by sharia law (Al-Istrabadi & Ganguly, 2018). However, ISIS ideology was meant to become something greater.

January states that "In the twenty-first century, ISIS is determined to unite the entire Middle East (and other parts of the world) under one caliphate, with no national borders. The caliphate would destroy what many historians have called the "lines in the sand" established by Europe in the Middle East after World War I" (January 2017, pp 20).

The increased international awareness of the ISIS threat, after the capture of Mosul in 2014, resulted in the formation of an international armed force to destroy ISIS. Together with the help of the local forces of the SDF, the US lead Global Coalition has devastated ISIS.

Although Islamic State was destroyed, Jihadist ideology has continued to pose a global threat.

Brian states that “Each new jihadi front has its origins in the previous conflict and, in turn, promotes the next jihad” (Brian, 2019: 4).

The war won against ISIS has destroyed the state only, however, the people of the state who didn't die during the war stayed alive and continued the ideology.

Garamone asserts that “There can be no doubt that the strategy to drive ISIS from its so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq has succeeded, but that doesn't mean the struggle against the ideology is over” (Garamone, 2019)

Besides the threat of its ongoing ideology, in her research Miranova pays attention to the threat of an ISIS manpower searching for a homeland to realize its ideology. Although Isis is deprived in Iraq and Syria, there are still a significant number of members who could re-join and resurge their revolutionary jihadist ambition (Miranova, 2018).

The residuals of Isis including returnees, detained women, children and prisoners continue to pose a global threat. Therefore, dealing with foreign and local fighters detained in Iraq and Syria, ISIS-affiliated women and children detained in SDF (Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces) controlled camps and other returnees constitute an array of complex and difficult challenges for the international community (Cook& Vale, 2019)

Complexity is originated from the numbers and the diversity of the detainees and returnees.

According to United Nations officials, 75,000 people are being held in SFF camps. Of these 75.00 people, 43 percent are Syrians, 42 percent are Iraqis, and 15 percent are foreigners with a majority of women and children. (Brian, 2019 page 1) There are also thought to be around 10,000 men detained by the SDF (Dworkin, 2019).

Some of those detainees are responsible for multiple terrorist attacks and are dedicated ISIS members. However, some are victims who were obliged to live in ISIS territory by their husbands' force or those who did not commit a crime but lacked the power or resources to enable them to leave or flee.

There is also great uncertainty and fear regarding the possible actions to be taken by governments and international communities to keep the remaining people under control and to diminish the ISIS Ideology.

Absence of satisfactory handling options at home for ISIS supporters who left their countries to fight for or join ISIS, leads Europe to follow an "externalization strategy" by revoking citizenship, and keeping them away from their countries (Dworkin, 2019)

'As British defence secretary Ben Wallace has said, "British Islamic State fighters detained in Syria should not be brought back to the UK for prosecution because they are dangerous "diehards" and the chances of convicting them are low"' (The Times UK, 2019)

There is a common approach towards the children of ISIS supporters. Even though they pose a degree of threat of being trained and illusioned in ISIS camps, they should be regarded as victims and their return should be accepted and organized by European countries (Drowkin, 2019)

However, regarding women, EU member states acknowledged them as a threat for facilitation, financing, spreading ideology and at the same time potential attackers of whom poses a direct threat to global security (EUROPOL, 2019).

According to Pohl, there are two approaches to be applied for detainees. Hard approach, which includes various measures like revoking citizenship, and issuing entry bans to keep foreign fighter from returning home. Although the hard approach remains popular, Pohl argues that a soft approach that mainly concentrates on repatriation of foreign ISIS members and managed rehabilitation and

disengagement programs to help them reintegrate into society could be a long term but efficient solution (Reed & Pohl, 2017).

From this complex and uncertain situation regarding the remaining people, to prevent the resurgence of ISIS, a comprehensive approach is needed to be run with the cooperation of governments and international communities.

As increasing numbers of ISIS cadres flee the battlefield, some as defectors and others as returnees still aligned with ISIS' goals and ideology, the challenges for the West will be how to identify and sort out true defectors from returnees and determine if they are at risk to support again or re-join a terrorist group (Speckhard & Yayla, 2018).

The Islamic State has lost its final territory in Syria, but the international community now faces an array of complex and difficult challenges those related to the up to 52,808 foreigners (Cook& Vale, 2019)

CHAPTER 1

1 ISIS HISTORY & IDEOLOGY

1.1 ISIS HISTORY: FROM ZARQAWI TO BAGHDADI

1.1.1 Birth of ISIS

The origins of ISIS can be traced back to al-Qaida Iraq (AQI) and Jordanian extremist Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi can be accepted as the founding father of the organization (Gulmuhamad, 2014).

Ahmad Fadeel al-Nazal al-Khalayleh was born in October 1966 to a working-class family of modest means and later came to be known as Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, taking his surname from the town in which he was born and raised, Zarqa, Jordan. (Gambill, 2004).

The small city Zarqa, where Zarqawi was raised, was home for Palestinian refugees who fled from West Bank Israeli occupation (Riedel, 2008). This environment, both social and material, where extremism and fanaticism were inevitably bred, later shaped Zarqawi's worldview and decision-making processes (Gerges, 2016).

The death of his father in 1985 became a milestone at his young age, leading him to a life of drinking, drug abuse, sexual assault and violence on the streets of Zarqa. He was arrested and jailed for several crimes soon (Gambill, 2004). In prison, he was exposed to radical Islamic preachers and fell under their influence. Under the exposure of Islamic thoughts, he gave up drugs and alcohol and started to realize his influential powers among other people (Gambill, 2004). He formed a small group around him and with his natural brutality, he easily became an extremist. (Riedel, 2008).

In 1989, Zarqawi travelled to Afghanistan with the dream of becoming a mujahid against Soviet occupation; however, he was late, Soviets were already defeated (Gerges, 2016). Even though he couldn't join the jihad, he stayed in Afghanistan

until 1992, as a journalist for the jihadist magazine *al- Bunyan al- Marsus* (The impenetrable edifice) (Gerges, 2016). During his stay in Afghanistan, he witnessed the struggle between the mujahedin groups and the government in Kabul. He spent some time in Peshawar, Pakistan where he met Jordanian extremist Issam al Barqawi, nom de guerre is Mohammed al-Maqdisi, and joined Arabic jihadist community with the aim of finding a new target for his jihadist dreams. (Weaver, 2006).

These dreams later became an ambition of reforming Jordan and setting up an Islamic State, with this jihadist ideology and reformist ambitions in mind, they returned to Jordan in 1992 (Riedel, 2008).

After his return to Jordan, in 1993, Zarqawi got into revolutionary Islamist circles (Gerges, 2016). However, in March 1994, he was arrested with the acquisitions of membership in an illegal organization and weapons possession (Gambill, 2004).

In 1995, following a trial Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi received a fifteen-year prison sentence for establishing an illegal jihadist cell (Gerges, 2016). Zarqawi's prison experience in al- Suwaqah marks another milestone in his life, creating a mental and physical transformation which traumatized him and eventually converted him a brutal extremist jihadist (Gerges, 2016)

During the prison days, Maqdisi and Zarqawi created a jihadist cell where Maqdisi served as the ideological leader and Zarqawi the executor (Riedel, 2008).

After 5 years in prison, in 1999 Zarqawi and Maqdisi were released in an amnesty. Separating the two comrades, Zarqawi left Jordan for Afghanistan, Maqdisi stayed in Jordan (Wagemakers 2009). In 2000, Zarqawi went to Peshawar, Pakistan and began actively plotting a new terrorist attack, getting in contact with bin Laden and the al Qaeda he started to gather money and recruits for his cause (McCants, 2015). He had established his own jihadist training camp in Herat Afghanistan with the help of Al Qaeda Central (Gerges, 2016)

His terrorist cell in Herat grew fast, but in 2001 with the US bombing campaign on Herat he decided to shift his forces to Kandahar and for the following two years he travelled to Iran, Jordan and Iraq to seize his influence and expand his jihadist network (Jasko, Kruglanski, Hassan, Gunaratna, 2018). In early 2003, Zarqawi recovered his group with the name of Jamaat al-Tawhid wal Jihad in Iraq, a precursor of ISIS, in west Iraq (Monotheism and Holy War, or Unity and Struggle) (Joffe, 2006).

In Iraq, Zarqawi quickly developed a strong social community and operational infrastructure within the Sunni population (Gerges, 2016).

“But it was on Feb. 5, 2003, when Colin Powell described him to the UN Security Council as the fictitious link between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, that Zarqawi achieved global stardom. Since then, his myth has grown exponentially in both the West and the East” (Napoleoni, 2005, para 3).

After this identification, al-Zarqawi became popular and a leading figure in the insurgency in Iraq and his notoriety grew with every massacre he committed (Weaver, M. A., 2006).

It is debatable whether Zarqawi had this reputation by his own merits or that the US had given him more credits than he reserved, where the latter seems to be the more likely.

“The Americans also had much to gain from the creation of his myth. From Sept. 11, 2001, to March 20, 2003, the United States built its case for attacking Iraq. Saddam’s regime was accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction and supporting terrorism. Without any proof of the existence of the former, Saddam’s support for terrorism was the only trump card the U.S. administration held to convince the world that the Iraqi dictator had to be removed. To play it, the administration had to demonstrate that Saddam and al-Qaeda were connected. Their link was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi” (Napoleoni, 2005, para 8).

After the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, state institutions and national identity were weakened which led to a profound sectarian fragmentation and an identity conflict between the Sunni and Shia population in Iraq (Gerges 2015).

In such a politically chaotic environment al-Qaeda leaders Bin Laden and Zawahiri wanted to force the US military to leave the region. Their imminent strategy to realize their future cause was to drive out the Americans (McCants, 2015). Unlike Bin Laden, Zarqawi aimed to provoke a sectarian civil war and eliminate the “betrayers” Shi’a, whom he alleged were collaborating with the Americans to vanquish the Sunnis (McCants, 2015). Zarqawi was so hateful of the Shia that he didn’t hesitate to bomb the mosque of Imam Ali simultaneously with Jordanian Embassy and UN Headquarters in Baghdad. His strategy was to ignite a bloody sectarian war and he was thinking that this was the only way to reshuffle the cards in the region and get the uppermost advantage for his cause afterwards (McCants, 2015). The discrepancy between the vantage points of Bin Laden and Zarqawi later constituted the elementary separation between al-Qaeda and ISIS, former accepting the western culture and especially US as its focal enemy, and the latter seeing everyone except Sunni Muslims as its enemy, with special hatred to Muslims in collaboration with western culture like so-called Shi’a.

In October 2004 despite their strategic disagreements, after some negotiations, Osama Bin Laden granted Zarqawi, the emir of AQI (al-Qaeda Iraq) making him an al-Qaeda brand franchise and enhancing his legitimacy and authority. By this alliance, the link that Colin Powell had previously fabricated came true (Chambers, 2012).

Even after this merger with al-Qaeda, in his terrorist attacks, Zarqawi targeted primarily the Shia organized political parties, new post-invasion government, Iraqi police and security forces which represents a threat to Sunni minority (Riedel, 2008).

“Zarqawi’s violent attacks on the Shia and other Iraqi civilians, his use of beheading as a terror weapon, and the gruesome nature of his work drew criticism

even within the jihadist community, and even from his old mentor Maqdisi who stayed in Jordan” (Riedel, 2008, page 103).

Inspired by Zarqawi many foreign fighters came to Iraq to make their contribution to jihad.

As Michael states “In Fallujah, in November 2004, his legend began to crystallize, as that battle becomes an Alamo of sorts in the hearts and minds of the insurgents. The role of the foreign jihadists was amplified, and Al-Jazeera television played a significant role in broadcasting the role of Zarqawi’s supporters in the battle” (Michael, 2007, page 342).

While Zarqawi’s influence and network were growing internationally, coalition and US forces were trying to capture and neutralize him. Several attempts against Zarqawi had failed and he succeeded to escape (Michael, 2007). However, on June 7, 2006, Abu Musab al- Zarqawi was killed in an airstrike as a result of surveillance of Abdul- Rahman, his spiritual advisor, by a mutual operation of US, Iraqi and Jordanian intelligence (Hassan & Weiss). The bombing killed Abdul-Rahman, as well as Zarqawi’s 16-year-old wife (Chambers, 2012).

Several days after Zarqawi’s death, Mujahideen Shura Council, an organization that includes Al Qaeda in Iraq and seven like-minded factions, named Abu Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian, as the new leader of AQI (Gerges, 2016).

In October 2006, al-Masri announced the creation of the Islamic State and named the organization as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Mujahideen Shura Council determined Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as the leader of ISI (Hassan & Weiss, 2015).

Al- Masri and al- Baghdad served as complementariness for common purposes. Both men wanted to institute an Islamic emirate (Hassan & Weiss, 2015). Al-Baghdadi, an Iraqi Salafist, didn’t want openly to adhere to Al-Qaida in order not to lose the support of Sunni insurgents who are committed in a more sectarian oriented Jihadi (Hassan & Weiss, 2015). Whereas al-Masri, while confirming his

commitment to bin Laden, also made bayat to al-Baghdadi placing AQI hierarchically under the patronage of a newly formed umbrella. Hence it was not until ISIS formally broke with al-Zawahiri in early 2014, fragmentation started with al-Baghdadi and al-Masri (Hassan & Weiss, 2015).

