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Jihadism in Finland

Leena Malkki and Juha Saarinen

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Abstract	<p>The aim of this study is to provide a broad overview of jihadism in Finland in the 2010s. The study is based on open source data that has been supplemented with interviews. Jihadist activism in Finland remains relatively low scale when compared to other western European countries, but the number of individuals involved has grown significantly during the 2010s. The most important factor contributing to this has been the conflict in Syria and Iraq, which, in addition to mobilising new activists, has had a uniting effect on an otherwise fragmented milieu.</p> <p>Despite this, the Finnish jihadist milieu is still mostly fragmented and unorganised. In Finland, jihadist activism consists mainly of small-scale, non-violent support activities. The most significant development has been the notable increase in travel to conflict zones abroad. The only jihadist attack to-date was the knife attack in Turku in August 2017, and there have been no publicly known serious plots.</p> <p>As of early 2019, the most active growth phase connected to the conflict in Syria and Iraq seems to be losing its momentum. The activism that emerged in connection with the conflict has, however, had an indelible impact on the jihadist milieu in Finland.</p> <p>The study was carried out alongside the <i>Jihadist online communication and Finland</i> study.</p>		
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Tiivistelmä	<p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on muodostaa yleiskuva jihadistisesta liikehdinnästä Suomessa 2010-luvun aikana. Tutkimus perustuu avoimesti saatavilla olevaan aineistoon, jota on täydennetty haastatteluilla. Jihadistinen aktivismi on Suomessa edelleen moniin muihin Länsi-Euroopan maihin verrattuna vähäistä, mutta siinä mukana olleiden määrä on kasvanut merkittävästi 2010-luvulla. Suurin yksittäinen liikehdinnän kehittymiseen vaikuttanut tekijä on ollut Syyrian ja Irakin konflikti, joka on uusien aktivistien mobilisoinnin lisäksi toiminut hajanaista miljöötä yhdistävänä tekijänä.</p> <p>Jihadistinen toiminta Suomessa on tästä huolimatta edelleen enimmäkseen hajanaista ja epäorganisointunutta. Suurin osa aktivismista on varsin pienimuotoista ja väkivallatonta tukitoimintaa. Merkittävin muutos toimintamuodoissa on konfliktialueelle matkustamisen huomattava yleistymisen. Ainoa Suomessa tapahtunut jihadistinen isku on Turun puukkoisku elokuussa 2017 eikä julkisesti ole tiedossa vakavasti otettavia iskuyrityksiä tai iskusuunnitelmia.</p> <p>Aktiivisin Syyrian ja Irakiin konfliktiin kytkeytynyt kasvuvaihe näyttää alkuvuodesta 2019 olevan hiipumassa. Konfliktin yhteydessä nähty aktivismi on kuitenkin jättänyt jälkensä jihadistisen toiminnan kenttään Suomessa.</p> <p>Tutkimus on tehty samanaikaisesti <i>Jihadistinen verkkoviestintä ja Suomi</i> -tutkimuksen kanssa.</p>		
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Referat	<p>Målet med denna undersökning är att skapa en allmän bild av jihadistiska rörelser i Finland under 2010-talet. Undersökningen baserar sig på öppet tillgängligt material som har kompletterats med intervjuer. I Finland sker jihadistisk aktivism fortfarande i liten utsträckning jämfört med många andra länder i Västeuropa, men antalet personer som deltagit i den har ökat betydligt på 2010-talet. Den största enskilda faktor som påverkat utvecklingen av rörelserna har varit konflikten i Syrien och Irak, som förutom att mobilisera nya aktivister också har varit en förenande faktor för den splittrade miljön.</p> <p>Trots det är den jihadistiska verksamheten i Finland fortfarande i huvudsak splittrad och oorganiserad. Största delen av aktivismen är småskalig och icke-våldsam stödverksamhet. Den största ändringen i verksamhetsformerna är att det har blivit betydligt vanligare att resa till konfliktområdet. Den enda jihadistiska attacken i Finland har varit knivattacken i Åbo i augusti 2017, och i offentligheten finns det inte information om några seriösa försök till eller planer på attacker.</p> <p>Det mest aktiva skedet för utvidgning i samband med konflikten i Syrien och Irak ser ut att mattas av i början av 2019. Den aktivism som vi har sett i samband med konflikten har dock bestående satt sin prägel på den jihadistiska verksamheten i Finland.</p> <p>Undersökningen har gjorts samtidigt med undersökningen <i>Jihadistisk webbkommunikation och Finland</i>.</p>	
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TO THE READER

