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«CENTER FOR INTERCULTURAL
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FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN THE RANKS
OF TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS
IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorism, (from the Latin word terror - fear, horror), as such does not present any new phenomena. It exists from the times of ancient Greece and ancient Rome. Organized groups of people used terrorism as a means for political struggle in secular and religious life. It is widely used during periods of transition in social and political developments of society and the state.

The first testimonies on the use of terrorist methods on the territory of the modern Middle East date back to the first century A.D. They pertain to a radical wing of the religious sect of Sicarii (from the Latin word sica - a short curved dagger that is, in accordance with ritual, used to kill opponents). During the years 66-73 A.D., the Sicarii were active in the Roman province of Judea (southern Palestine), where they fought against Roman rule as well as representatives of Jewish aristocracy who collaborated with the conquerors. During the holidays, the Sicarii would mix into crowds where they would find and kill their targets, then hide, using the provoked panic¹.



Source: <http://nic-pnb.ru>

In the Middle Ages, terrorist methods were actively used by the Assassini on Palestinian territory, instigating a number of myths and legends related to them. Their list includes several dozen killings of high-ranking political officials, religious officials, and

¹ N. A. Cernyadyeva. International terrorism. The origin, evolution, actual issues of legal opposition : Monograph. 2016. P.10

eight rulers². Such killings today would be qualified as political assassinations carried out by terrorists, who are ready to face death in the name of an idea.

In the nineteenth century, terrorist methods began to be vastly used by anarchists and a number of nationalist organizations. In the 20th century, terrorism had already become a global problem. From the second half of the 20th century, terrorists had begun to adopt the latest scientific and technological developments, actively use the media, and then, with the emergence of the Internet, cyberspace.



Source: <http://www.tvc.ru>

Over the past few decades, the Middle East has been one of the most unstable regions in the world. There is the problem of Palestine, as well as unresolved territorial problems, border disputes that continually persist, the worsening issue of water resources, and high population growth, in the context of the inability of the government to secure jobs for citizens capable of work. This causes the growth of radical attitudes in society, which terrorist groups use skillfully, and in this way equate themselves with active players in political processes.

The beginning of the so-called Arab Spring is an obvious manifestation of the above. The protests held in Tunisia in December 2010, concerning demands to improve the socio-economic situation of the population, turned into national revolutions in many Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East, with the aim of political reforms and regime change. However, very quickly did

² N. A. Cernyadyeva. International terrorism. The origin, evolution, actual issues of legal opposition : Monograph. 2016. Pp. 20–21

terrorist organizations «grab» the national dissatisfaction and subvert it to their goals.

From the very beginning, some external forces believed that the activities of non-state actors engaged in armed struggle against the legitimate government could contribute to the achievement of their geopolitical goals. According to a number of sources, the United States and its allies from the European Union and the Middle East have provided financial and military-technical assistance to certain rebel groups and are helping to establish camps for the training of militants³. Often these funds were at the disposal of terrorist organizations, and trained fighters — in their service.

This first weakened the ability of state structures to provide defense to attacks by terrorists, and then began the process of dismantling of a number of states in the region^{4, 5}. In the Middle East, the largest losses were suffered by Syria, Iraq and Yemen. In North Africa – Libya.

Modern terrorist organizations operating in the Middle East are no longer a group of poorly armed and poorly equipped people obsessed with an idea. They are well-organized structures, with diversified international connections, multi-million dollar revenues, internal divisions of responsibilities and areas of operation, with their own



Source: life-pics.ru

³ *Souad Mekhennet*. The terrorists fighting us now? We just finished training them. The Washington Post. 2014. August 18. — <https://www.washingtonpost.com>

⁴ *Brian Katulis, Peter Juul*. U.S. Middle East Policy at a Time of Regional Fragmentation and Competition. Center for American Progress. 2014. June. — www.americanprogress.org

⁵ *Fragmented visions of Middle East prevail on the last day of the Munich Security Conference*. 2017. February 19. — <https://www.dw.com>

recruitment systems, training camps, warehouses, workshops, medical facilities, laboratories for creating weapons, explosive materials and devices, chemical weaponry and poisons, their own means of communication and transportation, etc.

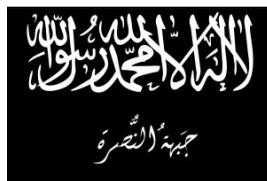
Terrorist organizations are constantly looking for new forms, methods and techniques of action that allow them to carry out attacks of enormous proportions and impact. They learn from each other, exchange experiences and try not to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors. Leaders of international terrorist structures have learned to effectively manage their terrorist networks, often located far from the Middle East region, using all available means of communication: from liaison agents to satellite communications systems and the global Internet⁶.

⁶ An introductory speech by the director of the FSB of Russia, the chairman of the National Anti-Terrorism Committee A.V. Bortnikov at the XV meeting of heads of special services, law enforcement agencies. Bulletin of the RF National Anti-Terrorism Committee no. 2{15} 2016. P. 11. — <http://nac.gov.ru>

MAJOR TERRORIST GROUPS

The main non-state actors who use terror to achieve their goals in the Middle East, and who have played or continue to play an important role in the radical transformation of the region are:

– «Al-Nusra Front» (Front of Victory), or «Jabhat al-Nusra il Ahl al-Sham» (Victory Front for the People of the Levant) – a branch of Al Qaeda in Syria (from July 2016 – «Jabhat Fatah al-Sham»); on January 28, 2017, the creation of the new «Hayat Tahrir al-Sham» umbrella organization was announced, uniting the fighters of the «Jabhat Fatah al-Sham», «Liwa al-Haqq», «Jaysh al-Sunna» and a number of others, a total of more than 70 groups);



– «Islamic State» (IS, also known as – «Islamic State of Iraq and Syria», «Islamic State of Iraq and Levant», «Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham»);



– «Muslim Brotherhood» («Al Ihvan al-Muslim»); and «Islamic Jihad» are also named on the special federal list of organizations that the courts of the Russian Federation have declared as terrorist;

– «Islamic jihad»⁷.



The Islamic group «Jabhat al-Nusra» was formed in December 2011 in Syria as the Al Qaeda branch in the country. The founders were: Abu Mohammad al-Julani (a Syrian citizen), Abdul Mohsen Abdullah Ib-

⁷ Website NAC RF. — <http://nac.gov.ru>

rahim al-Shariq (a Saudi Arabian citizen and a relative of Osama bin Laden), Hamid bin Abdallah al-Ali (a Kuwaiti citizen with a doctorate degree from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland) and Abu Yusuf Al-Turki (who came to Syria from the city of Bursa in Turkey). On June 20, 2012, al-Nusra announced its founding charter on the Internet. They proclaimed that their main aim is to establish the rule of Allah in Levant⁸.

The leader of the «Jabhat al-Nusra» is Abu Mohammad al-Julani (real name is Usama al-Hadawi). He studied medicine at a state university in Damascus. He quit his studies in 2005 and went to Iraq where he became a member of Al Qaeda and a close friend of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the future self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State. US forces in Iraq arrested Al-Julani in 2007 and held him in prison until 2008. He returned to Syria from Iraq in 2011 by the orders of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, to organize an armed struggle against the regime of Bashar al Assad. Al-Julani soon after founded al-Nusra.

In 2011, al-Julani pledged loyalty to the leader of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and thus «Jabhat al-Nusra» became an official branch of Al Qaeda in Syria⁹.

Al Qaeda leaders have stated that the main goal of the organization in Syria is the overthrow of the legitimate government of the country and the creation of an «Islamic Emirate» on its territory. Terrorist methods and armed conflicts were selected for this purpose. The targets of attack were state institutions, state symbols and the state border. Ethnic and religious cleansing had become a common phenomenon. The country's constitution and laws ceased to be valid in the «Jabhat al-Nusra» operation zone. Terms such as legitimacy, order, the state border and its regime were completely distorted.