1.1.2 Rise of ISIS

After a series of Iraqi led joint military operations on April 18, 2010, in an ISI safe house, Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi were killed. (Yonah & Alexander, 2015).

After the assassination of ISI's top leaders, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, an Iraqi extreme jihadist, whose real name is Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai took over the group's leadership (Crompton, 2014).

Al-Baghdadi inherited the group after it was significantly weakened by military attacks initiated by Iraqi government (Yonah & Alexander, 2015).

After becoming the leader, al-Baghdadi who had climbed the ranks with enthusiasm, quickly restructured ISI into a solid, disciplined and flexible organization capable of waging a continuous terror campaign (Rosiny, 2015).

As Gerges states, between 2010-2014, Baghdadi rebuilt the organization with significant territorial control over Iraq and Syria, posing a threat to the state system in the Arab world (Gerges, 2016).

Baghdadi took Zarqawi's tactics and modified them. Like Zarqawi, his primary enemies were Shiites, he targeted the Shiites in Syria as well, where there was a secular uprising against President Bashar al-Assad (Ghosh, 2014).

In July 2012 al-Baghdadi announced the "Breaking Walls" campaign which pulled down the prison at Abu Ghraib, leading to the escape of prisoners of whom were detained during the Iraq War for terrorist activities (Lewis, 2013)

After the campaign was successfully ended, in April 2013 al-Baghdadi declared the group's aim as to demolish the existing Iraq's Maliki regime and to establish its own Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant region (Yonaha & Alexander, 2015).

On 9 April 2013, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shaam, adding Syria to his existing Iraq dominion. In that statement, al Baghdadi declared the groups' merger with Jabhat al Nusra, which was set up in January 2012 as AQI's Syria branch (Zelin, 2014).

However, Jabhat al Nusra's leader Abu Mohammad al Jolani rejected the amalgamation, reaffirming his commitment to Zawahiri (Mohamedou, 2014).

After Baghdadi's declaration of seizing groups, domination into Syria and the claimed merger with Jabhat al Nusra, a permanent split between the ISIS and al-Qaeda broke out (Yonaha & Alexander, 2015).

In February 2014, as tensions escalated between al-Qaeda and ISIS, al-Zawahiri announced that al-Qaida was no longer responsible for the actions of ISIS (Yonaha & Alexander, 2015).

After a series of military successes in 2014, ISIS became a powerful force and gained control over vast territories in Iraq and Syria with a population of more than 8 million people (Nooruzzaman, 2017).

“A major milestone for ISIS came in June 2014, when the group took Iraq's second-largest city Mosul and numerous other cities in the north of the country. This took the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki - and the international community - by surprise” (Crompton, 2014).

After making significant gains in Syria and taking of Mosul, Baghdadi claimed himself as the “caliph” and rebranded the group as “the Islamic State” with a greater ambition of ruling the entire region from the Mediterranean to the Gulf (Ghosh, 2014).

Following the Mosul conquest and split from al-Qaida in January 2014, besides expanding in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State established a presence in several provinces of Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, the Caucasus, Afghanistan and Nigeria (Jones et al., 2017).

In the light of this expansion, ISIS as the jihadist alternative of al-Qaeda, have produced more influential and radical results in a shorter period than al-Qaeda had tried to achieve in two decades and this situation has led a status-quo change against al-Qaeda's leadership in the region and global jihadist image (Holbrook, 2015).

The group has also inspired people around the world, spread global propaganda and maintained an international terror campaign (Ohlers, 2017).

IS imposed its brutal rule on millions of people, carried out countless atrocities, destroyed cultural heritage, and generated billions of dollars in revenue from oil, extortion, robbery and kidnapping.

By mid-2014 the group controlled a taxable population of some seven or eight million, oilfields and refineries, vast grain stores, lucrative smuggling routes and vast stockpiles of arms and ammunition, as well as entire parks of powerful modern military hardware. Its economic capital was Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city. Isis was the most powerful, wealthiest, best-equipped jihadi force ever seen (Burke, 2017)

At its height in late 2014, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria controlled more than 100,000 km² of territory, with more than 11 million habitants (Jones et al., 2017).

1.1.3 Decline of ISIS

Following the military conquest of Mosul, and self-proclaimed Islamic Caliphate, U.S., British and other western forces have constituted a coalition against ISIS (Milne, 2015)

A US-led coalition began airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq on August 7, 2014 and expanded the campaign to Syria the following month. On October 15, the United States named the campaign “Operation Inherent Resolve.” (Wilson Center, 2019).

The aim of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), and the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS was to degrade and eventually eliminate IS over the long-term with limited use of on ground troops for training and advising the local forces (Ohlers, 2017).

In Iraq, the US-led coalition provided a ‘train and equip’ program to the Kurdish Peshmerga and some local security forces in coordination with the Iraqi government to defeat ISIS.

In Syria, some weaponry and US special operations personnel assistance had been provided to SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) for the operations against ISIS (Blanchard & Humud, 2018).

In Iraq, Syria, and Libya a U.S. led coalition had conducted several military operations against ISIS. The US has also provided security assistance to neighbouring governments and conducted diplomatic efforts to ensure political propitiation among local groups in support of operations against Islamic State affiliates.

Simultaneously intelligence sharing among international communities weakened the ability to carry out transnational terrorist attacks of ISIS supporters (Blanchard & Humud, 2018).

All those joint military and strategic operations of the international community together with the support of local factions, ISIS has lost large amounts of territory and by 2017, IS’s fortunes started to turn against the group (Lindstaedt, 2019).

1.1.4 End of the “Caliphate”

In early 2018, a US-backed coalition of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Arabs gradually captured key ISIS positions in Syria and Iraq, including Caliphate’s most important cities, Raqqa and Mosul (Wilson Center, 2019).

The offensive against ISIS had been continued by SDF until a final siege in February 2019, to the city of Baghouz, the last holdout of ISIS forces. Baghouz fell on March 23, 2019 ending the territorial existence of ISIS and the Caliphate. Mass surrender of ex-ISIS fighters and their families followed this undebatable defeat leaving the international community with a gigantic problem of “how to deal with them” (Wilson Center, 2019).

On October 6, 2019, following the US President Donald Trump’s sudden decision to pull out 100 US soldiers working with the Kurdish forces in northern Syria, he ordered the withdrawal of the entire US troops from the region (Feaver & Inboden, 2019).

A couple of days later Trump announced that a few hundred US soldiers would remain not to re-engage against a resurgent Islamic State but instead to protect Syrian oil. Trump’s announcement was a sign of America’s abandonment of its one-time Kurdish partners (Ruhe & Cicurel, 2019).

Withdrawal of American forces from northern Syria set the stage for the intervention of Kurdish-controlled land (Hubbard & Kingsley, 2019).

Days after President Donald Trump withdrew US troops from northern Syria, Turkey launched an offensive on the territories held by Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

President Donald Trump’s decision, green lighting Turkey to invade areas protected by US and controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), surprised the international community and was criticized in the US and abroad (Hassan, 2019).

Turkey's motivation in this intervention was to push SDF at least 30 kilometres away from its border and to establish a "safe zone" in which it plans to settle the Syrian refugees (Byman, 2019).

During the Turkish intervention, hundreds of people in the secure camp Ain Issa escaped as Turkey advanced in its offensive (Booth, 2019).

Women and children formerly part of the "caliphate" was held in Ain Issa and detained ISIS prisoners began to riot as the Kurdish guardians left the secure camps unprotected to join the defensive against Turkish troops (McKernan, 2019).

As Turkey expanded its offensive, and the results became devastating for the formerly US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Syrian Kurds had no chance than to achieve an agreement with the Moscow-backed President Bashar al-Assad regime to halt the Turkish intervention (Weise, 2019).

Following the agreement with the Assad Regime, SDF withdrew from a "safe zone" that Turkey aimed to establish near the Turkish border with Syria (Ali, 2019).

This change of hands in northern Syria could create a gap for ISIS to resurge and attack again (Hassan, 2019).

"Iraq's defence minister has already expressed concerns that Turkey's offensive and a Kurdish withdrawal could lead to a resurgence of the Islamic State, destabilizing Iraq—particularly if ISIS fighters held in prisons are able to escape. Iraqi officials have been hesitant to accept thousands of European jihadists held in Syria to face trial in Iraq—not to mention the difficulty of the transfers." (Wilson, 2019, para 6).

Finally, on October 26, 2019, with the intelligence provided by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Baghdadi had been killed by a US raid on his compound (Wilson Center, 2019).

On October 30, 2019, the Islamic State confirmed the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the group's new spokesman announced Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi as the successor and "caliph" of the group's alleged caliphate (Booker, 2019).

"The collapse of the Islamic State's caliphate, and the death of Baghdadi, deprive the group of one of its most important recruiting pitches and have put it on the defensive, forcing it to focus on surviving rather than conducting attacks on the West." (Byman, 2019).

In summary, after five years of fierce and bloody battles, local forces, backed by world powers, have driven IS out of all the territory it once controlled. As of today, the Islamic State, being seen invincible to some in mid-June 2014, has been physically wiped off the region, and its leader has been killed.

Donald H. Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense, had stated after Zarqawi's death that "Given the nature of the terrorist networks, really a network of networks, the death of Zarqawi, while enormously important, will not mean the end of all violence in that country" (Baldor, 2006, para 2).

Time has justified Rumsfeld foresight and violence in the region has had continued the following 15 years. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that this curse in the region will end following the death of Baghdadi.

1.2 ISIS IDEOLOGY

1.2.1 Jihadi Salafism

Ideologies provide a connection between beliefs, thoughts and myths and actions. Ideologies also help certain groups to preserve their political power. For those individuals who believe in an ideology, it identifies and highlights the common characteristics of the believer (Moghadam, 2008).

The Islamic State presents primarily itself as the representative of true Islam as practised by Salafism which is an ideological movement in Islamic thought. (Weiss & Hassan, 2015)

Salafism according to Bunzel is; “a primarily theological movement in Sunni Islam concerned with purifying the faith” (Bunzel, 2015, page 8). Salafis who view themselves as the true Muslims, believe in the abolishment of idolatry (shirk) and confirmation on God’s oneness (tawhid) (Bunzel, 2015). Those who worship in the stones, saints or tombs or even those who participate in a democratic system are considered deserters of the religion. They idealize the period of the Prophet as the ‘golden age of Islam’ and believe that the Muslims should follow to the first century Islamic practices and politics (Bin Ali, 2012).

However Islamic state’s members' declarations in their fatwas calling for the violent overthrow of the ‘apostate regimes’ is not an element of Salafism which respects the formal position of authority (Raffie, 2012). Salafism alone does not produce an Islamic State or catalyse extremism (Weiss & Hassan, 2015).

Within the Salafi movement, different factions give directions to the Islamic movements. According to Wiktorowicz Islamic movements can be classified in three main factions: the purists, the politicians and the jihadists (Wiktorowicz, 2006). Among those factions, Jihadis call on violent militant actions to pursue propagation (Wiktorowicz, 2006).

The Islamic State merely belongs to the third, jihadist, group with a more brutal and extremist adaptation than its counterparts. However, Islamic State's complex and multi-dimensional ideology which has evolved in different periods by different teachings has to be studied by how the group comprehends, teaches and implements its ideas (Weiss & Hassan, 2015). The content of its ideology needs serious attention to analyse and understand. It should be examined by the Islamic State's extreme orientation within Jihadi Salafism (Bunzel, 2015).

Jihadi-Salafism is a large and diverse movement with a global reach that has legitimized the violence to defend the imagined ummah (community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion) (Karagiannis, 2014). Egerton defines the Jihadi Salafis as those who believe that their action is driven from the teachings of Islam to protect the Muslim community (Egerton, 2011). Jihadists attribute their actions to several ayat (Qur'anic sections) to underpin their violent claims of religious piety (Egerton, 2011). They believe killing is legitimate if it is necessary for their religious duty. The idea of martyrdom has an honoured position within their Jihadi-Salafism ideology (Egerton, 2011).

Jihadi Salafists are inspired by religious and political factions. They believe their Muslim identity is supreme and the supposed Western hostility against the Muslim community should be addressed with violence (Jihad in the West, Frazer Egerton). In Jihadi-Salafism those participating in a democratic system are considered apostates, deserters of the religion (Bunzel, 2015).

1.2.2 Wahabism and the Islamic State

Wahhabism is named after its founder Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the eighteenth-century cleric who helped establish the first Saudi state. Wahabism advocates to live and interpret Islam in absolutely the same way as the early Muslims of the Prophet times, rejecting any adaptation and innovation (Barret, 2014). Shiism or anything that does not suit their way of living Islam should be eliminated. Post-colonial Islamic movements including Islamic State attribute their use of violence on this interpretation claiming all their violent actions are for

resurging Islam to its early times and for practising true Islam under the orders of God (Barret, 2014).

The ideological connection between Salafism and Wahabism is explained in Bin Ali's work as Wahhabism, a more traditional type of Salafism, adhere to an uncompromising form of Islam. The Wahhabis are always referred to as Salafis and all Wahhabis are Salafis but not all Salafis are Wahhabis (Bin Ali, 2012). The Wahhabi movement has become the ideological backbone of Salafism (Bunzel, 2015). In Wahhabism, the concepts of *al wala wal bara* (loyalty to Islam and disavowal of un-Islamic ways) and *tawhid* (the oneness of God) are interpreted and promoted more extremely than in Salafism (Weiss & Hassan, 2015).