Jihadist activism has been the subject of considerably more attention in Finland in recent years, especially as a result of the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the related foreign fighter phenomenon. However, the absence of research-based information has made fact-based public debate and policy planning difficult. The purpose of this report is to provide the first overview of jihadist activism in Finland in the 2010s.

The report has been commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior and it is mainly intended to support policies aimed at preventing radicalisation into violent extremism. We hope that the publication will also find a wider readership among those interested in learning more about the phenomenon.

The report has been produced by the same research team as the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*, which was simultaneously published. The report on jihadist online communication complements the overview of jihadist activism by examining the online content produced by jihadist groups and their supporters and its links to Finland.

The authors would like to extend warm thanks to all persons interviewed for this study and those contributing to its preparation. Our special thanks go to the steering group chaired by Tarja Mankkinen from the Ministry of the Interior, whose comments were of considerable help throughout the research. The steering group comprised Marko Juntunen (University of Helsinki), Timo Kilpeläinen (National Police Board), Marja Tiilikainen (Migration Institute of Finland), and Oussama Yousfi (Radinet).

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Leena Malkki and Juha Saarinen
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of jihadism in Finland and how it has developed in the 2010s. As jihadism is a highly international phenomenon and Finland is located at the periphery of these activities, this report begins with an examination of the evolution and manifestations of jihadism in Europe and globally. The study is based on open data sources, which have been supplemented with interviews.

When compared to many other Western European countries, jihadism in Finland is still a small-scale phenomenon. However, the number of individuals involved in jihadist activities has grown significantly during the 2010s. The single most important factor contributing to this trend has been the conflict in Syria and Iraq. This period of upheaval has prompted more individuals to travel from Finland to the conflict zone than any previous armed conflict involving jihadist groups. Whereas in the past, jihadist activities in Finland were disparately concentrated around various conflicts and issues, the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the caliphate project of ISIS have served as a unifying cause for activists and supporters from different backgrounds.

The influx of asylum seekers to Finland in 2015–2016 has undoubtedly increased the number of persons with ties to jihadism. Accurate estimates of how and to what extent this phenomenon has impacted the situation in Finland are hard to produce by relying solely on open sources. The growing interest in jihadism among women and women becoming more actively involved in the movement may have had a similar effect.

Jihadism in Finland remains a predominantly small-scale and non-violent phenomenon, primarily involving recruitment and fundraising. A notable increase in travel to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq is the most significant change in the nature of these jihadist activities. To-date, the stabbing incident in Turku in August 2017 is the only jihadist attack to have taken place in Finland. However, the perpetrator is not known to have links with jihadist networks in Finland. Moreover, there have been no known serious terrorist attempts or plans to carry out attacks in Finland. There have, however, been several cases of threats to carry out attacks having been posted online, although these threats have later proved unfounded.

Even though there has been increasingly extensive networking among people interested in jihadism in Finland in recent years, jihadist activism in the country is still quite fragmented and disorganised. There are still no organisations openly engaged in jihadist activism in Finland. Indeed, there appears to be only a few key activists that are capable of and willing to organise and encourage these activities. It should

nevertheless be remembered that such activists tend to be very security-conscious and prefer to operate clandestinely.

While men still constitute the majority of all individuals involved in jihadism, there are also indications in Finland that women are becoming increasingly interested and actively involved in jihadist activities. This is most evident in the context of the mobilisation of individuals to Syria and Iraq.

The opportunities provided by social media have also influenced Finland's relation to the international global jihadist movement. It has become easier to obtain jihadist material and to establish connections with people over regardless of geographical location. Such activities are still possible even though they have become increasingly difficult after jihadist communications have moved to closed channels.