⁸ *Sami Moubayed*. Under The Black Flag. 2015. P. 256

⁹ *Brian Arkton, Amateur Researcher*. Why does ISIS hate al-Nusra // Quora. 2015. September 12. — <https://www.quora.com>

Initially, «Jabhat al-Nusra» was focused on armed conflict against the regime. When taking over new territories, it abstained from establishing control over local government and full control over the population. According to some Western experts, this was done to prevent an immediate rejection of the «Jabhat al-Nusra» by other opposition groups and the local population.

However, by as early as July 2014, the group had established governing bodies on territory that it held under its control, and took over resolving military, humanitarian, religious, financial, mediation and other issues. Shariat courts, religious police, and prisons appeared in numerous places. This resulted in the formation of the so-called «administration of liberated areas» (Idaratal-Manategal-Muharara) as a management structure in settlements on territories that have been violently taken over by the Syrian government. Especially in Idlib and its neighboring cities (Ariha and Jisr al-Shughur), the authorities that were formed by the «Jabhat al-Nusra» directed their efforts at organizing the supply of electricity, water, and the removal of garbage. They also taxed the local population¹⁰.



Source: © AP Photo

The exact number of «Jabhat al-Nusra» formations is unknown. According to certain data, the number of fighters within these formations reached 25,000 by August 2017, and they were active in more than 70 armed groups. According to data from the Headquarters of the Russian Armed Forces for August 2017, its ranks numbered about 15 thousand people at that point. In addition to Syrian citizens, there were also foreign fighters from around 80

¹⁰ Charles Lister. Profing Jabhat al-Nusra. Brookings Institution. 2016. — <https://www.brookings.edu>

countries. According to the leader of the group Abu Mohammad al-Julani, the number of foreign fighters has reached about 30-50% of the total number in all the formations.

Al-Nusra has been a branch and loyal member of Al Qaeda since its inception. In July 2016, Al Qaeda gave Al Nusra permission to officially terminate their relations (to declare its independence) in order to achieve higher goals. Al-Julani subsequently announced the discontinuation of relations with Al Qaeda and the alteration of the name al-Nusra to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. The aim was to present al-Nusra as a legitimate rebel group and thus gains the support of the local population and obtains unhindered funding from interested Gulf States. However, the change of name was to no avail – even under a new name, al-Nusra remained an international terrorist organization connected to Al Qaeda.

The Islamic terrorist organization, which later became known as «Islamic State» (IS) has been forming from February 2006 till October 2006 as a result of the merging of several radical Sunni formations led by the Al Qaeda branch in Iraq. Then, the name was «the Islamic State of Iraq» (ISI), and the first leader was Jordanian al-Zarqawi. The founding charter, named «the Announcement for Humanity on the Birth of the Islamic State», was adopted at the same time. ISI had set itself the goal of taking over the Sunni part of Iraq and turning it into a militarized Islamic state.



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, (real name is Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri, a Sunni from Iraq), one of the leaders of Al Qaeda in Iraq, became the ISI commander in 2010. Al-Baghdadi studied Islamic studies at a state university in Baghdad and earned a PhD degree. He was captured by

the US Army in January 2004 and was imprisoned until December of the same year.

In April 2013, the «Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant» (ISIL), led by al-Baghdadi, was created by the merging of al Qaeda branches in Iraq and Syria, the «Islamic State of Iraq» and «Jabhat al-Nusra». The aim of this organization was to create an Islamic state on the territories of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. However, al-Julani made an announcement that «Jabhat al-Nusra» did not recognize al Baghdadi's leadership, but remained loyal to al Qaida's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, after which al-Nusra continued to act independently. At the same time, al-Zawahiri announced that ISIL does not act as a branch of Al Qaeda, which led to the splitting of the jihadist movement in Syria to two groups that were often in armed conflict until the meeting of al-Julani and al-Baghdadi in November 2014, when an agreement was reached about the termination of hostility. ISIL continued to operate in the territories of Iraq and Syria.

In June 2014, ISIL terrorists launched a massive offensive in Iraq and took control of several oil fields and the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk. Several divisions of the Iraqi military, a plethora of 30,000 people, fled to vastly inferior terrorists (according to data from Western sources, there were no more than 1,000 terrorists); they handed over their weapons which they had received from the Americans, including heavy artillery – tanks, artillery, armored combat vehicles, anti-aircraft weapons and huge ammunition supplies.

On June 29th 2014, ISIL announced the creation of the «Islamic Caliphate» in the occupied territories of Iraq and Syria, and leader of the organization Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was declared Caliph. At the same time, a decision was made to re-



Source: ReutersTV

name the group to the «Islamic State». Al Qaeda condemned this act, marking the final break between them and ISIL, as well as the beginning of their struggle for primacy in the jihadist movement.

There are significant differences in tactics between Al Qaeda and ISIL. Al Qaeda gave preference to a virtual war on the global scene against distant enemies, while ISIL leads a real war on the ground, focusing on internal enemies, primarily Shiite, Alawites, and others that are considered «infidels» in the opinion of the jihadists. Ideologically, Al Qaeda is most influenced by the ideologues of the «Muslim Brotherhood», such as Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azam, while ISIL is a follower of the fundamentalist Wahhabi movement whose most prominent religious ideologists were Ahmad ibn Hanbal (8th century), Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (13th century), and Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab (18th century) in honor of whom this ideology was named.



Photo: Beta/AP

According to estimates cited by the CIA, the number of ISIL members during the period of its rise was about 30 thousand people, while Iraqi authorities declare that it was a figure of 200 thousand. According to the estimates of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation for December 2015, ISIL numbers counted to 60 thousand people. At that time, citizens of more than 80 coun-



Source: Reuters

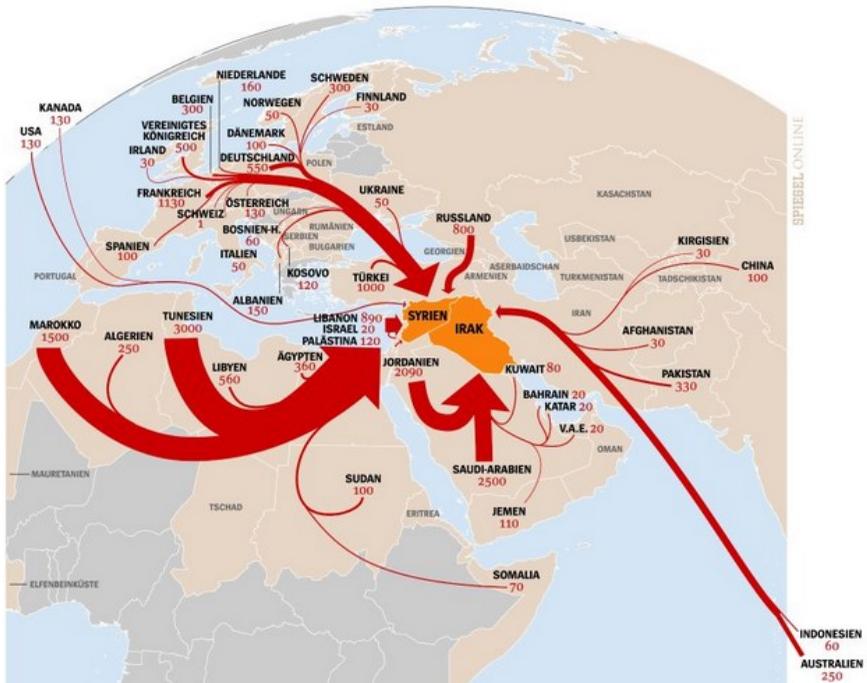
tries, including about 2,000 Russian citizens, fought in terrorist ranks.