“Abd al-Wahhab argued that all Muslims must individually pledge their allegiance to a single Muslim leader (a Caliph, if there were one). Those who would not conform to this view should be killed, their wives and daughters violated, and their possessions confiscated, he wrote” (Croke, 2017).

ISIS and Wahhabism share a common ideology with respect to the idea of caliphate and Shiite enmity, however, there is a disengagement regarding the Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine of “One Ruler, One Authority, One Mosque”. For Wahhabis Saudi King represents the absolute authority whereas ISIS denies Saudi King's single leadership (Crooke, 2017).

1.2.3 Sayyid Qutb and the Islamic State

The ideology of the Islamic State is inspired by Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of Egyptian Muslim Brother Ideologue in 1950s and 1960s, who advocated a radical, revolutionary activism with the aim of replacing the established governments with Islamic states (Bunzel, 2015).

“Qutb argued that the entire world, including the supposedly Muslim states, had fallen into a time of pre-Islamic ignorance, *jahiliyya*, or pagan darkness. He called upon the small number of true Muslims to form a revolutionary vanguard to restore

the light of Islam to the world” (Robert Manne, page. 25). Weiss and Hassan also mention the same argument that Qutb believed, that many Muslim societies are living in a state of jahiliyya (pre-Islamic age of ignorance) (Weiss & Hassan, 2015). Qutb had believed that the existing systems such as capitalism, communism and pan-Arabism have failed and must be changed and this change could only be succeeded by Islam (Weiss & Hassan, 2015).

Qutbist thought shaped the Islamic State’s dealings with the religious and ethnic communities it controls. The Islamic State believes that local populations other than Sunni Muslims are apostates and must be converted to true Islam (Weiss & Hassan, 2015).

Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi, highly ideologically driven, was influenced by Sayyid Qutb. He was responsible for adding a sectarian element, Shi’a hate, to the political ideology inspired by Qutb (Manne, 2017). Later he distanced himself from Qutb and approached more to Jihadi-Salafism, with a severe violent strategy (Bunzel, 2015).

1.2.4 Evolution of the Islamic State’s ideology

Before arriving in Iraq, during the prison years with Abu Mus‘ab al-Maqdisi, one of the most influential authors within the Jihadi–Salafi movement, Zarqawi was indoctrinated by the teachings of Jijadi-Salafism (Wagemakers, 2009). However, the ideological split between Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi broke out when al-Maqdisi criticized Zarqawi for his violent act of jihad against the civilians. According to Maqdisi his ideological writings were misinterpreted by Zarqawi and his followers (Wagemakers, 2009).

9/11 terrorist attacks and the aftermath wars in Afghanistan and Iraq evoked the Jihadi-Salafi movement. Since 9/11, terrorism became deadlier and more brutal which breded ISIS’ development of sacralization of violence (Rickenbacher, 2019). Being fueled with this violence Zarqawi’s thoughts evolved to an extreme

anti-Shi'a doctrine with the establishment of Sunni Caliphate on the parallel (Bunzel, 2015).

After Zarqawi and his two other successors were killed in 2006 and in 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the first caliph of the Islamic State extended the anti-Shi'a sectarianism and compounded the apocalyptic dimension into the group's ideology that Zarqawi had adopted from the vision of Qutb (Jones et al., 2017).

Abu Bakr, denounced Shi'a as apostates and stated that: "I direct my call to all the Muslim youth and men all over the world and call them to make Hijrah to us to consolidate the pillars of the State of Islam and perform Jihad against the Safavid Rafida—the Magian Shiites." (Jones, 2014, page 16).

In the Islamic State published online magazine Dabiq, which was an effective tool to spread the group's ideology, the most important theme was the Islamic State's ambition to destroy the apostates especially the Shi'a Muslims, the Alawites, the Yazidis and the Druze, the Christian West, the "Crusaders"; and, the Jews (Manne, 2017).

ISIS sectarian-based pan-Sunni identity embedded in Jihadi-Salafist ideology found fertile ground in the aftermath of the US Iraq invasion in 2003. They took advantage of the grievance of Sunnis discriminated by the Shia led Maliki government. Besides the politically chaotic environment in Iraq, the Syrian civil war fueled the rapid expansion of the group (Gerges, 2015).

Besides religious dedication, the apocalyptic prophecy is also an important cornerstone that shaped the behaviour of the Islamic State. Establishing a caliphate by seizing power and territory that extends from Africa through the Middle East, South Asia, and parts of the Pacific was the driving force of the Islamic State (Jones et al., 2017)

Islamic state's goal was to gather the Muslims from all over the world under a state ruled by strict sharia law. After capturing Mosul and self-declared caliphate,

Baghdadi made a speech saying: "Rush O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis" (Isis leader calls on Muslims to 'build Islamic state', 2014, para 9).

"O Muslims everywhere, whoever is capable of performing hijrah (emigration) to the Islamic State, then let him do so because hijrah to the land of Islam is obligatory," he added.

(Isis leader calls on Muslims to 'build Islamic state', 2014, para10)

Manne summarizes the Islamic State's ideology with a single sentence of an Islamic State supporter, thought to be the Yemeni journalist Abdulelah Haider Shaye: "The Islamic State was drafted by Sayyid Qutb, taught by Abdullah Azzam, globalized by Osama bin Laden, transferred to reality by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and implemented by al-Baghdadis: Abu Omar and Abu Bakr" (Manne. 2017, page 38).

We cannot explain the Islamic State's radicalized ideology with only one Islamic thought or a single movement. There are various dimensions which shape the Islamic State's ideology. The political trajectory in post-invasion of Iraq, Qutb's influence on the group's leaders' beliefs and behaviours, the Salafi-Jihadist movement embedded in Wahhabism, the sectarian behaviour of the Shi'a political leadership during and after the American occupation; the outbreak of civil war in Syria; all those factors played a significant role in the formation of the Islamic State's extreme Salafi-Jihadist ideology (Wagemakers, 2015).

CHAPTER 2

2 POST-DEFEAT SITUATION & PEOPLE OF ISIS

2.1 FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS IN ISIS

Although the definition of the term “foreign terrorist fighter” (FTF) is debatable, the people who have left their home countries and travelled to Iraq and Syria to join and support the terrorist organizations are commonly defined as, regardless of their gender, “foreign terrorist fighters” (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2018)

The phenomenon of Foreign Fighter is not new. There are many examples of individuals with a wide variety of motivations for joining terrorist groups (Baker, Paulussen, Entenmann, 2013). However, this thesis concentrates on Western Foreign Fighters who have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State.

During past years, together with the expansion of the Islamic State, there had been a sharp rise in the numbers of the FTFs travelling to Syria and Iraq. It has been estimated that around 41,490 citizens of 80 different countries travelled to conflict areas in Syria and Iraq (Cook & Vale, 2018).

Although the foreign terrorist fighters from European States, around 5,778 people, represent a smaller portion of the total number, and even some of those FTFs die in the battlefield, the numbers and political impact are significant. The surviving FTFs, including man, women and children are at the very heart of the European countries’ security agenda because of the threat they pose to their home countries (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2018). Within the total number of FTFs who travelled to the conflict zones, 13% of them are recorded to be women, 12% are minors and 75% are men (Cook & Vale, 2018).

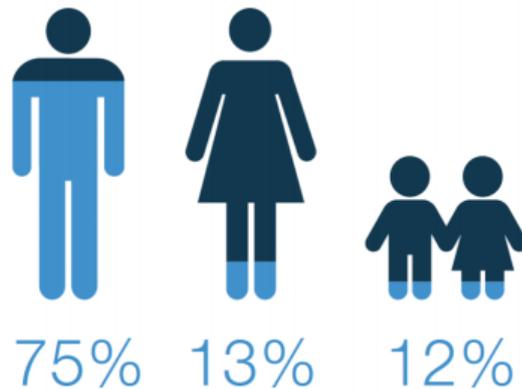


Figure 2.1. Percentage of foreign ISIS affiliates travelled to Iraq and Syria

Among 5,778 European national foreign fighters, around 2,838 of them came from Belgium, France, Germany and UK (Boutin, Chauzal et. al. 2016).

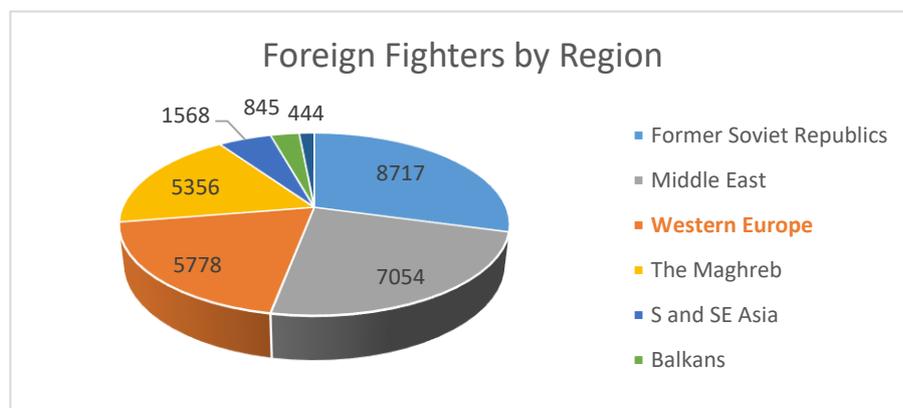


Figure 2.2. Foreign Fighters by Region (Boutin, Chauzal et. al. 2016, pg.11)

2.1.1 Women in ISIS

The fundamental role of women in ISIS is to marry, bear children, raise them and to obey her husband. Besides the motherhood and the wife role, many women were engaging in other supportive roles such as distributing online propaganda for more recruits and working in health service or teaching.

Shapiro and Maras define the women in ISIS as;

“Moreover, women in general are reputed to be steadfast in their radical religious ideals and pursuit of their extreme beliefs, despite loss of their male counterparts from arrests and death, by financing and facilitating operations; influencing and advancing the group’s cause; and using propaganda to recruit and educate new members, particularly their own children” (Shapiro & Maras, 2018, page 12).

The women in ISIS primarily participate in the global jihad with their motherhood and as first teachers of their children to create future jihadist fighters embedded with a profound ISIS Ideology (Fraih, 2018). Their roles centred on support of the militant husbands and the ideological upbringing of children (Vale, 2019).

According to Buner, all the ISIS women, preferring either the supportive roles or domestic roles, have a common desire to be a Jihadi bride by marrying an ISIS fighter (Buner, 2019).

Fraih analyses the motherhood duty of the women as;

“In an extreme convincing missionary way, she becomes the very first teacher of her child’s jihadi ideas. She lays the foundation of the architecture framework of the global jihad. Hence the martyr becomes the mother’s creation” (Fraih, 2018 page 28).

Buner categorizes the main roles of ISIS women upon their arrival to ISIS territory as; 1) to marry ISIS fighters and bear as many children as possible 2) to provide sexual support to ISIS fighters 3) to serve as “Islamic morality police” in the Al-Khansaa Brigade 4) provide new recruits through social media (Buner, 2019).

Even though female jihadi is not a phenomenon firstly used by ISIS, the group’s impact on women and the number of female militants recruited from the west differs from other counterpart extremist organizations (Zehra Yılmaz, 2017).

ISIS increased its female recruitment by sending the clear message that women are valued as the mothers of the next generations. Children mean next generations and

they are important for the continuation and the propagation of the Salafi Jihadist Ideology (Fraih, 2018).

A manifesto was published by Al-Khansaa Brigade on 25th January 2015 entitled “Women of the Islamic State”. In this Manifesto, ISIS’ policy on women and ISIS Sharia Law interpretation for women were discussed (Zehra Yilmaz, 2017).

In that Manifesto, it is stated that;

“The women everywhere, especially those who care about the ummah, may you be aware that the ummah of Muhammad which would not rise without your help, do not disgrace the caliphate, but serve it even if it is by one word, may your sons be the bricks and mortar in the tower of majesty and minarets of the state of Islam. Allah bless you and your patience, you are of us and we of you” (ICSR Report, Mattheis & Winter, 2019, page 4).

In this message, the active participation of the women to jihad was underlined. According to the manifesto, besides the motherhood role, women can also fight in the war when men are not enough. The manifesto emphasizes women’s mobility by stating that women would carry the tradition to the conquered territories and her duties would continue where the jihad exists (Zehra Yilmaz, 2017). Yilmaz reviews the manifesto as; “Implying that women may be involved actively in the founding of the state by not being absent, but on the contrary, by being present, this understanding is the most important element that renders ISIS attractive for women” (Yilmaz, page 26).

Women were not only holding “back seat” roles, they were also playing crucial roles in propaganda dissemination and the online recruitment of other women. They were also used for logistics and sometimes contributing to violent acts. They were politically and morally safeguarding, and when necessary they would engage in fighting (Weggemans, Daan & de Bont, Roel & Peters, Ruud & Bakker, Edwin. 2017).

One of the most activist roles for women in the Islamic State was a morality police role in the Al-Khansaa Brigade (*hisbah*).

According to information gained from interviews that Speckhard and Yayla have conducted, the female members of ISIS can join the *hisbah* (morality police), and many are quite brutal in this role (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015). The female brigade of women in *hisbah*, named al Ketibet-el Khansaa, were recruited to control and enforce morality rules for other women (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015). The Western group members of *hisbah* might carry AK-47s and they move around freely without taking orders from anyone and they have more power and authority than the regular women's *hisbah* (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015).