However, physical connections established with, for example, friends and family members, are still the most probable route to involvement in jihadist activities. A potentially significant change to this is the way in which current and former residents of Finland now maintain closer links with jihadist groups operating in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. This may make it easier to channel more support from Finland to ongoing conflicts in other parts of the world.

The most active growth phase connected to the conflict in Syria and Iraq would appear to have ended in early 2019. However, the growth in jihadist activism accompanying the conflict has left a permanent mark on the jihadist milieu in Finland. A similar period of strong growth is not expected in the near future.

It is worth bearing in mind that there are still substantial gaps in our knowledge of jihadism in Finland. Open sources offer little information about the topic and, even after the initial overview of jihadism in Finland provided by the present study, there remains a need for further research. The lack of information does not merely apply to the body of knowledge in the public domain. In fact, it would appear that not even the authorities currently have a comprehensive sense of the extent to which individuals are mobilising to Syria and Iraq. Indeed, it is likely that we will only fully understand recent events in the future.

1 Introduction

In recent decades, political and religious extremism has been considered to be a marginal phenomenon in Finland. Moreover, jihadism has historically been viewed as a distant problem. In Toby Archer's report *International Terrorism and Finland* published in 2004, the threat of jihadist terrorism in Finland was considered low. This was also the view of the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO). When Finland started developing its counter-terrorism capabilities after 2001, the main motivation was to ensure that the obligations specified in international counter-terrorism agreements were met.¹

Attention on jihadism has substantially increased in recent years. The main reason for this has been the fact that people living in Finland have also begun traveling to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq to take part in the activities of jihadist groups (especially ISIS). Foreign fighters received a great deal of publicity in summer 2014, when a man who had travelled from Finland to Syria appeared in an ISIS video. The extensive news coverage of the ISIS-linked attacks in Europe in recent years, changes in threat assessments on Finland, and the trials in Finland of individuals suspected of terrorist offences have also aroused attention and concern.

Despite growing interest in the topic and extensive media coverage, the nature, forms and background of jihadism in Finland have only been superficially touched upon. Furthermore, only a limited number of books on jihadism have been published in Finnish. One purpose of this report is to fill some of these knowledge gaps. Indeed, this report has been written as an introduction to the phenomenon of jihadism for those readers interested in societal phenomena who are unfamiliar with research literature on this topic.

The aim of the report is to provide an overview of the manifestations and development of jihadism in Finland, especially in the 2010s. As jihadism is a highly global phenomenon, and Finland is located at the periphery of the related activities, we also examine the evolution and forms of jihadism in Europe and globally. The report was commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior and its main purpose is to support policies aimed at preventing radicalisation into violent extremism. It is also hoped that the document will provide those working with the phenomenon of jihadism and the public at large with much-needed information. For this reason, every effort has been made to avoid the use of complicated academic expressions and the inclusion of

¹ Leena Malkki, 'International pressure to perform: Counterterrorism policy development in Finland', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 39, no. 4 (2016).

Arabic terms. Indeed, attempts have been made throughout this report to insert an English translation of these terms (in brackets).²

The same team of researchers has also written the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland* and the two documents have been published simultaneously. The report on jihadist online communication complements the picture of jihadism by examining the online material produced by jihadist groups and their supporters and the way in which this material relates to Finland.

1.1 Research topic and objectives

The term jihadism refer to a phenomenon that is closely associated with many of the violent attacks carried out in Europe in recent years, such as the attacks against the office of the Charlie Hebdo newspaper and the Bataclan concert hall in Paris (2015), Brussels Airport and metro (2016) and the Berlin Christmas market (2016). The stabbings in the centre of Turku in August 2017 are also part of the same phenomenon. Jihadist activism is also the main reason that so much attention is currently being paid to the prevention of violent radicalisation.

Jihadist activism refers to the activities of such groups as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.³ In jihadism, the aim is to overthrow the existing social and world order and to establish a society based on Islam. Justifying violence and the view of what an Islamic society should be like and how it should be established are based on the salafist interpretation of Islam. Jihadism and salafism are examined in more detail in the next chapter.