According to data for January 2018, the total number of ISIL members in Syria and Iraq is in a range of 20 to 30 thousand people, evenly distributed between the territory of both countries, including several thousand foreign fighters¹¹.

¹¹ UN report on ISIL, AQ and associated groups (July). — <http://undocs.org/S/2018/705>

STATISTICS OF EXTREMISM

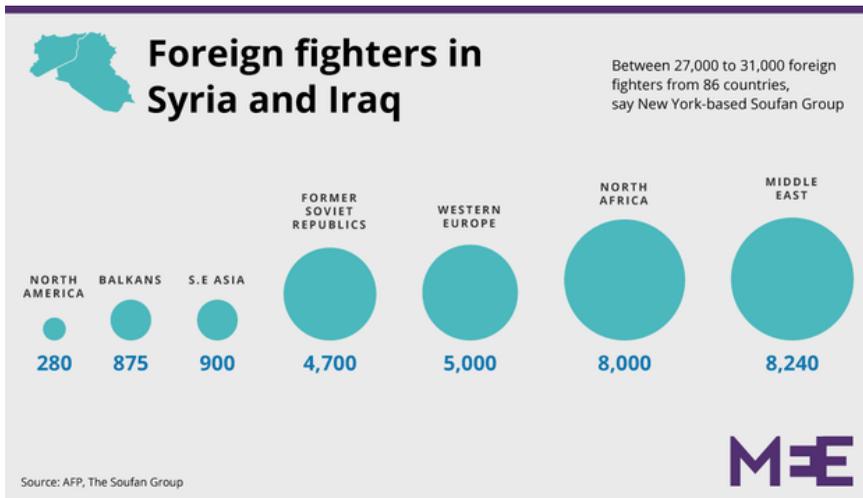
The participation of foreign fighters in military operations of various terrorist groups is one of the reasons of longstanding civil wars in the territories of Syria and Iraq, as well as numerous civilian casualties.



Source: Conflict News, 28th of November 2014

Unlike the local fighters in these terrorist organizations (who try to prevent the destruction of local settlements in which their relatives and friends live and who initially avoided participating in public executions) nothing stops foreign fighters. According to the disclosure of some fighters who came to Syria from Western Balkan countries, they claim to have repeatedly witnessed the fierce cruelty of foreign fighters, which they did not even face during the bloody civil wars in former Yugoslavia¹². Executors who cut off the heads of their victims in front of cameras were mainly citizens of foreign countries.

The first foreign fighters appeared in Syria in 2012, and in Iraq much earlier. According to Western data for June 2014, only in Syria there were already about 12,000 foreign nationals from 81 countries in various extremist groups, and in early 2016 – about 31,000 foreign fighters from 86 countries.



Source: <https://www.middleeasteye.net>, 13th of January 2016

¹² Jovo Martinovic. Balkan Jihadis Return, Disillusioned with ISIS «Caliphate» // Balkan In-sight. 2017. August 11. — www.balkaninsight.com

The number of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq varies year by year. In the summer of 2014, almost half of them were individuals who came to the Middle East from France, Great Britain, Belgium and Germany. The marginalization of local immigrant communities, especially from North African countries, played a major role in the radicalization of young people and influenced their decision to join the jihad in Syria and Iraq.

When it comes to the danger of returning fighters, it is necessary to mention that they have a rich experience of war, including the production of hand-made explosive devices, as well as continued contacts with terrorist organizations. This category actively uses its «image» of fighters against «infidels» and thus becomes the core of radicalization.

A particular problem for which a solution has not yet been found is the children who went to Syria with their parents or were born there. For example, according to data for the autumn of 2018, there were about 80 children from Kosovo and Metohija, of which 30 were born in jihadist camps¹³.



Source: <https://www.pravmir.ru>

Regarding foreign fighters from countries of North Africa and the Middle East, Tunisian citizens were the largest contingent, followed by the Saudis and the Jordanians. There were many citizens of Turkey, as well as a significant number of fighters from Morocco, Lebanon and Egypt. Among the countries of Southeast Asia, the most frequent were citizens of Indonesia and Malaysia.

The Uighurs, who prefer to fight as part of their own formations, keep to themselves. There are immigrants from Xinjiang

¹³ *Serbeze Haxhiaj, Elvis Nabolli. Parents of Albanian ISIS «Martyrs» Abandoned to Grief // Balkan Insight. 2018. January 15. — www.balkaninsight.com*

Uyghur Autonomous Region of China among them, as well as persons from numerous Uyghur diasporas living in various countries of the world.

Uighur fighters in Syria are mainly members of the armed «East Turkestan Islamic Movement» group. Their exact number is not known. Estimates vary from 2,000 to 5,000 fighters. Unlike other foreign fighters who joined al-Nusra or ISIL, the Uighurs established their own formations. They worked separately from other groups, but worked closely with other terrorist and anti-government formations.



Source: <http://anna-news.info>

For example, in Aleppo, the formation «Liva Turkestan» fought on the side of Al Qaeda. In the fighting that took place in this city, the Uighurs lost about 300 fighters. Their citizenship and countries of origin have not been precisely determined. According to Syrian moderate opposition, there are Uighurs among them who are citizens of the People's Republic of China, as well as Uighurs from numerous foreign diasporas. According to the statements of these same representatives of the Syrian moderate opposition, some places appeared where Uighur family members live compactly in the province of Idlib.



Source: <http://rusnext.ru>

Since 2014, the inflow of fighters from Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan has increased. Meanwhile the number of foreign fighters from Russia is significantly lower compared to European countries and

many Muslim countries, including post-Soviet Republics states. By the end of September 2015, with the launch of the active phase of Russia's Air Force operations in Syria and with the preventive action of Russian special services, the number of fighters with Russian passports in Syria and Iraq began decreasing drastically.

In the beginning, it was mostly young people that came to Syria and Iraq to participate in military operations on the side of various extremist formations, and later came entire families¹⁴. According to the Eurasian Analytical Club, the main recruitment networks in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and South Kazakhstan were the «Katibat al-Imam Bukhari» and «Jannat Oshiklari» groups. They acted in the interests of the «Miramsha Taliban Sure» (based in North Pakistan) and «Jabhat al-Nusra» (Syria).



Gulmurod Khalimov.
Source: akhbor-rus.com

According to the General Prosecutor's Office of Tajikistan, during the first months of 2016, around 1,000 citizens of the country were in the ranks of extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. Gulmurod Khalimov, the former chief of the special police units (OMON) was among them.

According to data from the publication «Caravanserai», there is approximately the same number of emigrants from Uzbekistan. One of them, Abdulkadir Masharipov, killed 39 people and wounded more than 70 civilians on January 1, 2017 in a nightclub in Istanbul. In June 2016, more than 40 people were killed during a

¹⁴ International seminar «Countering IS: reliance on traditions and new youth initiatives». Orenburg, 2016. — Materials of the Centre of Scientific and Analytical Information, Institute of Oriental Studies RAS.

terrorist attack at an Istanbul airport. One of the three attackers was an emigrant from Uzbekistan.

According to official data, about 600 people from Kyrgyzstan went to Syria and Iraq. From 2010 to 2016, only 431 inhabitants joined the terrorists from the region of Osh.

According to the beginning of January 2017, in the province of Idlib there was a formation made exclusively by the Kyrgyz people. They were well armed, possessing among other things weapons with silencers, and riding in Japanese-made jeeps equipped with heavy machine guns. This formation was part of the «Jabhat Fateh al-Sham» (former «al-Nusra»), which at that time changed its name to «Hayat Tahrir al-Sham». In order to fill their ranks, Kyrgyz leaders of the Idlib group actively used social media and video hosting services YouTube.