As mentioned in an interview of Sky News with an ISIS-affiliated woman, many members of the al-Khansaa Brigade were European women who enjoyed a privileged life in ISIS-controlled territory compared to Arab women members of the group (Eleftheriou-Smith, Independent, 2015).

Women's contribution to the foundation of the Muslim community as a mother was the prioritized concern of the ISIS women, which makes them feel important in Islamic State. Especially for the western women who feel themselves excluded and alienated from the society of their home country, they believe that their role as Jihadi wives and child-bearers are the domestic ideal for the group's existence and continuation (Harriet Sherwood, The Guardian, 2014). This feeling of being important and sense of belonging to ISIS derives solidarity between women which they name as "sisterhood in the caliphate" (Harriet Sherwood, The Guardian, 2014).

According to Saltman, Western women join ISIS as a result of social and cultural isolation and the perception of the Muslim community is under attack by the West (Saltman & Smith, 2015)

About the Western women's participation to ISIS, Karim Pakzad, research fellow at the French Institute of International and Strategic Relations indicated that "Women have an almost romantic idea of war and warriors. There is a certain

fascination even with the head and throat-cutting. It is an adventure. Some may feel more respected and important than in their home countries” (Harriet Sherwood, *The Guardian*, 2014, para 13). ISIS utopia was presenting a romantic paradise and an adventurous life for western women (Asif, Abbas & Azim, 2018).

In order to attract the western women, ISIS propaganda represented women as empowered fixture of their households, who receive respect from their husbands and the society (Europol, 2016). In addition, ISIS allows women to participate in weapons training and have an active role in the health sector and local female-only forces enforcing strict moral and dress standards in public (Europol, 2016).

To some extent, an ideological shift has changed the role of the women as a combatant or even as a suicide bomber. However, the high majority of the women were mainly holding domestic roles in ISIS (Weggemans, Daan & de Bont, Roel & Peters, Ruud & Bakker, Edwin. 2017). This has changed after the war against ISIS has started. In the July 2017 edition of *Rumiyah* (ISIS’ magazine), when ISIS started to lose territory and men fighters, it was stated that the time had come for women to join actively into violent Jihad (Weggemans, Daan & de Bont, Roel & Peters, Ruud & Bakker, Edwin, 2017). The effectiveness of the women in violent Jihad staying uncertain, this condition also didn’t last very long. After ISIS lost its final stronghold in Baghouz in March 2019, women’s activism and allegiance changed (Vale, 2019).

All the remaining women members were sent to live in the camps in north eastern Syria under hard living conditions. Most of those women, together with their children, are held separately, sleeping in tents and under the deteriorating conditions of the al-Howl camp (Wright, 2019). Lack of food and water and severe accommodation conditions halted the ideological commitment of some women. Some of those women stayed attached to ISIS with a strong belief of its revival, on the other hand, some were illusioned and sought a way out and return their home countries (Vale, 2019)

2.1.2 Men in ISIS

After the establishment of the so-called ‘caliphate’ in the summer of 2014, the leaders of the group declared a transnational ‘Islamic State’. This new phase attracted ISIS sympathizers from all around the world, and they were called to settle in the ‘caliphate’ and take a role in the remaining and expansion of the Islamic State (Weggemans, Daan & de Bont, Roel & Peters, Ruud & Bakker, Edwin, 2017).

Adnani, spokesman of the Islamic states called all the Muslims to emigrate to the ‘caliphate’ as;

“O Muslims in all places. Whoso is able to immigrate to the Islamic State, let him emigrate. For emigration to the Abode of Islam is obligatory” (Bunzel, 2015, page 32).

Basit asserts in his article that those who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State were lured by the ISIS ideology which was successfully propagated by ISIS propaganda following the establishment of the caliphate (Basit, 2014).

Having a revolutionary and apocalyptic goal, ISIS seeks to overthrow the existing world order and return to the golden age of early Islam, assuming everyone else other than them are apostates (Schmid & Tinnes, 2015). Hence joining ISIS was an attractive adventure for the Muslims in the West who were alienated and excluded from the society in which they are living and eventually indoctrinated in Salafi Jihadism (Schmid & Tinnes, 2015). Those who adhere to this belief answered the call of Adnani and decided to settle in the newly established ‘caliphate’.

When the foreigners arrive in Syria, the first thing they are asked to do is to take an oath of loyalty then they are interrogated and questioned on several topics (personal questions and questions regarding the preferred role in the Islamic State) (Weggemans, Daan & de Bont, Roel & Peters, Ruud & Bakker, Edwin, 2017). Many of those foreigners do not have any military or security experience, so men after completing the registration part, are taken to training camps. The program in

training camps includes the ideological teachings, sharia training, physical development (weaponry, dealing with hunger and cold, combat techniques) (Weggemans, Daan & de Bont, Roel & Peters, Ruud & Bakker, Edwin, 2017).

Although they pass through an ideological training, Western Foreign Fighters already adopt the Salafi Jihadi Ideology before coming to Syria or Iraq and were seen as the ‘true believers’ since they sacrifice their life back home country and decide to settle in the ‘caliphate’ for jihad (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Yayla, 2018).

Based on the interviews that Speckhard and Yayla conducted for their research paper, one of the defectors asserted ;

“Foreign fighters were seen as the ‘true believers’ by our informants who witness their dedication since they had given up everything to come and join ISIS” (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015, page 107).

In the Sharia training program, the first thing that the trainer teaches is the “hear and obey” rule (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015). Under this rule, ISIS members, without questioning must obey and implement the orders that the ISIS emirs ask. The trainees are indoctrinated that the ‘true Islam’ is practised only under the rule of ISIS and the outsiders are apostates who deserve to be murdered (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015).

Perliger and Milton define a ‘lifecycle’ for the foreign fighters. Before arriving to the conflict zone, fighters detach themselves from their home country society, when they arrive in the Islamic State controlled territory they pass through training and gain knowledge about the Islamic State’s rules and develop fighting skills. There are also supporting roles for the fighters with professional educations. Finally, some of those fighters, trained in the training camps and experienced in the battlefield, return home and pose high-security risks to their home countries (Perliger & Milton, 2016).

One of those returnees, Mehdi Nemmouche, engaged in an anti-Semitic attack in Brussels in May 2014 and killed four civilians (Brussels Jewish Museum murders: Mehdi Nemmouche jailed for life, 2019).

During the collapse years of ISIS, from 2017 to 2019, around 10,000 male fighters from different countries were arrested, tens of thousands of them died in the battlefields, and the remaining ones were sent behind bars in north-eastern Syria. They are now posing an international threat for mass prison breaks (Gilsinan & Giglio, 2019).

In the final battle in Baghouz, more than five thousand ISIS fighters were arrested, thousands more had already been captured in the last months of the conflicts between ISIS and the allied forces. Besides the prisoners, there were also heavily wounded activists in the hospitals. The biggest issue regarding the captured ISIS members is that no nation would like to repatriate them and SDF wouldn't like to keep them under control indefinitely (Wright, 2019).

Another security concern regarding the ISIS prisoners from 28 different countries, is a potential riot which could bypass the control over them and result in an escape, as happened during “breaking the walls campaign” of Baghdadi in 2012, leading to a second wave for a potential resurgence of ISIS (Hall, 2019).

2.1.3 Children in ISIS

There are several categories of children in the caliphate – children of foreign fighters, children of local fighters, abandoned children, children forced to enrol and voluntary recruits, who together form what they call the ‘Cubs of the Caliphate’ (Benotman & Malik, 2016, page 16).

Based on the report of the Council of the European Union, we can categorize the radicalized children under ISIS control as; 1) Refugee children who have arrived in Europe 2) Young foreign terrorists (YFT) 3) Children born and raised by European FTFs in Syria and Iraq 4) Children remaining in the home county, but with parents

and siblings who have left for Syria and Iraq. In ISIS children are radicalized first by normalizing the violence than exposing them to violence and finally enabling them to experience acts of violence (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017).

Children indoctrinated with the ISIS ideology, especially if they are in the conflict zones, might easily engage in extremist and violent acts. Combined, the psychological vulnerability of those children and the violent environmental conditions shapes ISIS children's identity aligned with the ISIS Ideology (Heide & Geenen, 2017).

According to Schwartz, Dunkel and Waterman, identity plays a central role in determining the inclination of one's engagement in terrorism (Schwartz, Dunkel & Waterman, 2009). The interaction of personal, social and cultural identities is one of the most important factors that create the "us versus them" thinking (Schwartz, Dunkel & Waterman, 2009). This thinking legitimizes one's participation to terrorist activities in the name of protecting the Muslim Community and faith (Schwartz, Dunkel & Waterman, 2009). In the Islamic State for the cases of minors, as they pass through an identity formation process, they are more vulnerable for indoctrination eventually adapting the "us versus them" thinking.

Children's education at schools' grounds on their future roles as women and men (Weggemans, Daan & de Bont, Roel & Peters, Ruud & Bakker, Edwin, 2017). There is a strict Islamic education starting from the very first degree of primary school. Besides the religious learnings, there are classes on Arabic, math, warfare, gymnastic and English for the children of Western fighters (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Yayla, 2018). Girls start to learn their domestic roles and how to behave according to the ISIS' interpretation of Sharia Law (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Yayla, 2018). Domestic roles training includes how to be a good wife and most importantly how to raise their children in accordance with the ISIS ideology (Benotman & Malik, 2016). Boys are trained for military purposes of the Islamic State. At the age of 9, boys could join the training camps where they learn how to fight (Speckhard,

Shajkovci & Yayla, 2018). They learn how to use a weapon, detonate bombs and execute the prisoners and infidels who do not obey ISIS rules (Benotman & Malik, 2006).

Although the active role of children and youths is not a new item for the international agenda, ISIS' intensive children recruitment strategy and ability elevated the attention on children. This militant problem is relevant for both their home country and the international communities (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Yayla, 2018). According to research findings that Almohammad deploys in his report;

“There are two methods of recruitment: predatory and structural. The enlistment intensity of indoctrination, types of training, and nature of deployment were found to depend, to a high degree, on the type of recruitment (predatory or structural), and category of children based on their origin and if they are orphans.” (Almohammad, 2018, page 1).

In order to secure its survival, ISIS believes that children recruitment plays a significant role in their cause. Hence for the creation of the next generations, indoctrination with the ISIS ideology and military training was crucial (Almohammad, 2018).

Generally, children become a member of a terrorist group either by force or through natal circumstances (Capone, 2017). However, for the children of ISIS there is one more channel which passes through the recruitment of foreign families (Capone, 2017).

ISIS employs a concentrated education program for the ideological indoctrination and physical sufficiency of the children through schools and training camps (Capone, 2017). Ideological doctrine and militarization of the children were embedded in the education system of the Islamic State. Children are indoctrinated and raised with hate against anyone even family members who do not adhere and obey ISIS strict and barbaric rules (Speckhard, 2017).

According to Almohammad, children living in ISIS-controlled territories were surviving under harsh conditions within a stressful environment. They were frequently exposed to violence such as; torture, beheadings, executions and sometimes participating in those acts of violence (Almohammad, 2018). That participation is encouraged by the adult militants and the training camps are designed for children to gain the skills required for performing those violent actions.

The intensive agenda applied in the training camps are described in Almohammad's research paper based on an interview as below;

“The camp is the most intense in terms of desensitizing the children to violence, jihad and the concept of heaven. Speeches, lectures, propaganda videos, direct exposure and participation in violent acts, including executions, are central to the training in this camp” (Almohammad, 2018, page 20).

The Islamic State had a long-term goal for children's contribution to their cause. Today's children constitute the next generation jihadists (CST, Bloom, Hogan & Winter, 2016).

“ISIS regards minors as an essential component of the continued existence of the ‘caliphate’” (NCT, AIVD, 2017, page 3).

Scholars examine the pathway of child recruitment which constitutes the cornerstone of ISIS's existence in different categories.

In ISIS there were two categories for children recruitment; 1) coercion 2) co-option. Coercion is used to force children to join ISIS whereas in co-option various options are used for convincing the children. In the ‘caliphate’ both are used but co-option is used to create faithful generations (Benotman & Malik, 2016).

In Training Camps, instructors make sure that the trainee does not struggle with the brutality, otherwise, the trainee is sent back to the beginning training camp (Hassan, 2015). In order to graduate from training camps, child students are obliged to carry out savage and violent acts like beheading a prisoner (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015)

Those training camps serve to indoctrinate the children at young ages, children exposed to violence from early ages, see the barbaric and brutal acts of ISIS as a way of life (K. Anderson, 2016).

Instead of toys children are introduced to real weapons. One of the children trained in ISIS training camps stated “A lot of the training was with live weapons, if you get distracted when you’re holding a real weapon, they will put your finger in the barrel of the rifle and almost break it. Some of the kids were 13 to 15. Some as young as six-years-old” (Speckhard, 2017, para 7)

ISIS teaches some children to volunteer in suicide bombing attacks (K. Anderson, 2016). And while doing so, they are indoctrinated into the idea of “martyrdom” that giving up their own lives would be a direct ticket to Paradise. (Speckhard, 2017)

Since the ideological teachings start at an early age in children’s natural environment (family, school, social life), minors in the ‘caliphate’ are thought to become better than the current members of the Islamic State (NCT & AIVD, 2017).