This study focuses on analysing the activism carried out within the jihadist framework. This includes various modes of action. In violent activism, which has attracted the most attention, individuals have travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters and terrorist attacks have been planned and carried out outside the

² The original Finnish language report used the Finnish translations of Arabic names and terms that have become established in the Finnish media. Translations of terms that did not already have established Finnish translations deferred to those already in common use in the English language research literature on this topic. In the case of organisations, media outlets, or names of individual people (e.g. of foreign fighters), the name used by the party in question was used.

³ ISIS (also known as ISIL and Daesh) has had several names during its history. Even though the group changed its name from ISIS into Islamic State in summer 2014, the group is exclusively referred to as ISIS in this report because this name is well-established in the public realm. The other names used by the group during its history or their versions and translations established in the research literature are Monotheism and Jihad (1999–2004), Al-Qaeda in Iraq (2004–2006), Mujahideen Shura Council (2006), Islamic State of Iraq (2006–2013), Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham (2013–2014), and the Islamic State (from summer 2014).

region. However, jihadist activism also involves extensive non-violent support work, such as the recruitment of new supporters, activists and fighters, and fundraising.

This report focuses on the ways in which this international phenomenon relates to Finland. This means that the report analyses the types of jihadist actors that operate or have operated in Finland, the forms of activism that have been identified in Finland or are otherwise relevant to Finland, and the transnational connections of networks that operate or have operated in Finland. In accordance with the commission received from the Ministry of the Interior, the report specifically examines developments in the 2010s. However, a review of the years in the preceding decade is also included as background information. The report aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- How has jihadist activism manifested in Finland in the 2010s?
- How does the development of jihadist activism in Finland relate to similar trends elsewhere in Western Europe?
- What explains the growth of jihadist activism in Finland? Which societal trends that are relevant to Finland and have a wider impact on Europe have contributed to changes in the jihadist environment?

We have decided to use the term jihadism for the phenomenon examined in this report. There is no single well-established name for the phenomenon and such terms as radical islamism, Islamic extremism, and violent islamism have also been used. The Ministry of the Interior and SUPO have also used a variety of names for the phenomenon in their documents. In academic research, the term (salafi) jihadism is well-established, especially in English-language research, even though not all researchers use the same terms for the phenomenon.

The broad variety of different terms used reflects the fact that none of them is universally accepted. Different views of the origins and explanations of the phenomenon lie at the core of these disagreements. In fact, in the interviews conducted for this study, representatives of Finland's Muslim community also expressed their concern over the association between violence and Islam arising from these concepts.

The use of the concepts containing the words 'Islam' and 'Jihad' have been particularly strongly criticised by Muslim communities because they create an association between violent activities and Islam as a religion and especially the religious teachings of Jihad and give the misleading impression that the

interpretations of the main teachings of Islam popular among jihadists are typical of Islam as a religion. The use of the word 'jihadism' has also been opposed because it is the term used by the jihadist movements themselves. Using the term has been claimed to indirectly reinforce the belief that the movements and their religious thinkers possess special expertise and authority of the kind that permits them to interpret Jihad.

It has been proposed that instead of the term 'radical islamism' or 'jihadism', the term 'kharijites' (literally meaning 'those who went out') should be used. This term has its origins in the power struggles and doctrinal disputes during the first century of Islam and it was used for the movement that broke away from the mainstream religion as a result of these disputes. Kharijites are considered to have an uncompromising attitude towards those that do not accept their religious interpretations and they are also seen as opponents of the caliphate. The term is, however, problematic when the sole aim is to describe or analyse jihadism as a phenomenon because it has been specifically used to express contempt for the phenomenon.⁴

In this study, the authors have decided to use the term jihadism mainly because it is the most precise of the terms available. In this context, the term 'radical islamism' would be too broad an expression, as it refers to a phenomenon that is broader and more diverse than the one examined in this study.