Since 2014, the number of women recruited into terrorist groups has risen considerably. Correspondingly, according to 2015, one third of about 500 Kazakhstani citizens who went to the Middle East, were women, mainly widows and divorced women, who remained alone with their problems. Additionally, they were not used only in support structures, but also as snipers and bombers. Unlike men, it was easier for women to present themselves as civilians.

According to the situation for July 1, 2018, there were 120 men, more than 250 women, and 500 underage children from Kazakhstan in Syria and Iraq. Many of them were killed, and their wives remained with children in the Syrian-Iraqi zone and found themselves in very difficult conditions in closed camps and prisons¹⁵.

According to data from the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), areas with a significant percentage of Muslim population in the Western Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and

¹⁵ Will the wives and children of Kazakhstani IS fighters be returned home. 2018 September 25. — <https://www.zakon.kz>



Source: *kavkazr.com*

groups that follow the ideology of Al Qaeda. «Balkan jihadists» are mostly unemployed young people between 20 and 35 years of age, originating from rural areas.

An analysis made by E. Polakova of the College for International Security Studies at the National Defense University in Washington, regarding factors and motives that influenced the decision of 33,815 foreign fighters from 103 countries to go to another state to fight, testifies that the previously listed characteristics are common to all of them¹⁷.

The specificity of the Western Balkans is reflected in the fact that it is primarily about members of marginalized groups in a divided society, with the example of the foreign fighters from other territories who went to the Western Balkans in the 1990s, primarily Bosnia and Hercegovina



Balkan fighters in Syria.

Source: *www.senica.ru*

¹⁶ *Jelena Beslin, Marija Ignjatijevic.* Balkan foreign fighters: from Syria to Ukraine. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). 2017. June. — <https://www.iss.europa.eu>

¹⁷ *Elena Polakova.* Driving Factors behind Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq. 2017. September 18. — <https://doi.org>

and Kosovo and Metohija, in order to fight against the ruling authorities in Belgrade¹⁸. This includes fighters from Afghanistan and several Arab countries that fought in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Many of them remain on the territory of the former Yugoslav republics, primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, as well as in Albania.

Most of the 1,000 fighters who went to the Middle East from the region of the Western Balkans between 2011 and 2016 came from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija (359 people) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (323 people), that presents the highest percentage per capita on the global level¹⁹. For example, in the same period about 400 foreign fighters were registered as comers from the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany²⁰. Following Kosovo and Metohija and Bosnia and Herzegovina was Macedonia (155 fighters), Albania (144), and Montenegro (23)²¹. One part of those who went were killed, another part returned home, and some others, according to the data for the end of 2018, were reported to have remained in the ince of Idlib in the ranks of irreconcilable Syrian opposition.

According to data received from the Kurdish People's Self-Defense Squads, after fighting for the city of Raqqa and destroying the detachment of the «Islamic



Source: www.zdravruussia.ru

¹⁸ *Andrea de Guttry, Christophe Paulussen, Francesca Capone. Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond. 2016. January. P. 5*

¹⁹ *Dusica Tomovic. Montenegro Opens Probes into ISIS Fighters, Recruiters // Balkan Insight. 2018. May 16. — www.balkaninsight.com*

²⁰ *Sean Reynolds, Mohammed Hafez. Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq. Terrorism and Political Violence. 2017. February 14.*

²¹ *Black Banners in the Western Balkans: Jihadis in Serbia, Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia / Migration- Research Institute. 2018. January 25. — <https://www.migraciokutato.hu>*

State» in that territory, they succeeded in capturing immigrants from some Balkan countries. They were mostly Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija, as well as fighters from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Taking into account the aforementioned specificities in which radicalization took place in the former Yugoslav republics, as well as the context of events, it can be assumed that these specificities contributed to an increase in the percentage of foreign fighters per capita from the Western Balkans. In addition, about 40% of foreign fighters from Kosovo and Metohija have previous criminal records, which are also the highest percentage among foreign fighters and can represent an additional motive for going to the Middle East to avoid criminal responsibility²².

According to the Slovak Institute for Strategic Policy, there are 250 people from the Western Balkans among the 5,600 foreign fighters returned to their home countries²³. A number of people from Western Balkan countries are still in the Middle East. This is also confirmed to the Institute for Oriental Studies RAS by their Syrian partners. By the end of 2018, it was recorded that citizens of Western Balkan countries were active in the detachment of the irreconcilable Syrian opposition in the province of Idlib and in the territory controlled by the Kurdish People's Self-Defense Squads. Among them there are about 80 children from Kosovo and Metohija, 30 of them were born in Syria. According to verified data, at the beginning of 2018, more than ten women and children, members of families of foreign fighters who went to Syria from the Rashka area in Serbia, found themselves in camps in northeastern part of the country.



²² Jelena Beslin, Marija Ignjatijevic. Balkan foreign fighters: from Syria to Ukraine. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). 2017. June. — <https://www.iss.europa.eu>

²³ Asya Metodjeva. Balkan Foreign Fighters Are Coming Back: What Should Be Done? // StratPol. 2018. February 10. — stratpol.sk

In accordance with the amended legislation in most of the countries of the Western Balkans, fighter-returnees from foreign battlefields are subject to criminal responsibility and are categorized as terrorists. This was not the case with the fighters who had returned earlier. However, practice proves that it is extremely difficult to prove participation in the war, bearing in mind that all potential participants traveled to countries of the Middle East within the framework of various work or education arrangements. In other words, a significant number of returnees from the battlefield is still beyond the reach of judicial or rehabilitation institutions of the state system. An additional problem is the family members who were, often even against their will, taken away by fighters because they were in complete economic and other types of dependence on their relatives who were recruited. Family members, especially children, need support, primarily in the organization of their return. It is also necessary to provide support to fighting persons who have returned, because they may otherwise represent the core of future radicalization.

Focusing only on the application of legislation to returnees, without adequate or sufficient care of those who did not willingly find themselves in the war zone, and in the absence of a policy of deradicalization and rehabilitation, as well as the absence of economic rights and opportunities, the basis for serious security challenges in the future can be formed. In line with the above, stronger cooperation is needed between countries, as well as among state institutions dealing with security, social support and protection issues, together with wider cooperation with local and international civil society organizations and religious institutions.

CAUSES OF RADICALIZATION

The causes of radicalization vary from country to country. According to expert estimates, in the countries of the CIS and the



Source: *vestikavkaza.ru*

Western Balkans, the main causes are the following factors: youth unemployment; corruption that is present in the government structures, as well as in enforcement bodies; growing gap in the society between the rich and poor (naturally angry) people. All of this presents a fertile ground for the emergence of radical ideas about the reorganization of society, which are as old as the world itself: «to take back what others have previously taken» and «seize everything and divide».

Broken people are good material for those who (acting from the shadows), and under the pretext of the protection of Islam, use them to achieve personal and selfish goals, in order to gain unlimited power in order to extract maximum profit. This applies not only to Syria, Iraq, Libya, but also to Kosovo and Metohija, Chechnya and other regions of the world.

Where state authorities are weakened or generally ineffective, it is easier to create various «evil jobs» – the production and sale of narcotics, human trafficking (modern slavery) and the trafficking of human organs, looting and selling of cultural and archaeological artifacts, or illegal oil trading. The turnover of such a business that takes place over bloodshed in Syria and Iraq reaches

astronomical sums. Al-Nusra, for example, kidnapped 13 nuns in a monastery in the ancient Christian city of Maaloula in central Syria in December 2013, and according to some reports it received \$16 million for their ransom and release under Qatar mediation.