The logic behind the importance of the children in ISIS is explained below by Benotman & Malik;

“Having been introduced to ideology at a young age, children are more likely to consider it normal, and therefore defend its practices. Not only can children help meet the present needs of the ‘caliphate’, once they grow up, they will continue to propagate its existence and expansion, thus securing its long-term survival” (Benotman & Malik, 2016, page 27).

Therefore, even though ISIS had collapsed physically, the children of these foreign fighters, born in Iraq and Syria and those who were brought to ISIS controlled territories by their parents, constitute one of the biggest problems for a potential revival of ISIS.

Although the exact number of foreign fighter’s children is not known, it is estimated that 12 percent of more than 40,000 foreign ISIS members are minors who travelled

to the region by their parents and another thousand or more of foreign fighter's children were born in Syria or Iraq (Athie, 2018).

According to the ICSR Report, within those 4640 foreign minors (around 9%-12% group's foreign members), 1,502 of them have been identified as nationals of Western European countries (Vale, 2018).

2.2 CAMPS

In March 2019, the Islamic state was totally defeated by the loss of its last controlled territory, Baghouz, its fighters were killed or imprisoned, and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi died in October 26, 2019 (Gilsinan & Giglio, The Atlantic, 2020).

The tens of thousands ISIS fighters' families and their children were sent to camps controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and many of those detainees' home countries do not accept to repatriate them. Besides these camps, SDF is also controlling the prisons in Syria where thousands of men and boys are held (ICG, 7 April 2020). The prisons and the camps are located across north-east Syria. Women and children have been housed at camps in al-Hol, Roj and Ain Issa (ICG, 2019)

Al-Hol, the most crowded detainee camp, was set up in the late 1990s as a refugee camp with 20,000 people capacity, however, after the fall of Baghouz it is housing 75,000 people of whom 11,500 are foreign ISIS affiliated women and children and around 40,000 of them are Iraqis (Sheikho, Al-Awsat, 2020)

In al-Hol, 94 percent of detainees are women and minors (Margolin, Cook, Winter, 2019).

Thousands of women and children who arrived at Al-Hol after the Baghouz battle pushed the limits and led to a significant shortage in housing facilities at the camp. ISIS-linked Iraqis, Syrians and the local refugees who ran away from the ISIS incursion and the ones who lived under ISIS control are living in the mixed section, whereas foreign members of the group are living in a separate annexe within the camp (Hesen, McClur & Steinhardt, 2019).

The foreigner part of the camp poses a security risk. The director of a camp in northern Syria defines this dangerous situation as;

"We thought we could put them [the foreign women] together with the Syrians and the Iraqis, and that they would adapt, but they're ferocious, they burned some of the Syrians' tents, they would call them cockroaches, infidels. They consider themselves as the only true Muslims. So, we had to separate them" (Flora Drury, BBC, 2019, para 15).

According to Rojava Centre's Report into the annexe (foreign section) at Al-Hol, population distribution is: 3236 foreign women, 7930 children, an uncertain number of local women, estimated less than 100, who have children from foreign fighters and their approximately 200 children. In Roj camp within 1200 total inhabitants, 254 of them are foreign women and 795 children. The Ain-Issa camp is housing 249 foreign women with 700 children and 1000 foreign fighters in detention (Hesen, McClur & Steinhardt, 2019, page 14).

The security risk in the foreign annexe of the camp prevented aid groups to deliver sufficient help and already aggravated conditions in the camp turned into a disaster with disease, lack of food and clean water. The security conditions were a major cause for this humanitarian crisis, as well as the SDF's attitude towards "ISIS women and children". For some aid workers, it was a way of punishment (ICG, 2019).

Another reason for this humanitarian disaster is explained in the ICG's report as;

"The ambiguity of women's and children's legal status (they are neither formally displaced persons, nor prisoners, nor conflict detainees) has slowed the delivery of services a refugee or internally displaced persons camp would normally receive" (ICG, 2019, page 14).

Although some women in the camps neglect their duties as being a member of the Islamic State and don't support it anymore, some are still ideologically attached to

the Islamic State and they are waiting for the group to resurge and rejoin it. As they are the mothers of the “next generations”, their commitment to the Islamic State constitutes a serious threat (Margolin, Cook, Winter, 2019).

During the Turkish incursion, named Operation Peace Spring, Turkey has captured hundreds of ISIS-affiliated people who had escaped from Ain-Issa. Mr. Soylu, interior minister of Turkey, reported that 287 captured ISIS members are resettled in a Turkish controlled area in Al-Rai (Gall, 2019).

A foreign woman who regrets joining ISIS was interviewed by Arraf in Annex stated;

“I didn't really know what I was getting myself into. I came because of my husband, and I ended up being stuck. You know we are not a threat at all. We're just moms, and we're trying to take care of our kids.” (Arraf, Conditions Deteriorate At Syrian Camp Where ISIS Families Are Held, 2019, para 26).

The strict ISIS version of Sharia Law had been adapted to the camp life. If the women don't obey the clothing rules, they are targeted as infidels and some were murdered (Arraf, Conditions Deteriorate At Syrian Camp Where ISIS Families Are Held, 2019)

The danger is highest in the annexe and lately with the COVID 19 pandemic, due to difficult access to the annexe, medical aid and even consultation to prevent COVID 19, couldn't be delivered to the women and children in the annexe (ICG, 7 April 2020).

Most importantly the ambiguity of those people in the camps, whether to repatriate or prosecute there, has been even more complicated by COVID 19.

According to a Western official;

“This definitely means a halt to repatriations”, no one can commit resources to repatriation now or for the foreseeable future” (ICG, 7 April 2020).

2.3 PRISONS

After ISIS lost its last territory in Syria, the remaining fighters, around 12.000, who were not killed during the conflicts were sent to the prisons in north-east Syria under the control of SDF (McKernan, 2020).

According to SDF authorities, 4.000 of those 12.000 detainees are foreign fighters. However, the US government has reported this number as only 2.000 foreigners from 50 different countries, and 800 being from European countries (Reality Check team, 2019).

Whether the SDF or US numbers were correct, it can be concluded that about 20 to 30 percent of the prisoners were foreign fighters. With this many foreign fighters born and raised in a civilized environment, somehow finding themselves in the middle of a brutal terror war, and ended up with vague imprisonment, it was inevitable that these prisons would become a focal point for journalists all around the world. This flow of journalists to the region not only publicized many interesting stories but also shed light to inner dynamics of ISIS ideologies and the personal dilemmas of the fighters.

According to the interviews made with the prisoners, some travelled to ISIS territories for utopian promises and after witnessing the violence and barbaric acts, they regretted joining ISIS but did not have a chance to go back, however, some regret only their own circumstances in the prisons rather than the crimes they had committed. They were also waiting for their home country to take them back for prosecution.

One of the prisoners Lirim Sulejmani, an American from Chicago, was interviewed by Robin Wright. He stated that;

“My goal wasn’t to come and fight, it was making hegira,” - to re-create the Prophet Muhammad’s migration from Mecca to Medina” (Wright, The New Yorker, 2019, para 8).

A British prisoner interviewed by *The Independent*, denies taking an active role in ISIS and declares that;

“When I was interrogated by an American, I said I condemn all the oppression ISIS done. I never approved of them. But you can’t blame me as much as I don’t blame the American people for Nagasaki and Hiroshima or the bombs they threw on Vietnam. Or we just look back in their recent history, they enslaved black people.” (Hall, 2019, para 50).

The condition of the prisons is another major issue. With the increasing number of prisoners, the existing conditions deteriorated rapidly and some pop-up prisons with terrible conditions have been formed. Following the US withdrawal from the region, the conditions became worse than terrible (Arraf, December 8, 2019).

This is not a big surprise, on the other hand. It is expected from a governing authority to harbour an enormous number of fighters who once fought against them. These fighters once maybe killed the loved ones of the prison guards or the ones that take part in prison management. It is very likely that any improvement and rehabilitation attempt is cancelled for any reason. It is expected by the international community that these fighters be treated as war criminals, but it is uncertain today that they even have basic humanitarian needs (Arraf, December 8, 2019).

Putting all the “so-called” criminals under a single roof is naturally another reason for concern. Considering that the foundations of ISIS had been set in the prison years of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his supporters in Camp Bucca, it is not unrealistic to think of a new ISIS being born in the confines of pop-up prisons. This thought also brings a huge security concern within the prison (Wright, *The New Yorker*, 2019).

A final concern is about the future of the imprisoned fighters. Putting in two basic steps; (1) thousands of ISIS left-overs are imprisoned under the conditions that no one exactly knows, (2) they are wanted by neither any of the countries they had battled in nor by their homelands. This summary is easily explained in a single

word; uncertainty. The parties affected by this have different agendas and dissimilar thoughts on what to be done about these prisoners.

SDF wants an internationally recognized prosecution and they seem to keep these fighters until such a prosecution is realized. However, Western governments are not willing to take the foreign fighters back, so the future of those prisoners remain uncertain (Zaman, Al-Monitor, 2020).

The peace spring operation that Turkey realized in February has made the situation even more complicated. Turkey has declared that captured and detained ISIS suspects would be returned to their home countries and Turkey deported 11 French national fighters to their home country (Turkey deports 11 French suspected IS members, 2019)

Ministry spokesperson Ismail Catakli said that “Turkey is no one’s open-air prison or hotel” (Turkey deports 11 foreign fighters to France, 2019, para 7). This being said, it is still unclear how this return will be realized.

The US also holds an unclear position regarding the situation. For the current situation of the ISIS prisoners in Syria and Iraq, a senior US State Department official stated that;

“There is nothing else in the world that compares to this unprecedented humanitarian and security situation, which is legally complicated and politically fraught” (Wright, The New Yorker, 2019, para 4).

Together with the COVID 19, the tense situation inside the prisons increased and led to riots inside the prisons. With this revolt, guardians struggled to restore control of the prisons and some prisoners took advantage of this conflict and managed to escape (Yeung, Browne & Balkiz, 2020).

According to the local news, four ISIS suspects who fled after prisoners provoked a riot in Ghourian prison, holding around 3.000 to 5.000 militants of whom the

majority are foreign nationals in Hasakah region of Syria, were later captured by the police (McKernan, 2020).

There are now concerns if coronavirus reaches northeastern Syria, authorities will not be able to halt the spread within the prisons, bringing more security problems within the prisons and more uncertainty about the future of the prisoners (Trew, 2020).

2.4 RETURNEES

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, around 42,000 foreign fighters including men, women and children have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join terrorist groups like ISIS. The number of foreign fighters increased exponentially since the declaration of the 'caliphate' in 2014. Of those 42,000 departees, more than 5000 FTFs have travelled to the conflict zones from Europe (Ran Manuel, 2017). Some of those FTFs died during the conflicts, some stayed in the region and continue to be a member of an insurgent terrorist group and some have returned to their home countries for several different reasons. It is estimated that 30% of the total Western departees have returned to their home countries (Ragazzi & Walmsley, 2018 & Ran Manuel, 2017).

The increasing number of foreign terrorists with the rapid rise of ISIS, decreased *pari passu* with the collapse of the Islamic State in Iraq in October 2017 when Raqqa was captured by the US-backed coalition forces (Barnard & Saad, 2017, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2018)

There are considered to be two main motivations for FTFs who travelled to the ISIS-held territories and now wished to return:

- 1) the ones who were less violent, disappointed with the acts of ISIS leaders and eventually disillusioned. Surveys suggested that those who returned before the caliphate began to lose control, belong to this first group who were disappointed

with what they have experienced but still having a little sympathy for the group (Barret, 2017).

2) The ones who were more battle oriented, ideologically committed, having a motivation of harming EU citizens.

Besides those 2 groups of returnees, there are also children returnees who have to be comprehensively understood (RAN Manuel, 2017). Children of ISIS start the military training from the age of nine, are exposed to violence and brutal punishments in every age of their life and in some cases were forced to realize killing of prisoners, hence they are highly traumatized. (RAN Manuel, 2017).

Either returned by disillusionment or by a motivation to harm EU citizens, any kind of returnees, including men, women and children, have to be carefully monitored and handled case by case. It has to be taken into consideration that returnees do certainly not represent a homogenous group with same backgrounds, experiences and motivations, so they have to be understood and investigated carefully (Ragazzi & Walmsley, 2018).

There are security risks attached to each returnee profile with different backgrounds. Child returnees, although considered as victims, might be inclined to copy the adults of whom they witnessed performing barbaric acts. Already traumatized by the experience they had been through, and the military training they started at nine years old might lead them to carry out violent acts (Ran Manuel, 2017). Many men who went to conflict zones would return as veterans, skilled in the use of every kind of weapons and explosives including suicide bombs and having an ability to radicalize and train the other Western Muslims (Bakker, Paulussen and Entenmann, 2014). Returned foreign fighters admired by sympathizers of the group have the prestige to recruit and radicalize others and this process enables the cycle for the group's human resource (Byman & Shapiro, 2014).

In the case of returned women; since the ISIS women do not hold 'back seat' roles, they might act as recruiters, carry out terrorist attacks at home or as an ideological

in-house teacher, they could raise next generations (Bont, Weggemans, Peters & Bakker, 2017).

European governments and security services are concerned about the potential threat that returning fighters could pose (Baker, Paulussen, Entenmenn, 2014). These concerns proved itself with some terrorist attacks on EU soil which were linked to the jihadist foreign fighters.