In fact, it should be emphasised that the jihadism discussed in this report and many of the interpretations of Islam and its core religious teachings (especially Jihad) included herein differ significantly from those of the major branches of Islam even though they, too, are based on historical traditions. While the objectives and justification of jihadist movements are strongly based on their interpretations of the holy scripts of Islam, these interpretations have failed to be broadly accepted, especially among Islamic religious scholars.

1.2 Previous research

A great deal of research has been conducted on jihadist activism over the past twenty years. The areas studied have covered such issues as the development of the ideology and social activism connected with the phenomenon, its causes, the operating practices of different armed groups, networks and organisations, as well as

⁴ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: A History of an Idea* (London: Hurst, 2016), pp. 77–78. See also Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction* (London: Hurst, 2010).

the way in which they are organised and methods for combating them.⁵ A significant proportion of the research has been devoted to developments in regions outside Europe, which is logical, as, until recently, our continent was on the side lines of these activities.

Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History by Petter Nesser (2015, revised edition 2018), is probably the most extensive study of the history of jihadist activism in Europe. It discusses the growth of jihadist networks from the early 1990s to 2010s. The United Kingdom, Belgium, and France, long-time centres of jihadist activism, are the European countries with the longest research traditions on these activities.⁶

Even though jihadist activism has been extensively studied in Europe since the early 2000s, the volume of research on the topic in the European context only started to increase in the aftermath of the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005. There was another substantial increase in the research when people started to travel to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. In the 2010s, research into jihadism has expanded to include countries that have been considered marginal in the context of jihadist activism. In recent years, research has turned its attention to the phenomenon of foreign fighters and especially to the reasons prompting thousands of young Muslims

⁵ Recommended reading on jihadism and its evolution: David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Gilles Kepel & Jean-Pierre Milelli (ed.), *Al-Qaeda in its Own Words* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Lahoud, *The Jihadis' to Self-destruction*; Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Assaf Moghaddam & Brian Fishman (ed.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organization, strategic, and ideological fissures* (London: Routledge, 2011); Bruce Hoffman & Fernando Reinares (ed.), *The Evolution of The Global Terrorist Threat: From 9/11 to Osama bin Laden's Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Mustafa Hamid & Leah Farrall, *The Arabs at War in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2015); Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*; Brian Fishman, *The Master Plan: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Barak Mendelsohn, *Jihadism Constrained: The Limits of Transnational Jihadism and What it Means for Counterterrorism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019).

⁶ Recommended reading on Jihadism and its growth in Europe: Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Peter R. Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda* (Adelphi Series 399, London: Routledge, 2009); Frazer Egerton, *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Rik Coolsaet, *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experiences* (London: Routledge, 2011); Daniela Pisoio, *Islamist Radicalisation in Europe: An Occupational Change Process* (London: Routledge, 2012); Angel Rabasa & Cheryl Benard, *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History* (London: Hurst, 2015, revised edition 2018); Sam Mullins, *'Home-Grown' Jihad: Understanding Islamist Terrorism in the US and UK* (London: Imperial College Press, 2016); Peter R. Neumann, *Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016); Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of the Islamist State* (London: Hurst, 2017); Gilles Kepel, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); David Thomson, *The Returned: They Left to Wage Jihad, Now They're Back* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

to turn their backs on the liberal Western societies in which they have grown up and to travel to conflict zones to create a conservative society based on religion despite the considerable risk of losing their freedom and/or being injured or even killed.⁷ At the same time, there has been relatively little research on jihadist milieus and networks in Europe and the way in which they have developed in recent years.⁸

There has been virtually no research on jihadist activism in Finland. One probable reason for this is the lack of research into political and religious violence in Finland in general. This research topic has not been a priority area at any research institute and no specialisation studies in this field have been offered by any university. The details provided by the public authorities and particularly the (often brief) comments issued by SUPO are still the main source of information on the bearing of the phenomenon on Finland. This picture has been supplemented (and partially also questioned) by media reports, mainly produced by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) and the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper. However, when compared to other countries, there has been relatively little investigative journalism on the topic in Finland.