Of course, the extremists project a very positive image about themselves. Their recruiters use traditional methods, as well as public media, blogospheres, and social media. At the same time, members of extremist ideologies clearly succeed in applying the propaganda principles of the Hitler's Germany: the more monstrous the lie, the easier it is to believe. Their order of things implies opposing obvious facts – insisting that black is white, and that white is black.

Owing to terrorists the Internet has become the most important instrument for forming ultra-extremist views of the world. Websites for almost all international terrorist organizations are active, and their materials of terrorist and extremist orientations is published in more than 40 languages. Terrorists actively use new technologies and software products that allow them to encode communication and information transfer, thus ensuring their anonymity.

The motives of people who want to join the extremists in Syria and Iraq are different: ideological and religious indoctrination, personal gain (as primary motives), or desire for adventure (there are those who, without realizing the essence of what is happening, come to the Middle East as romantics, and leave, if they are lucky enough to stay alive, as gangsters and killers who have smelled human blood believing that they will remain unpunished). Among those who plan to go to Syria and Iraq, there are many criminals and pathological killers incapable of living normally without cruelty and violence against others.



Source: vestikavkaza.ru

In recent years, terrorist attacks in Western Europe have been carried out mainly by persons with criminal records who have been subjected to the process of Islamic radicalization in prisons. These are the cases with the attacker in the Jewish school in the French city of Toulouse in 2012, with one of the attackers in Paris in 2015, with the terrorist who attacked the Christmas market in Berlin in 2016, as well as with the terrorist who is responsible for the attack on the Christmas festival in Strasbourg 2018.

According to the testimony of a fighter from Macedonia who was lucky enough to return from Syria alive, the main motive for his recruitment into the al-Nusra ranks and his departure to the Middle East was money. He had experience in fighting on the territory of former Yugoslavia and he was therefore promised \$2,000 a month, as well as benefits from robbing the civilian population. The highest sum of money he earned was from the smuggling of cultural artifacts from Syria that he sold in Turkey. Members of his group were mainly citizens of Western Balkan countries and the Caucasus region. Their fundamental goal was identical – to make as much money as possible²⁴.

West Point, US Military Academy, conducted a survey by posing the question: is religion the main motive for the departure of foreign fighters into the ranks of various terrorist organizations? 1,200 people were surveyed from many countries that have been to the Middle East or are willing to go there. The vast majority responded that religion is not the main motive that influenced their choice. The leaders of terrorist organizations, in fact, prefer those who have a very vague idea of religion.

A significant part of foreign fighters is those who for some reason were offended in their homelands by corrupt officials, or lost their way in life, and thus believed in the justice and equal opportunities promised to them by the extremists.

²⁴ *Jovo Martinovic*. Balkan Jihadis Return, Disillusioned with ISIS «Caliphate» // Balkan Insight. 2017. August 11. — www.balkaninsight.com



*Photo: Dabiq/ZUMA Wire/
GlobalLook Press*

Foreigners are most often used as «cannon fodder». Many such examples can be cited. Islamic State leaders and field commanders from the Al Qaeda structures in Syria do not have much mercy for foreign fighters, especially for Uighurs and those who came from Central Asia and the Western Balkans. An obvious example: during the battle for the Syrian city of Kobane in the summer of 2014, at

first, newly arrived CIS immigrants were treated by the field commanders like slaughter sheep. The result: dozens of dead. For ideologists-extremists, so-called infantry, including immigrants from the CIS and the Western Balkans, is plain wasted material. Unfortunately, this is not understood by those who are going to the Middle East to fight for the interests of others.

Those who are beginning to realize that they are being exploited, and are trying to get out of the game, extremists subject to demonstrative executions (including mass executions), proclaiming them as traitors and agents of foreign special services. They have punished people by cutting off their heads, arms, and legs, burning them and suffocating them. Furthermore, they did this not only in the «Islamic State», but also in the groups that followed the ideology of Al Qaeda. In Syria, terrorists from «Jabhat Fateh al-Sham», «Ahrar al-Sham» and many others have been actively involved in public executions.



Source: aranews.org / Aranews

FUNDING OF THE JIHADIST GROUPS



Photo: tengrinenews.kz

The financial and logistical support for the formation of «Jabhat al-Nusra» was initially done through the IS²⁵. After the breakup with the IS, Al Nusra secured significant financial resources from taxes, customs and fines imposed on local people, donations from abroad, primarily from the Gulf countries, from the

sale of oil, seizure of property of religious minority groups, as well as from robberies, abductions and smuggling. They also levied a tax on other rebel groups of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) that was paid in arms and ammunition. In this way, al-Nusra is believed to have appropriated about half of the ammunition and weapons sent to FSA in northern Syria by some countries from the West and the Gulf.

Part of the money was transferred to agents in Turkey who bought weapons literally all around the world. The deliveries were made at the crossing points at the Turkish-Syrian border that already nominally existed^{26, 27, 28}.

²⁵ Charles Lister. Profing Jabhat al-Nusra. Brookings Institution. 2016. — <https://www.brookings.edu>

²⁶ Belal Durani. Who is funding al-Nusra front in Syria? // Quora. 2015. September 12. — <https://www.quora.com>

²⁷ Nusra Front (Jabhat fateh al-Sham) / Counter Extremism Project. — <https://www.counterextremism.com>

²⁸ Terrorist group «Jabhat al-Nusra». Dossier. 2017. October 4. — <http://tass.ru/info/1678156>

Unlike the IS, Jabhat al-Nusra relied more on sources of funding from the outside and on donations by various sponsors who have provided financial support for its activities. The main inflows of finance came from wealthy sponsors of the Gulf States, primarily from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, as well as from Turkey.

Another way of securing funds for «Jabhat al-Nusra» was money from the ransom for hostages, among which there were also foreigners. Tens of millions of dollars have been acquired this way. According to some data, Qatar played an intermediary role in such hostage release operations.

The third component of «Jabhat al-Nusra» financing was the taxation of the local population and the collection of taxes from commercial transport via checkpoints at the border with Turkey (checkpoint «Bab al Khava»). An additional source of income was granting licenses to other non-governmental groups in order to use controlled border crossings for transportation weapons and ammunition delivered from Turkey.



Source: <https://x-true.info>

According to some western researchers, the leaders of the «Jabhat al-Nusra» initially tried to achieve not a complete territorial control, but as well as the «Islamic State» military and political domination. Establishing complete control over the territory was a long-term goal. In any case, the territories occupied by the al-Nusra units have fallen outside the jurisdiction of the legitimate authorities of Syria, which has led to the destruction of the territorial integrity of the country, its industry, agriculture, the banking system and the taxation system.

Illegal oil trade has become the main source of revenue for IS. In the territories under the control of jihadists, the IS had a monopoly over the production and delivery of oil. Experts point out the high level of organization of the oil business. The so-called police units formed from the fighters carried out control of the sites.

A significant part of the resources was acquired in the eastern part of Syria. Production of oil reached from 20 to 40 thousand barrels per day. The price of the acquired raw material was \$20-\$45 per barrel of oil. Revenues from oil sales reached up to 3 million dollars a day.

According to some data, the intermediary in the sale of oil was the Saudi National company Aramco, which issues stolen oil for additional production as a result of increased production in Saudi Arabia itself.



Source: <http://www.topnews.ru>

sponsors from the Persian Gulf countries, who support the struggle against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Information is also emerging about the involvement of the IS in the smuggling of heroin from Afghanistan to Europe, the production of synthetic drugs (especially captagon) in the territories controlled by jihadists, and trafficking in human organs.