The first one was in 2014, committed by Mehdi Nemmouche, an Algerian origin French-born jihadist, who killed four civilians in a fire attack in the Jewish Museum in Belgium. Before this attack, he had spent one year in Syria fighting for ISIS (Brussels Jewish Museum murders: Mehdi Nemmouche guilty, BBC, March 7, 2019). These attacks continued with other jihadist attacks such as “Charlie Hebdo” in 2015 which resulted in 12 people’s death, a few months later Belgium and France mass shootings and suicide attacks which had more deadly results; were all linked to foreign fighters who had spent some time in the conflict zones of ISIS (Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015).

According to the study of Speckhard, Yayla and Shajkovci, there are two categories of returnees among the foreign terrorist fighters who came back home after spending some time in ISIS-controlled territories;

- a) Defectors who have truly defected from ISIS and disengaged from the group
- b) ‘Islamic State’ returnees who were allowed to return home to recruit other fighters or to conduct or sometimes assist a domestic attack for the group.

Hence, those returnees’ allegiance to the caliphate continued after they return home. In the case of ‘defectors’, despite being detached from the group, there had been some cases who returned to the group because of unsuccessful reintegration process at home (Speckhard, Yayla & Shajkovci, 2018). It is also indicated in the Ran Manuel, for the returnees who were disillusioned with what they had experienced in ISIS that;

“It is also important to note that disillusionment with a terrorist group does not necessarily equate to distance from a violent ideology, nor disengagement from the ‘jihadi’ cause, when back in EU” (Ran Manuel, 2017, page 21).

Because of the cruel nature of ISIS, foreign fighters are experienced in barbaric, violent actions which they could imitate back home (Govier & Boutland, 2020). Even if they do not conduct and attack there is another security concern: the continuation of the group’s ideology (Govier & Boutland, 2020). This ideological adherence has to be addressed for the returnees and the sympathizers of ISIS. Because this might have both a domino effect on the radicalization of the other Western Muslims and it might lead returnees and sympathizers to a pathway for a potential domestic terrorist attack.

Regarding the returnees, although government and international communities are trying to make policies to solve this disturbing and uncertain situation, governments seem to be reluctant to engage in a profound discussion or take responsibility on the phenomenon of ‘returnees’ especially after the collapse of ISIS and the so-called ‘caliphate’ (Govier & Boutland, 2020).

Bakker and Zuijdewijn claim that the threat posed by individuals returning from Iraq and Syria might be considered as 'low probability, high impact'. Also, Ragazzi and Walmsley state that the cases of 'foreign fighters' returning to conduct attacks in Europe were few in amount but had more deadly results. However, it is hard to predict how any returnee would react over time in their home country or in any other neighbouring countries (Bakker & Zuijdewijn, 2015, Barret, 2017 & Ragazzi & Walmsley, 2018). So, the issue of “returnees” will continue to be of high importance on the agenda of Western countries due to the security risks they pose.

CHAPTER 3

3 HANDLING THE COMPLEXITY

When the Islamic State lost its final stronghold Baghouz in March 2018 and following the death of its top leader al-Baghdadi, the physical Islamic caliphate ended. However, this doesn't mean that ISIS has been totally and forever defeated, it is still posing a global threat (Dhanaraj, 2018). There are remaining ISIS-affiliated people and most importantly the Salafi Jihadi ideology which could result in a potential ISIS resurgence.

The present and unprecedented challenge regarding ISIS is the tens of thousands of ISIS fighters, local and foreign, together with their families, who are held by SDF and the Iraqi military and security services. More specifically, the phenomenon of foreign fighters has become the central issue for governments and international communities in the aftermath of the fall of the 'caliphate'.

During the conflicts between ISIS and the coalition forces and ISIS's continuous territorial loss, many foreign fighters, disillusioned with the group or still adherents of the caliphate, returned to their home countries and Western countries should be prepared and aware of the threat that those returnees could pose at home (Speckhard, Yayla & Shajkovci, 2018). Those who are not defectors might engage in terrorist activities on behalf of ISIS, manipulate Muslim youth with their experience in the Islamic State by drawing a utopian life under the rule of the 'caliphate' (Speckhard, Yayla & Shajkovci, 2018).

Besides the returnees, there are detainees and prisoners in Syria and Iraq which have to be addressed by governments, intelligence agencies and the international communities.

The present situation in Iraq is different than the situation in Syria. In Syria ISIS fighters and their families are being held in the SDF controlled camps and pop-up prisons. The future of those ISIS-affiliated people is still not known. According to

Shane Bell, senior international security advisor at Global Journalist Security, until the Assad Syrian civil war ends, no one knows what is going to happen with the prisoners and the detainees in Syria (Shane Bell, personal communication, 11 May 2020)Although in Iraq most of the ISIS affiliated women and men were sentenced to death in the courts or they were killed with their families in the battlefield. The situation in the West Mosul is unbearable for the families who have returned after the ISIS' defeat because of the thousands of dead bodies of ISIS fighters under the rubble (Inside the killing rooms of Mosul, 2018).

A resident states that;

“There are bodies underneath the rubble, we are worried that we will get a plague in this area. The smell is horrible, the city is going to get sick” (Inside the killing Rooms of Mosul, 2018).

Iraqi Government and authorities don't do anything regarding moving the bodies out from the rubble and cleaning the region. What had happened there is still a mystery. (Inside the killing Rooms of Mosul). However, according to a journalist of Vice News, the situation looks like that there had been as mass execution (Inside the killing Rooms of Mosul, 2018).

Although tens of thousands are thought to have been killed, tens of thousands more remain alive — many in prison or in SDF controlled camps and some are operating hidden (What should be done with ISIS detainees? 2018).

In this chapter, the plans and policies to deal with the foreign ISIS detainees and prisoners will be discussed under the perspective of NATO, EU and the Pentagon.

3.1 NATO

NATO's Strategic security thinking and approach has evolved within 3 major eras: 1) The cold war era 2) Aftermath of the cold war 3) Post 9/11 era (Strategic Concepts, 2018).

During these distinctive periods, NATO has prepared and implemented several strategic concepts in order to adopt itself to the security environment of the period in which the world has been through (Strategic Concepts, 2018).

The Strategic Concept regarding terrorism was published and adopted after the 9/11 terrorist attacks which brought ‘terrorism’ to the world stage as a global security threat.

▶ The last Strategic Concept was issued in 2010 at the Lisbon summit. Lisbon Summit states the NATO commits to prevent a crisis with the support of international partners especially the European Union and the United Nations (NATO Strategic Concept, 2010).

As stated in all strategic concepts, ensuring the member state’s freedom, peace, security and shared values, was asserted as the fundamental mission of the alliance in the last issued strategic concept (NATO Strategic Concept, 2010).

In a changing security environment, NATO’s three essential core tasks; a) collective defence b) crisis management c) cooperative security and continuous process of reform, modernisation and transformation were underlined.

Terrorism, terrorist attacks, the proliferation of mass destruction and nuclear weapons, conflicts outside of NATO borders and cyber-attacks together with the use of modern technology, all linked to each other, were defined as a direct threat to NATO member states and global stability and peace (NATO Strategic Concept, 2010). The means of defend and deterrence against those threats and continuous development of NATO’s continuous ability to defend, detect and deter those threats to maintain the stability was discussed in the last strategic concept

However, by the time of the Lisbon Summit in 2010, there was not an ISIS on the world stage and the mobilization of the foreign fighters was not a common concern

neither for NATO nor for the EU, hence any mention regarding FTFs threat was not mentioned.

The previous strategy was declared in 1999 and after that, there had been many security challenges against the alliance, especially 9/11 attacks against the United States which shocked the world. Following this traumatic attack, the US with reluctant NATO partners intervened in Afghanistan and Iraq and the alliance surely needed a new strategic concept in coherence with the new security environment (Dawis, 2010).

Following the two decades after the collapse of the Cold War, the attention of NATO has moved from containing communism to preventing and countering terrorism. The objective of the alliance was determined as being an effective offensive military power against the new threat of terrorist groups. (Peterson, James W., 2011)

Against the threat of terrorism, construction of a partnership vision is mentioned and emphasized in the 2010 Strategic Concept of NATO (Peterson, James W. 2011).

In 2014, at the Wales Summit, regarding the instability in the Middle East, NATO stated its partnership with Iraq by helping the Iraqi government in the process of building effective security forces to fight against ISIS and mentioned that NATO would take all necessary steps to protect and enhance the collective security (Wales Summit, 2014).

In Warsaw Summit issued in July 2016, NATO defines the threat posed by ISIS as a direct threat to its nations and the alliance itself. As stated in the 2010 strategic concept, NATO in the Warsaw summit repeats its dedication to respond to the crisis outside its borders in order to maintain international peace and stability through partnership. By the time of the Warsaw Summit, the US led global coalition to defeat ISIS was already on duty. Many NATO allies and NATO members were in the coalition. Although ISIS was in the process of decline and the coalition forces

advanced significant gains against ISIS, it was stated at the summit that a legitimate government formed by a political transition in Syria as well as inclusive governance and strong institutions in Iraq were crucial in ensuring the defeat of ISIS.

The rapid and aggressive rise of ISIS led to the rethinking and analysing of NATO's capability of anticipating and foreseeing terrorist threats. In the Warsaw summit, strategic anticipation of NATO was handled in the development area of the alliance (Warsaw Summit, 2016). Although at the Warsaw Summit, NATO decided to support Global Coalition with AWACS surveillance, its full commitment to the coalition was declared in May 2017 with the below statement of the Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg;

“At the same time, we agreed that NATO will become a full member of the Global Coalition, in which all 28 allies already take part. Being in the coalition does not mean that NATO will engage in combat. But it does send a strong signal of our commitment to fight global terrorism. And it will enable NATO to take part in political deliberations, including on the coordination of training and capacity building.” (Nato Press conference, 2017, para 5)

As the Islamic State started to lose territory, the flow of foreign fighters passing through Turkey decreased from 2000 at high to 50 by the last quarter of 2016. However, the decrease of FTFs travelling to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq revealed another security concern for the West and international communities; the ‘return of FTFs’ to their home countries (Reed & Pohl, 2017).

Reed and Pohl point out two alternative ways of handling the returning foreign fighters. The first and the popular one is the “hard approach” which includes revoking citizenship, issuing entry bans and long prison sentences. (Reed and Pohl, 2017). However, prosecution of FTFs and sentencing long prisons constitute serious challenges for the governments due to difficulties in obtaining evidence from the conflict zones (OSCE ODIHR, 2018).

The second way is the “soft approach” which includes a set of policies such as rehabilitation, reintegration and prevention measures to counter and prevent terrorism (Reed & Pohl). Since the profile of returnees varies from each other with different motivations and backgrounds, the soft approach is believed to have more efficient results in their de-radicalization process including family members and children of FTF returnees and surveillance is easier with those policies (Reed & Pohl, 2017).

European countries have different strategies in the rehabilitation process of these individuals. In Germany, non-governmental organizations carry out the preventive measures whereas in France state representatives lead the process of rehabilitation (Reed & Pohl, 2017). Although Europe is facing a major challenge with the foreign fighter returnees, it is still debatable the best practice of handling the returnees and countering violent extremism in Europe (Reed & Pohl, 2017).

Besides the returnee challenge, the unstable situation in the camps and prisons in northeastern Syria pose risk as well. Jenkin states that;

“What the world does or does not do about these foreign fighters and their families could affect the future stability of the region and the countries from which the foreign volunteers came.” (Jenkins, 2019, page11).

There are many scenarios about the remaining ISIS-affiliated people. They could be victims, disillusioned by the group and regret being a member of the group. Alternatively, they could still be adherents and fanatics even though they might not show themselves as such. Hence, their real intention is very hard to predict. This uncertainty is also making the situation more complex to deal with (Jenkins, 2019, page11).

The attitude of countries towards those remaining FTFs and their families in Syria and Iraq might show some differences but their hesitation and reluctance to take them back is common.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, in a press conference, asserted that NATO would support UN-led political solutions after the physical defeat of ISIS and he emphasized the importance of training mission in Iraq to prevent an Isis resurge (Nato Press conference, 2019)

At the NATO Summit in Brussels in July 2018, the training support of NATO to the Iraqi security service had been further developed in order to fight against an ISIS revival under the name of NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) (NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), 2019).

NATO Mission Iraq aims to transform the Iraqi forces from foreigner backed and trained Iraqi troops to locally backed and trained Iraqi troops or in other words self-sufficient Iraqi forces (NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), 2019).

After the physical defeat of ISIS, the NATO Mission in Iraq continues to assist the Iraqi national security forces by helping them to improve their capacity to be able to stabilize areas liberated from ISIS. (Statement by Ministers of the Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS/DAESH, 2019)

Although NATO emphasizes being effective in a changing world (Strategic Concept, 2010), it hasn't issued a new strategic concept since 2010 against the new evolving threats like ISIS. Even though NATO was very aware of the threat posed by ISIS and developed strategies to defeat it on the battleground, NATO did not propose any solution or plan for what remained from the so-called 'caliphate'. It continues its training mission in Iraq to prevent ISIS resurgence but it stays reluctant in dealing with ISIS prisoners and their detained families and children.