An important source of income for the IS was the robbery of banks and the taking of hostages for ransom. Thus, about \$500 million in cash was taken solely from the banking vaults in Mosul. Other successful bank lootings have brought the organization, according to various es-

A significant source of income for the IS was the smuggling of valuable archeological objects and cultural artifacts. Terrorists were involved in robbery and racketeering, they also imposed the «Islamic tax» (a tax for refusing to accept the Sunni powers of Islam). According to some reports, the IS has also received money from private



Source: © AP Photo

timates, from \$900 million to \$2 billion. Concerning the taking of hostages for ransom, the IS is the world leader, earning over \$45 million in this field.

Participation in the implementation of illegal migrations from Middle East countries to European Union States has also brought significant revenues for the IS. A number of refugees have, with the help of IS and jihadists, secured themselves a path to Europe. Together with people who sought refuges from war, fighters with the task of carrying out terrorist operations outside the borders of the pseudo-caliphate territory and of the creation of so-called sleeping cells in EU countries have also migrated^{29, 30}.

According to research carried out by experts from the UN Security Council monitoring group and independent NGOs, the Islamic State sold oil and gas annually at \$950 million, wheat and rye at \$200 million, cement at \$100 million, cotton at \$20 million, and also actively traded with phosphates, sulfur and phosphoric acid.



Source: www.sknews.ru

Unlike Al Qaeda, the Islamic State has succeeded in creating some sort of a quasi-state. 127 cities and settlements on a large part of the territory of Iraq and Syria were under their control, including important facilities – military bases, equipped airports, dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and hydroelectric power plants (which allowed for them to dictate conditions for Shiites in Iraq and Kurds in Syria), and border crossings. In this way, the Islamic State secured access to natural resources, the oil production and processing in-

²⁹ *Duaa Binzafran*. The Effect of Non-State Actors on Middle East Politics. 2016. — <https://csuchico-dspace.calstate.edu>

³⁰ *Abdul Basit*. Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria – Why So Many? Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses. 2014. October. Vol. 6. No. 9. Pp. 4–8. — <https://www.jstor.org>

dustry, which gave the Islamic State the possibility of acquiring significant financial resources in order to increase their investment in terrorist activities^{31,32}. IS plans included the establishment of pseudo-sovereignty on occupied territories. If the jihadists had been able to implement this idea, it would have marked the beginning of an obliteration of existing state borders among the countries of the Middle East and a complete reconfiguration of the region.

The forces standing behind terrorist groups planned to redefine the existing state borders in the Middle East in line with the ethno-confessional principle. According to their plans, it was deemed necessary to form an Alawite enclave in the west of Syria, a Sunni region controlled by Islamist groups and jihadists in the center of the country, and in the northeast – a Kurdish enclave.



Photo: politpuzzle.ru

Iraq was destined to same fate: to be divided into Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish areas³³.

The Islamic State created its own global financial network. It was used for the procurement of weapons and ammunition, the recruitment of volunteers around the world, the providing payments of all types of financial operations conducted by the IS, and the financing of terrorist attacks that were carried out outside the borders of the Middle East³⁴.

³¹ The financing of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) / European Parliament. 2017. September. — <https://www.europarl.europa.eu>

³² *Saran Almkhtar, Troy Griggs, K. K. Rebecca Lal, Tim Wallace.* The Islamic state: From insurgency to Rogue State and Back. 2017. October 22. — <https://www.nytimes.com>

³³ *Kathy Cilsinan.* The Confused Person's Guide to the Syrian Civil War // The Atlantic. 2015. October 29. — <https://www.theatlantic.com>

³⁴ Coalition forces kill financial facilitator in Syria. 2017. June 23. — <https://frontnews.eu>

The victory over IS and Al Qaeda in Syria and Iraq does not mean that the threat of such types of jihadist groups in these countries is completely eliminated. According to many experts, with the collapse of the Islamist pseudo-caliphate created in the Middle East, the threat of jihadists is not diminished, but will mark the end of one phase and the beginning of a second phase of the struggle with this phenomenon³⁵.

According to the United Nations report from August 2018, there are between 20,000 and 30,000 Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria, including a large number of foreigners³⁶. Renowned analyst at IHS Markit, Columb Strack, believes that the organization is changing its tactics and switching to new forms and modes of operation, and that the network will survive and continue to operate under a new identity³⁷.

³⁵ Lidia Khalit, Rodger Shanahan. Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: the Day After. Lowy Institute. 2016. September 13. — <https://www.lowyinstitute.org>

³⁶ IS conflict: Up to 30,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq – UN. 2018. August 14. — <https://www.bbc.com>

³⁷ Saran Almukhtar, Troy Griggs, K. K. Rebecca Lal, Tim Wallace. The Islamic state: From insurgency to Rogue State and Back. 2017. October 22. — <https://www.nytimes.co>

FOREIGN SPONSORS

The activity of terrorist structures in Syria and Iraq would not be so effective without interference and support from the outside. From the very beginning of the conflict, certain external forces considered that all armed groups, without any exception, waging a war against legitimate governments, can contribute to the achievement of their geopolitical goals. A number of states provided direct assistance to certain rebel groups, while some other countries did not provide direct assistance, but instead allowed the provision of financial, logistical and other assistance by their citizens, as well as the recruitment and transfer of foreign fighters.



Photo: ruwikipedia

The governments of the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar from the very beginning have openly helped arming anti-government groups, and some of them have given direct help to Islamist groups. Saudi Arabia has provided tremendous assistance to all Islamic armed groups that have accepted Puritan Wahhabic Islam (e.g. Jaysh al-Islam – the Army of Islam).

Qatar and Turkey primarily assisted the «Muslim Brotherhood» and some other Islamic armed groups. In 2012, the Foreign Minister of Qatar said in a speech to the International Institute for Security Studies that he was opposed to any group being excluded (from the assistance program) and identified with Al Qaeda.

In June 2014, the authorities of Iraq officially accused Saudi Arabia of funding ISIL, which had already captured by that time a vast territory in the north and west of Iraq. Baghdad blamed the Saudi authorities for the mass murders that terrorists carried out against the population of Iraq. Mediation functions were carried out by Turkey. Its territory has become a kind of base for the deployment of activities to overthrow the regime of Bashar Al-Assad.

According to many sources, the United States and its allies in some countries of the European Union and the Middle East had, bought weapons and ammunition for certain rebel groups, and organized their delivery, trained fighters, supplied them with intelligence, provided medical assistance and enabled the treatment of wounded people in health institutions in Turkey, Israel and other countries of the region, as well as financed and facilitated propaganda activities. However, with this assistance, well-trained fighters often ended up in the hands and ranks of terrorist groups.

In his address to Harvard students in 2014, Vice President of the United States Joseph Biden caused major controversy with his statement on the situation in Syria. He particularly pointed out that: «Our biggest problem was our allies... Turks... Saudis, Emirates, etc., what were they doing? They were so determined to take down (Syrian President Bashar al) Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did they do? They «poured» hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad, but it all ended in the hands of al-Nusra and Al Qaeda, as well as extremist structures among jihadists who came from other parts of the world».



Photo: Hamid Khatib/ Reuters

On the same occasion, Biden said that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan admitted to him that Turkey made mistake in allowing too many foreign fighters to cross its border into Syria. Biden later explained that he did not mean that the US allies deliberately contributed to strengthen IS and other extremist organizations in Syria.

On the order of President Obama, the CIA carried out a secret training program for the fighters of the Free Syrian Army since early 2013, which, according to the Washington Post, cost nearly \$1 billion a year and involved training, cash delivery, intelligence, and certain types of weapons. The Pentagon and the State Department have simultaneously implemented their training and support programs for the armed Syrian opposition.