3.2 EU & UN

Fourteen months after the fall of the last stronghold of ISIS, EU member states still haven't proposed a comprehensive policy on how to handle the detained ISIS-affiliated citizens and prisoners in the SDF controlled camps and pop-up prisons (Dworkin, 2019).

The ongoing instability in Syria together with Turkey's incursion into northern Syria have increased the concerns of European countries regarding their citizens held by SDF as ISIS fighters and members. Taking advantage of the conflicts in the region they could flee from the camps and prisons and they could take roles in a potential resurgence of ISIS in the Middle East or back in Europe (Dworkin, 2019). The deteriorating conditions of the camps fuel the risk of strengthening the radicalization of the women and children which makes it difficult to reintegrate them one day if repatriated (Dworkin, 2019).

Besides those factors, it is also very clear that SDF doesn't have the capacity and resource to hold ISIS members in the long-run (Dworkin, 2019). However even though these facts are known by the European countries, they are reluctant in taking the necessary actions to repatriate their citizens (Dworkin, 2019). Till now, Western countries have repatriated very few of their citizens from camps in Syria and Iraq and those who were taken back are mostly children (Borges & Tidey, 2019).

There are many difficulties and risks in repatriating those European citizens who are held in the camps. First of all, many of them are still loyal to ISIS. According to the Kurdish authorities, a significant number of 11,000 foreign women and children held in the annexe continue to be loyal to the group and adhere to sharia rules of the so-called 'caliphate', so they are considered to be very dangerous (Borges & Tidey, 2019; Wright, 2019).

According to Shane Bell, women are the most dangerous in terms of their level of radicalization and strong commitment to the group (Shane Bell, personal communication, 11 May 2010)

It is difficult for Western countries to prove that suspected fighters took part in combat. As for women, they were not allowed on the frontline by ISIS but may have helped in the background. Proving this is even more difficult (Borges & Tidey, 2019).

The fear for Western governments is that they may not be able to detain them after repatriation and that they will join or establish sleeper cells capable of unleashing home-grown deadly terror attacks (Borges & Tidey, 2019).

The kids in the camps are raised under severe conditions with the group's ideology and rules which doesn't transform them to jihadist rather create next generations as the dedicated inheritors of the Islamic State (Wright, 2019).

International communities and European governments are aware of the problems regarding the remaining ISIS people including foreign fighters and their families (Stiggal, 2020). The legal enforcements and obligations on foreign fighters and returnees have been issued to UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs), with UNSCR 2178 adopted in September 2014, the foreign fighters problem was addressed and with UNSCR 2396 issued in December 2017 returning foreign fighters problem was specifically addressed (Stiggal, 2020). In UNSCR 2396, it is stated that;

“Recognizing that addressing the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters requires comprehensively addressing underlying factors, including by preventing radicalization to terrorism, stemming recruitment, inhibiting foreign terrorist fighter travel, disrupting financial support to foreign terrorist fighters, countering violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, countering incitement to terrorist acts motivated by extremism or intolerance, promoting political and religious tolerance, economic development and social cohesion and inclusiveness, ending and resolving armed conflicts, and facilitating reintegration and rehabilitation” (UNSCR 2396, 2017, page 8).

The above obligations should be subjected to all member states to take responsibility to repatriate and take all necessary measures such as prosecute, reintegrate or rehabilitate their nationals who are held by SDF (Stiggal, 2020).

In the resolution 2368 adopted in July 2017, it is decided to develop the member states' capability of using and keeping the record of Passenger Name Records

(PNR), by the help of international and regional cooperation, in order to prevent the mobilization of the foreign fighters. (Resolution 2368, 2017). With this requirement, airlines would allow the relevant nations to access and use of PNR (Resolution 2368, 2017). The European Parliament adopted the PNR in 2016, in order to identify terrorists and prevent, detect and investigate terrorist offensives. (Regulating the use of passenger name record (PNR) data, 2016)

In the same resolution, resolution 2368, the Security Council decided that the Monitoring Team would continue to prepare comprehensive strategic reports every six months to redefine and discuss the threat posed by ISIS and its affiliates in the conflict regions (Resolution 2368, 2017).

By the time of the ninth report, prepared by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Monitoring Team, on the threat posed by ISIS; member states were concerned about the FTFs, returnees and re-locators after the complete territorial defeat of ISIS. The report addressed the challenge regarding the women and children held in the overcrowded Al-Hawl camp. It is openly noted in the report that the conditions in the camps and the future of those women and children held in the camps shouldn't be ignored. It is stated in the report that the challenges posed by those detainees, if not correctly handled, could result in the potential risk of violence and terrorist attacks in the middle and long run (UN Security Council Ninth Report, July 2019).

Besides the threat posed by them, it is stated in the report that a resolution is needed to ensure the conditions of those ISIS-affiliated people's detention to be in accordance/coherence with the international human rights and humanitarian law (UN Security Council Ninth Report, July 2019)

Michael Bachelet, UN High commissioner, emphasized the state's responsibility to ensure their citizens, held in the camps as ISIS members, transparent prosecution in accordance with the international law. The family members of the foreign fighters who are not prosecuted must be taken back by the origin country and among those family members, the primary concern must be the protection and rehabilitation of

the children. In order to prevent the return of those people, revoking citizenship and rendering people stateless is not acceptable and legal (Bachelet, 2019).

In January 2020, the Parliamentary Assembly of European Council issued a report to address the problem of child repatriation from Syria and Iraq whose parents are believed to be ISIS members. The assembly urges all Europe member states to take the responsibility of protecting those children and take immediate actions to repatriate them from Syria and Iraq regardless of their age and degree of committing crime (Schennach, 2020). The Assembly encourages all Member states to take all necessary steps to effectively reintegrate and rehabilitate those children upon their return (Schennach, 2020).

United Nations admitted the need for urgent solutions to deal with the uncertain situation of the women and children who are believed to be the members of ISIS in Syria and Iraq. It is stated by the UN as;

“Necessary measures include political engagement; repatriation; justice; prosecution (where appropriate), rehabilitation and reintegration; access to psychological expertise and support services; and consideration of security issues. This requires the engagement of Member States and other relevant actors, including civil society” (UN, 2019, page 3).

The situation is quite complex for those women and children linked with ISIS. Their future depends on several variables such as the willingness of the origin country to repatriate them, implementation of international, human and children rights law, attitude and treatment of the host country, lack of legal documentation for many children and so on (Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration of Women and Children with links to United Nations Listed Terrorist Groups , 2019).

According to the UN the children must be considered primarily as victims and in accordance with the juvenile justice, children under 12 years old cannot be prosecuted (Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution,

Rehabilitation, and Reintegration of Women and Children with links to United Nations Listed Terrorist Groups , 2019).

In the tenth report of the Security Council, among the 1,000 FTF prisoners, some suspects are still believed to be dangerous and would be released in 2020. Besides the released prisoner's problem, the effectiveness of the rehabilitation programs is another concern for European countries. It is also emphasized in the report that women held in the camps who are expected to be repatriated constitute security concern because a significant number of them are still adherent of the Islamic state and highly radicalized during their stay in the camps (Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 2020).

It is also stated in the report that the potential for radicalization in the camps remains high due to inhumane conditions, the humanitarian crisis including insufficient basic services and needs and lack of psychological support in the overcrowded camps. Among them some are left stateless and deprived of national rights, making them more vulnerable against any violation of human rights (Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 2020).

Although the Council of European Union and United Nations encourage their member states to repatriate the women and children linked to Isis from Syria and Iraq, member states are either too slow to act or they are finding grounds not to take them back.

For instance, Britain and Belgium argue that their nationals who travelled to conflict zones and fought for ISIS should be prosecuted in the countries where they committed the crimes, not taken back to home country to face justice (Kennedy, 2019). France and Britain, refuse to take back fighters and their wives (Kennedy, 2019).

In the case of prosecution back home, the European countries face the challenge of short sentences of the foreign fighters due to difficulties in obtaining evidence from the conflict zones (Kennedy, 2019). The existing laws ask for intensive proof that the suspect committed a crime and engaged in terrorist acts which is difficult to provide for those returnees and the people who are repatriated from Syria and Iraq.

Shiraz Maher, the director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, states that;

"For all kinds of legal reasons, much of what is called 'battlefield evidence' in this case would not be admissible in court, either falling short on evidential grounds or because of the manner in which it was obtained. We do not, for example, use intercept evidence in UK courts." (Kennedy, 2019, para 12)

European countries face challenges in the prosecution process of returning foreign fighters including ISIS-affiliated women who might also pose a threat as some still stay loyal to ISIS and took an active role in al-Khansa Brigade as a Sharia Police. In the case of Shamima Begum who left the UK to join ISIS when she was 15 years old, the UK revoked her citizenship after she showed sympathy to the Islamic state in an interview conducted by BBC (Shamima Begum loses first stage of appeal over citizenship, 2020)

“Due to ongoing resource constraints, even those governments with far-reaching legal authority to detain terrorist suspects have found it difficult to identify and monitor a growing number of potential assailants. Furthermore, implementation of several EU-wide measures under discussion could be slowed by national sovereignty concerns, longstanding law enforcement barriers to sharing sensitive information, and strong EU data privacy and protection rights” (Kristin Archick, Paul Belkin, Christopher M. Blanchard et al, 2015, page2).

When it comes to repatriation, so far, European countries seem to be only willing to repatriate orphans. France, the Netherlands, and Austria have each taken back a handful of orphans and the United Kingdom is currently making plans to bring back British orphans. The German government was already taking steps to repatriate the children but refused to repatriate the mother. According to the Higher Administrative Court repatriation of the mother could only be refused if there is a concrete and tangible threat, which the German government was unable to prove.

While European countries are turning their backs to repatriate women and children, some family members of those detainees back home in Europe are appealing to courts to counter their governments' attitude towards repatriation (Mehra, 2019).

In Accordance with the Article 6, 7 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the current situation in the camps with limited access to water, food and health care, where women and children are exposed to inhumane treatment and diseases, leaving them in the camps would mean violation and spurning of the international law and obligations (Mehra, 2019).

On the other hand, several European countries claim that the foreign fighters should be trialled in the region where they committed the crime. However; the Iraqi government stated clearly that they did not have the capacity to deal with the foreign fighters so they would only prosecute the Iraqi fighters (Mehra, 2019).

After Turkey's incursion in northern Syria, Turkey took control of captured FTFs in areas that it seized control from Kurdish groups (Turkey launches air and ground military operations against Kurds in northern Syria, 2019)

While European countries resist repatriation for different reasons, in November 2019 Turkey decided to send back ISIS members and deported a dozen ISIS fighters and their families to Britain and Denmark. Turkey claimed that 2280 foreign fighters from 30 countries were being detained (Onishi & Peltier, 2019)

Suleyman Soyly, Interior Minister of Turkey criticized Europe for not taking the responsibility for their citizens that fought for the Islamic State by saying;

"There is no need to try to escape from it, we will send them back to you. Deal with them how you want" (Turkey looking to exploit European divisions on repatriation of jihadists, 2019, para 4)

Speaking to reporters before a visit to the United States, Erdogan also said Turkey would continue repatriating foreign Islamic State militants to their home countries, even if those countries decline to take them back.

"You should revise your stance toward Turkey, which at the moment holds so many IS members in prison and at the same time controls those in Syria," Erdogan warned European nations, a day after the EU unveiled a system to sanction Turkey. (Fraser, 2019, para 2)

With this decision of Turkey, European countries faced with serious problems which they were trying to ignore since the collapse of the Islamic state.

3.3 US & THE GLOBAL COALITION TO DEFEAT ISIS

On September 10, 2014, the United States declared the establishment of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS with the contribution of 82 coalition partners (About Us – The Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS, 2014).

On October 17, 2014, the Department of Defense launched Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) in order to militarily defeat ISIS and provide stability in the region (Operation Inherent Resolve Mission). OIR and partner forces extinguished the self-proclaimed caliphate and liberated 7.7 million civilians from ISIS tyranny.

Operation Inherent Resolve designed its Combined Joint Task Force in four phases, three of which have been achieved by the collapse of the so-called territorial Islamic State 'caliphate'. The fourth phase named as 'Support Stabilization'

concentrates on providing security and support to Iraqi Government and partners in Syria by the contribution of the Coalition nations (OIR, CJTF Campaign Design).

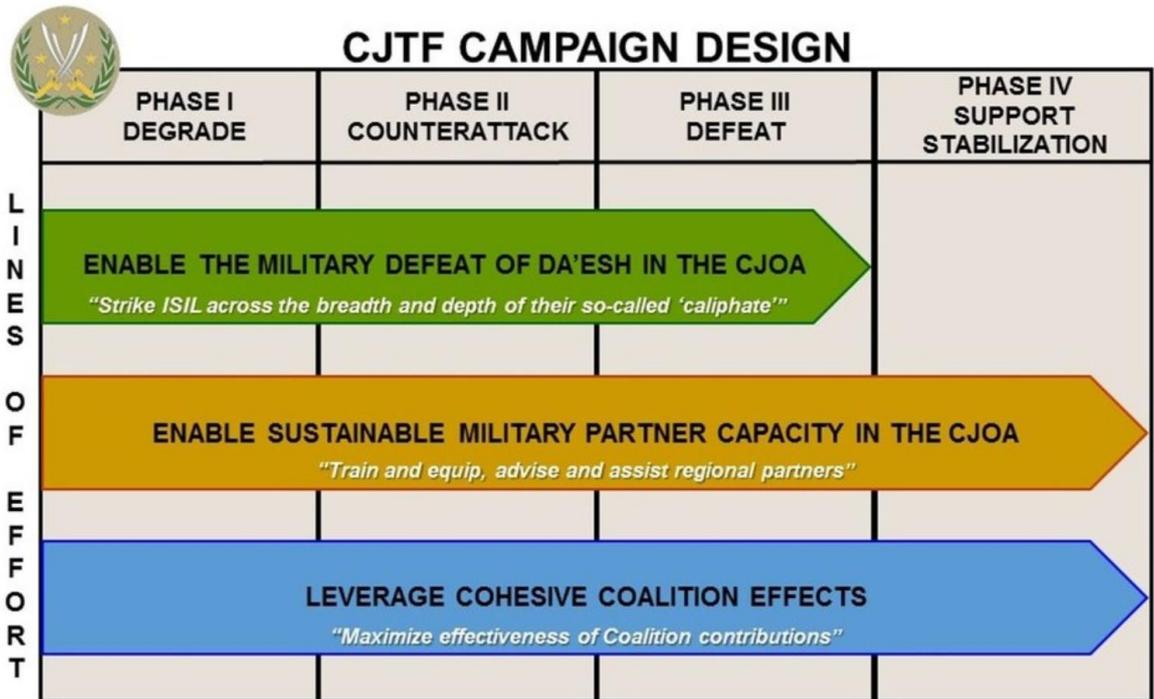


Figure 3.1. CJTF Campaign Design

On January 29, 2020, the Political Directors of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS gathered to discuss the comprehensive effort to strengthen the cooperation in order to ensure that ISIS and its affiliates would not regroup and claim territory again or threaten the collective security (Joint Statement by the Political Directors of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2020).

Even though ISIS is physically defeated, it is still posing risk with its existing affiliates and ideology. (US Department of State, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, January 29, 2020).

In order to deal with the current that remained from the collapse of the Islamic State, the Coalition affirms the continuation of the partnerships in the region and close working with the Iraqi government and security forces. It is clearly noted in

the meeting notes of the Global Coalition that a comprehensive effort is needed for a lasting defeat of ISIS. (US Department of State, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, January 29, 2020).

In the Political Directors of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS meeting on April 16, 2020; the Political Directors agreed on sustaining their efforts in the fight against ISIS despite the multifaceted challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic. They agreed on the continuation of the Operation Inherent Resolve's training role when the pandemic conditions would allow. They underline the importance of the stabilization of the regions liberated from ISIS (Statement by the Political Directors of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Small Group, 2020).

According to U.S. Marine Corps General Kenneth F. McKenzie, the SDF detention of more than 2000 foreign fighters of ISIS would not be an enduring solution rather it would be a problem in the long term. He said;

“Ultimately, the best way to alleviate this problem is to reduce the numbers of detainees through repatriation. While some countries have made efforts to reclaim their foreign fighters, full-resolution requires a comprehensive diplomatic and international effort” (Stigall, 2020, para 5).

The necessity of repatriation is emphasized in different platforms and recognized by international communities however without an international obligation, it seems European countries would continue to ignore it and reject to take de- facto actions to ensure repatriation.

After the so-called ISIS caliphate have been destroyed by the US-led Coalition forces and regional partners, the current situation in the comprehensive effort of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS has been regularly updated and discussed.

In the Press Conference on August 1, 2019, James Jim Jeffery, Secretary of State's Special Envoy for the Defeat of ISIS and Nathan Sales, Secretary's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, discussed and analysed the current situation on the Coalition's

comprehensive efforts to defeat ISIS. (Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2019)

Ambassador Jeffrey defined the current situation in the fight against ISIS as;

“The coalition, aside from the military effort, takes on ISIS in four separate civilian ways: through counter-financing, through counter-messaging and public affairs, through foreign terrorist fighter activities, and finally through stabilization of areas that have been liberated from ISIS.” (Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2019, para 5)

In terms of military effort against the ongoing violence by the underground cells of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the coalition would continue its presence and training in the region. (Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2019)

Ambassador Jeffery mentioned that the problem of the displaced persons camps where mainly ISIS fighters’ families are housed would be handled first by recognizing the humanitarian issues and addressing the radicalization problems in the camps. He stated that the long-term solution would be the repatriation of those people by their origin countries. (Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2019)

Another ongoing problem for the Coalition is the threat posed by the returning fighters. Nathan Sales mentioned that the United States was implementing the screening tools years before the United Nations Security Council 2396 Resolution which required all members’ states to use the screening tools to identify terrorists and prevent their mobilization. He emphasized the obligation of the resolution 2396 with which the US succeeded in arresting returning fighters in some cases. (Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2019)

Nathan Sales affirmed the obligation of prosecuting the captured 2000 foreign fighters to prevent them from engaging in terrorist acts again and in order to achieve this, he advocated the necessity of repatriation of those FTFs. He added as;

“That’s what the United States has done for our citizen fighters and that’s what we expect other countries to do as well. This is a priority for the President and it’s a priority for the Secretary.” (Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, 2019, para 30)

In the new phase of defeating ISIS, the United States determined two important priorities; 1) Rehabilitate and reintegrate repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families. 2) Countering racially or ethnically motivated terrorism (Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges, 2020).

In order to rehabilitate and reintegrate the ISIS-affiliated people and fighters, the United States urges the countries to repatriate them as a moral and security duty. Otherwise, the outcome would be the return of those fighters to the battlefield. Another aspect of repatriation is the humanitarian approach. Leaving the citizens under inhumane conditions in the camps and revoking their citizenship not only makes them more vulnerable to radicalization and but also violates international human rights. The United States criticizes European countries for undermining these facts, ignoring the current situation and disregarding the human rights that were sacralised by Europe (Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges, 2020).

On the other hand, leaving the children in those camps without basic services and education would breed the ground for the most important threat of an ISIS resurge which is the creation of naturally radicalized next generations (Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges, 2020).

The United States calls for countries to take responsibility and repatriate their citizens from Syria and Iraq (Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges, 2020).

Chris Harnisch in his press conference stated that the United States was committed to encourage and help countries in the process of taking their citizens back from

Syria and Iraq and provide the knowledge to rehabilitate and reintegrate them (Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges, 2020).

A State Department spokesperson told to Sputnik;

“We are aware of press reports of a very small number of potential US citizens present throughout northeast Syria who were in ISIS [IS]-held territory and now claim US citizenship,” (US Ready To Repatriate SDF Captured IS Fighters Upon Verifying US Citizenship - State Dept, 2019, para 3)

After the US declared their withdrawal from the conflicts zones in Iraq Trump appealed to worried European countries from that withdrawal and stated that;

“We said to France, we said to Germany, we said to various countries in Europe: We’d like you to take your people back,” (McKernan & Borger, 2019, para 16)

In a Press Conference in December 2019, U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham underlined that hundreds of European ISIS fighters were imprisoned in Syria under insecure conditions with limited control and said;

“President Trump is right to insist Europeans come up with a legal system based on the reality that we are fighting a war -- not a crime,” (Gungorigok, 2019, para 11).

The US is urging the European countries to take responsibility regarding the remaining ISIS affiliated people in Syria and Iraq.

CONCLUSION

The declaration of the Islamic State so-called ‘caliphate’ in June 2014 increased the flow and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters travelling to the conflict zones from different countries with diverse backgrounds and motivations but with a common dream; to live in a ‘utopian Islamic State’ (Jones, 2017). However, their dream didn’t last long. The Global Coalition founded in September 2014 with the help of the local partners, defeated ISIS and destroyed its territorial claim. Among those foreign fighters with European origin, some were disillusioned, some radicalised more and stayed attached to the group, some returned to their home countries for different purposes and some stayed in the conflict zones.

Many fighters including top leaders of the group were killed during the conflicts. However, thousands of ISIS-affiliated people were either housed in the overcrowded camps or detained in the prisons in Syria and Iraq under severe conditions (United Nations, April 2019). According to United Nations officials, 75,000 people are being held in SFF camps. Of these 75,000 people, 43 percent are Syrians, 42 percent are Iraqis, and 15 percent are foreigners with a majority of women and children. (Brian, 2019 page 1). It is also estimated that around 10,000 men are detained by the SDF (Dworkin, 2019).

These people, many of them women and children, are at the risk of further radicalisation due to the hard-living conditions, with limited access to food and water. Some of them still believe in building a utopian Islamic “Caliphate”. People, lots of them being children, are left in the camps waiting for an uncertain future with limited control. Those children were exposed to violence, were militarily trained at the age of nine and many were trained to be suicide attackers. Perhaps the most important issue was that they were raised by radicalized mothers who were committed to creating the next generations for the group.

Besides the camps, prisons in Syria and Iraq constitute a high-level risk. Detention conditions in the prisons could facilitate the formation of a ‘radicalization academy’ like the similar conditions had bred the ground for the creation of ISIS in Camp

Buca where Al-Baghdadi and all the big bosses were radicalized. Low-level fighters in prison without any occupation would be vulnerable to radicalize more (Mironova, 2018 & Haid, 2018). If not properly addressed and studied case by case, prisoners could be released in a couple of years and they could return to the battlefield or engage in terrorist activities in other parts of the world.

Foreign Fighters managed to escape from the intelligence services' and governments' radars, even those disillusioned with the group would constitute to be a danger to their home countries (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Yayla, 2017). If not properly monitored, rehabilitated and reintegrated; they could be easily manipulated to commit crime (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Yayla, 2017).

These factors are the new challenges for European countries and the international communities to deal with, preventing the resurgence of ISIS being vital. Although the European Union, NATO and the Global Coalition acknowledge repatriation as the best way of keeping the ISIS-affiliated people under control and prevent their return to battleground or engagement in terrorism, none of the European countries took radical action to repatriate their citizens held in Syria and Iraq as ISIS members. Very few numbers of citizens were repatriated, the majority of whom are children and orphans.

The United States urges the United Nations to adopt a resolution which will require member states to take responsibility for taking their ISIS member citizens back. The US mentions the importance of reintegration and the rehabilitation process of foreign fighters and their families as well. So far it has been over a year since the Islamic State collapsed and was territorially defeated by the US-led Global Coalition and its local partners, but nothing has done, and no international obligation had been proposed and issued for the remaining people of ISIS. European countries don't want to deal with these people and are trying to mitigate the challenges by proposing different solutions that will not produce a long-term solution.

As General McKenzie, commander of United States Central Command (CENTCOM) stated;

“While some countries have made efforts to reclaim their foreign fighters, a full resolution requires a comprehensive diplomatic and international effort. This problem will not go away by ignoring it, and can only be addressed by the international community working together to accept its shared responsibilities” (Stiggal, Repatriating Foreign Fighters from Syria: International Law and Political Will Part 1, 2020, para 4)

On the other hand, NATO as a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat Isis militarily fought and still fighting to defeat ISIS and prevent its resurgence; but it has not adopted an updated Strategic Concept to address a comprehensive understanding to counter the challenges and risks posed by ISIS or its affiliates. NATO has issued Summits to discuss the problem of ISIS and contributed to the efforts to defeat ISIS, however, neither NATO nor the UN has developed pre-emptive strategies against ISIS or ISIS-like terrorist groups.

NATO, the UN, the EU and the United States failed to prevent the emergence of ISIS but after the declaration of the so-called ‘caliphate’ the US-led Global Coalition addressed the threat of ISIS and launched a military fight with the contribution of local partners to defeat ISIS.

In order to provide long-term stability and collective security with respect to territorial integrity of the Middle East and human & children rights and prevent the emergence of an ISIS liked terrorist groups, pre-emptive measures have to be discussed and implemented by nations and international communities.

Although the anti-ISIS coalition has achieved to defeat ISIS physically in Iraq and Syria, the new challenge is whether ISIS has also been deprived of its resurgence has to be taken into consideration (Mironova, 2018). If not, it has to be comprehensively addressed with the implementation of pre-emptive measures such as; predicting the future behaviour of those who remain, understanding the reasons

of those foreign fighter's motivations in joining ISIS, developing and adopting a counter ideology to eliminate the Salafi Jihadi ideology, considering efficient de-radicalization and reintegration programs for prisoners, women and children, prevent discrimination and alienation of Muslim youth in European and Western countries, address the problems that returning foreign fighters face in their home countries, such as unemployment, discrimination, difficulty living a conservative Salafi lifestyle in the West, (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Yayla, 2017; Mironova, 2018). The manpower and the ideology itself should not be avoided. A comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration program have to be studied and implemented for children who were exposed to violence at early ages, trained militarily and raised by the ISIS' brutal ideology.

However, the current situation is far from the ideal one. Rather than rehabilitating ISIS members, the EU, Western countries and NATO are focusing on the militarily defeat of the group, undermining the existing ideology and ignoring remaining ISIS-affiliated people left from the so-called 'caliphate'.

As Haid stated in his report;

“The aim is to prevent the re-emergence of the group by providing a more comprehensive approach to erase its remains” (Haid, 2018, page 26)

Although some alternative process of handling the issues, such as prosecution in Europe, prosecution in Syria and Iraq, the establishment of a hybrid international-national court alliance with Iraq are being discussed by governments and international communities for residuals of ISIS, repatriation of European ISIS fighters and followers and a comprehensive prosecution at home remains the most executable option for delivering justice for ISIS's crimes and providing disengagement and rehabilitation program to keep them under surveillance

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