It is necessary to mention the case linked with the fighters of the Free Syrian Army under the command of Colonel Nedim al-Hasan, and also with deserters from the Syrian Army, who were trained and armed by US Army and UK military instructors in Jordan and Turkey. A group of 100 fighters was sent to Syria from Jordan at the end of June 2015 and a group of 54 fighters was brought from Turkey on July 12, 2015. After several weeks, Al Nusra attacked the camps of these groups and posted on social media photos of US weapons and equipment that were confiscated.



In September of the same year, 75 Syrian fighters trained and armed by the US Army were sent to Syria from Turkey. Virtually on the same day, they voluntarily surrendered new vehicles, weapons, and ammunition to the fighters of Al Nusra.

A confidential US intelligence report from 2012, parts of which have been declassified in 2015, reveals that US intelligence services predicted the strengthening of Al Qaeda and ISIL in 2012. The report specifically states: «Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood

and Al Qaeda are the strongest forces leading the armed rebellion in Syria... The West, the Gulf states and Turkey [who] support the [Syrian] opposition... there is the possibility of establishing a declared or non-declared Salafist principality in Eastern Syria (al-Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor), and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want in order to isolate the Syrian regime...».

These predictions came true two years later when ISIL violently established the Islamic Salafist government exactly on that territory. The report confirms that the West, the Gulf countries and Turkey largely believed that al Qaeda and ISIL were useful tools for regime change in Syria.

According to data from Western experts, the purchase of weaponry for armed opposition groups that were considered acceptable was organized in the countries of Eastern Europe. They purchased automatic and sniper rifles, 7.62 and 12.7 mm machine guns, anti-tank weapons, T-55 and T-72, ammunition, including artillery and multi-barrel rocket launcher «Grad» in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Montenegro, Slovakia and Romania, with money from the Gulf countries for several years. Transactions totaled over 1.2 billion euros³⁸.

In Bulgaria, for example, in armaments factories where orders for



May 2017. Motorboat Hanne Danica delivers weapons from Burgas. There are two BTRs on board. The photo was taken by a Turkish blogger when passing the boat through the Bosphorus (twitter.com)

³⁸ Ivan Angelovski, Miranda Patrucic, Lawrence Marzouk. Revealed: the £1bn of weapons flowing from Europe to Middle East // The Guardian. 2016. July 27. — <https://www.theguardian.com>

the war in Syria were made, was an increase in the number of employees. Their average salary was increased two and a half times, to \$837, – one and a half times higher than the national average³⁹.

The weapons were delivered by air and sea from the ports of Bulgaria and Romania to some Gulf States and neighboring countries of Syria. Then it would be redirected to Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.

Due to Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) data three cargo vessels belong to the Command of special operations USA (SOCOM) were transporting «weapons and ammunition intended to support special operations and their missions around the world» from the ports of Bulgaria and Romania to identified ports of the Red sea⁴⁰.

The most profitable jobs were carried out in 2015, precisely during the time of the battle when the fate of Damascus was practically being decided. Some countries denied allegations of the sale of weapons, despite plentiful evidence that emerged on the blogosphere. Croatia particularly emphasized its non-involvement. However, Robert Ford, former US Ambassador to Syria (from 2011 to 2014), stated that, according to his data, Zagreb achieved such an agreement in 2012, receiving money from Saudi Arabia



Source: <https://www.sana.sy>

for weapons. According to the ambassador, weapons purchased with the help of the USA/CIA by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan and the UAE were delivered to two Military Operations Command posts (MOC) in Jordan and Turkey, and then were

³⁹ Bulgaria's Plants Prosper due to Arms Shipments to Terrorists in Syria // South Front. 2017. March 11. — <https://www.southfront.org>

⁴⁰ Ivan Angelovski, Miranda Patrucic, Lawrence Marzouk. Revealed: the £1bn of weapons flowing from Europe to Middle East // The Guardian. 2016. July 27. — <https://www.theguardian.com>

shipped to Syrian opposition groups that were considered acceptable⁴¹.

Malek al-Kurdi, Colonel of the Free Syrian Army (the Western ally in the fight against the regime of Bashar al-Assad), stated in an interview with Dilyana Gaitandzieva for a Bulgarian newspaper that Saudi Arabia, alongside special services from 15 countries, delivers weapons to fighters in Syria. According to the claims of Malek al-Kurdi, at the head of these operations are the special services of the United States, Great Britain, France and the Persian Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar)⁴².

In December of 2016, D. Gaitandzieva visited Aleppo, where she discovered (in a part of the city that was freed from the terrorists) warehouses with containers of weapons and ammunition produced in Bulgaria. Among them there were also 122 mm MBRL «Grad» rockets. The journalist published photographs of these rockets and other weapons produced in factories of the military-industrial complex of Eastern European countries in Bulgarian newspapers and on her website «Live Journal».



*Dilyana Gaytandzhieva.
Source: <https://trud.bg>*

Weapon deliveries from Eastern European countries are ongoing. On December 29, 2018, a ship for bulk cargo *Stade*, registered in the Netherlands and under the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, transported another delivery of weapons and ammunition for Syrian anti-government

⁴¹ Eastern Europe and the lucrative Middle East arms trade // DW. 2016. August 9. — <http://www.dw.com>

⁴² Tracing Bulgarian Arms Shipments to Syrian Islamists // South Front. 2017. April 5. — <https://www.southfront.org>

forces from Bulgarian port Burgas to the Saudi port of Jeddah on the Red Sea⁴³.

Among the various types of weapons that the CIA delivered to the Free Syrian Army and other opposition groups through its program operating in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey were anti-tank rocket systems TOW. These systems have become an important tool for opposition groups, since they do not have air support and armored vehicles such as those available to Damascus. TOW systems can effectively destroy various armored targets on the battlefield. Unlike other anti-tank weapons, and especially RPGs, TOWs can operate at significant distances. It was exactly this kind of armed system that destroyed the Russian MI-8 helicopter in November 2015, that was on the rescue operation of the Russian bomber Su-24, which was shot down by Turkish Air Force fighter jets.

According to Syrian blogger Hasan Mustafa, at least 42 Syrian anti-government groups are supplied with anti-tank rocket TOWs from Saudi Arabia, delivered by the United States. These rocket systems have come to Syria via Turkish and Jordanian Military operation centers (MOCs), which cooperate with Western and local intelligence services⁴⁴.

Saudi Arabia could not hand over American TOWs to rebels without approval from the CIA. Opposition squads had to submit requests for the acquisition of anti-tank rocket systems. After that, they were delivered in small batches.

In order to continue the weapon supply, CIA-controlled groups recorded their use on video, and returned empty cannisters to the nearest operational command headquarters so as to confirm that the missiles were not sold or shared with groups that were not under American control. This procedure ensured that all anti-tank

⁴³ Consignment of Bulgarian weapons for Syrian militants was delivered to Saudi Arabia. EurAsia Daily. 2018. December 30. — <https://eadaily.com>

⁴⁴ *Hasan Mustafa*. The Moderate Rebels: A Growing List of Vetted Groups Fielding BGM-71 Tow Anti-Tank Guided Missiles. 2015. May 8. — <https://www.hasanmustafas.wordpress.com>

rocket systems would remain available to those CIA-controlled formations (not counting those TOWs that could be hijacked by competing forces). Some of these recordings later surfaced on the internet.

The policies and attitudes of the United States, the UK, France and other Western countries have been changed after Al Qaeda and ISIL carried out a series of terrorist attacks in those countries, and when jihadists started ritually cutting off the heads of Western hostages, and then posting videos of the acts on social media.

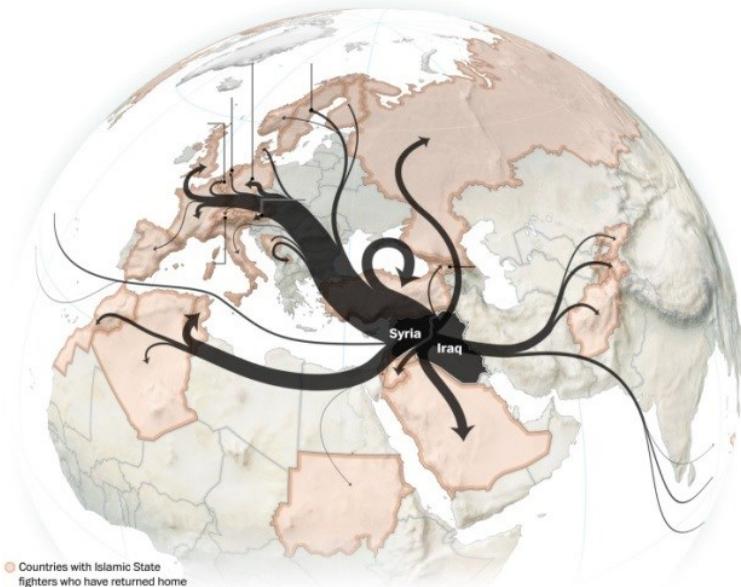
The Gulf States have also to some extent changed their policy and attitude towards ISIL after it established control and rule in the territory of Iraq and Syria, becoming a direct threat to the monarchies in the Gulf.



*ATGM «TOW» in the hands of fighters.
<https://imp-navigator.livejournal.com>*

TERRORISTS RETURN

A great danger is posed by the surviving foreign fighters who often return, after obtaining war experience in Syria and Iraq, with concrete instructions on carrying out terrorist activities in the territories of their countries. Fighters are returning with a changed way of thinking, which is why they begin to consider their countries as enemy territory⁴⁵.



The routes of militants return.
Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com>

⁴⁵ Daniel Buman. Frustrated foreign fighters // Brookings. 2017. July 13. — <https://www.brookings.edu>.

The inflow of foreign volunteers dropped significantly with the start of the Russian Air Force operations in Syria. About 18,000 of them were killed, and some managed to escape. Some of them were transferred to other countries of North Africa and Middle East – Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan. Some have settled in transit countries, apparently expecting to get new «offers». Nevertheless, the system of recruiting new volunteers, in whose organization huge money has been invested, continues to function.

In 2016, two Kyrgyz nationals were arrested in Turkey, who organized a countrywide illegal migration channel for foreign nationals using counterfeit Kyrgyz passports. Their smuggling network was discovered in May 2016 after 98 Chinese citizens were stopped at the airport in Istanbul who had fake passports of the Kyrgyz Republic. They planned to fly to Jeddah (Saudi Arabia).

The State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan reported on several occasions in 2016 about the retention of its nationals who underwent training in the Middle East for diversion-terrorist attacks and participated in military operations in Syria in the ranks of the extremist formations. During the hearings, the detained admitted that they had returned home with the task of creating underground cells in Kyrgyzstan with the aim of committing terrorist actions in their own country.

According to Israeli sources, in January 2017, leaders of the Islamic State issued a confidential order. According to one of its points, about 6,500 foreign fighters (primarily citizens of European countries) were granted permission to return home from Syria and Iraq. Jihadist leaders have taken it upon themselves to cover the payment of travel expenses for their return. Upon returning home, combatants were advised to



*Truck ramming a Christmas market in Berlin.
<https://www.dw.com>*

begin to committing terrorist attacks and diversions at massive gathering sites, in traffic infrastructure facilities, using terrorist strategy and tactics developed by Al Qaeda, and «perfected» by the IS. For example, according to official data, individuals who fought in Syria in the ranks of various terrorist groups, have in recent times been, involved in more than 80 terrorist activities in France.

Among the terrorist attacks carried out by terrorists with experience gained in Syria and Iraq, the tragic events in Belgium, France, Great Britain, Libya, Turkey, Pakistan, Thailand, and Indonesia have to be highlighted. Terrorism as a global threat does not pardon neither the developed country, nor the developing world, nor non-Muslim or Muslim countries. In addition to terrorist attacks, jihadists returning home promote extremism and religious radicalism, recruiting new fighters using various financial incentives.

It is not only returnee fighters that deal with terrorist attacks and the spread of terrorism and extremism, but also those who have been found under their influence or propaganda. This is precisely the profile of the people who committed terrorist attacks using cargo vehicles in France (Nice) and Germany (Berlin).

Only in 2018, about 550 ex-fighters of the Islamic State returned to European countries, according to estimates by some experts⁴⁶.

Therefore, the issue of the returning of foreign fighters poses a threat in terms of a short-term perspective, as well as a long-term challenge. It is unlikely that the conflicts in Syria and Iraq will be resolved in the near future. There is a danger that extremist structures will survive and adapt to new conditions by adopting improved methods of terrorism, including the use of weapons of mass destruction and biological weapons in populated areas.

⁴⁶ *Jalal Zainedine*. Where Are ISIS Fighters Following Its Military Defeat? 2018. November. — <https://syria.chathamhouse.org>

CONCLUSION

The authorities of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Serbia have a fairly objective and complete view on how the citizens of their countries fall into the ranks of extremist and terrorist



groups in Syria and Iraq. Judging by the official announcements of the national security authorities, comprehensive measures are being taken to curb terrorist financing, targeted actions are being taken to combat the spread of terrorist propaganda, to discredit terrorist ideology, and to prevent the recruitment of people from vulnerable social categories into terrorist activities. National security authorities protect the information space of their countries from penetrating ideas that justify terrorist activity.

For example, in 2017, the measures implemented by Roskomnadzor (the Federal Communications Service, Information Technologies and Mass Communications), the Interior Ministry and the Federal Security Service of Russia enabled the blocking and removal of illegal content from 61,700 websites. Based on court decisions, in the Internet Resource Register containing information forbidden for distribution, there are registered about 10,000 websites and domain names of websites with terrorist and extremist content. Among them are those through which agents of international terrorist organizations carried out recruitment operations and organize logistical support.

These and other measures allow for preventive action against terrorist crimes that are already in the phase of preparation. How-

ever, it is not enough to rely solely on the work of special services. They will never replace institutions of civil society, nor clergy, nor agencies of public information.

No one should remain alone with their misfortune or problem. Every citizen should be treated with special care by the head of local administration, district police officers, social workers, and head of the village church or imam of the village mosque. Particular attention should be paid to young people and broken families, primarily to those in which a woman is expected to take full care of children, as well as to those who are the most vulnerable by the impact of terrorist ideology.



Source: rnk-concept.ru/24016

These are people who have been deprived of liberty or have returned from an area where they were deprived of liberty, supporters of radical religious movements. Individual work with them by representatives of local authorities, police, and clergy, will allow preventive measures that involve providing assistance and support in case of need.



Source: <http://cherepovets-eparhia.ru>

their problems in difficult moments, – no one will ever bite the bait, nor fall into any traps or be persecuted by extremists.

If a person has a job, if their personal safety is ensured, as well as the safety of his family and friends, if there is the possibility of receiving free medical aid, education (everyone deserves it), a dignified future for children, the possibility of speaking to somebody about

Terrorism does not emerge in a vacuum, but in the wider context of the extremist culture. Therefore, in cooperation with religious and influential public figures, the state should adopt and implement a comprehensive plan of action to combat and prevent not only terrorism, but also radicalism and extremism among young people and members of certain vulnerable communities.

Responding to the emergence of Islamic extremism with another form of extremism should not be allowed, and it is important to support and encourage the presence of respected religious leaders of the Islamic community in Serbia and Russia in the media and state institutions, which should be the main defense against the spread of extremist ideas and radicalization of the youth.

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