The aforementioned report *International Terrorism and Finland* compiled by Toby Archer and published in 2004 and the SYPONUR study⁹ (2016), which discussed travel from Finland to Syria and Iraq, come closest to the topic of this study. In addition, Kristiina Koivunen has written a book called *Suomen nuoret jihadistit – ja*

⁷ The phenomenon of foreign fighters, their mobilisation in Europe and the Middle East and their flow to Syria and Iraq has been extensively studied in the following articles: Jakob Sheikh, "‘I Just Said it. The State’: Examining the Motivations for Danish Foreign Fighting in Syria", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016); Edwin Bakker & Roel de Bont, 'Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015): Characteristics, Motivations, and Roles in the War in Syria and Iraq', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (2016); Sean Reynolds & Mohammed Hafez, 'Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2017); Lorne Dawson & Amarnath Amarasingam, 'Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 3 (2017); Amir Rostami et al., 'The Swedish Mujahideen: An Exploratory Study of 41 Swedish Foreign Fighters Deceased in Syria and Iraq', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2018).

⁸ There has been some research on European-based activities in the years preceding the war in Syria and in the early years of the conflict. In these studies, the focus is on Western European countries, especially Germany and the United Kingdom. See, for example, Guido Steinberg, *German Jihad: On the Internationalisation of Islamist Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Raffaello Pantucci, *We Love Death as You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists* (London: Hurst, 2015); Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*; Mullins, *Home-Grown Jihad*. Of the situation in Norway, see Brynjar Lia & Petter Nesser, 'Jihadism in Norway: a Typology of Militant Networks in a peripheral European Country', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016). Of the situation in Denmark, see Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, 'Plebeian Jihadism in Denmark: An Individualisation and Popularization Predating the Growth of the Islamic State', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016).

⁹ Marko Juntunen, Karin Creutz-Sundblom & Juha Saarinen, *Suomesta Syyrian ja Irakin konfliktikentälle suuntautuva liikkuvuus*. Publications of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities 43/2016, https://tietokayttoon.fi/documents/10616/2009122/43_Suomesta+Syyrian+ja+Irakin+konfliktikent%C3%A4lle+suuntautuva+liikkuvuus.pdf/c3211f98-4522-49728867-8ece7664d9ec?version=1.0.

*miten radikalisoituminen torjutaan*¹⁰ (Finland's young jihadists and how to combat radicalisation). However, despite its name, only a small part of the book is devoted to the situation in Finland. The topic is also discussed in a small number of articles, although mostly at quite a general level.¹¹ Jihadist activism, its prevention and media coverage are also addressed from a variety of perspectives in a small number of academic theses.¹²

1.3 Data and methods

Studying violent political and religious campaigns and their support activities poses a number of challenges and this has also been the case with the preparation of this report.

Securing access to research data has been the most difficult challenge. It is typical of European jihadist activism that only a relatively small number of people is privy to the details of the activities and those involved are often extremely reluctant to talk to outsiders. Access to confidential documents produced by intelligence and security agencies is one way of improving the situation. From the perspective of academic research, this material is not without its problems either; for example, in most cases the information source remains unknown.

This report is almost entirely based on open sources, which means that no official documents classified as confidential have been used. The authors have addressed the data accessibility problems by using different types of data in parallel (by applying document triangulation). The acquisition of the data has partially been made in

¹⁰ Kristiina Koivunen, *Suomen nuoret jihadistit - ja miten radikalisoituminen torjutaan* (Helsinki: Into Kustannus 2016).

¹¹ For example, Anssi Kullberg, 'Radikalismi Suomen muslimiyhteisöissä: ulkomaisten konfliktien ja kansainvälisen islamin vaikutus', in Anssi Kullberg (ed.), *Suomi, terrorismi, SUPO: Koira joka ei haukkunut* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2011); Juha Saarinen, 'Vierastaistelijailemiö islamilaisessa maailmassa Afganistanista Syyriaan', in Antti Paronen & Olli Teirilä (ed.), *Vihatkoon kunhan pelkäävät: Näkökulmia terrorismiin ilmiönä*. Department of Strategic and Defence Studies, Series 2: Research Reports No 51 (Helsinki: National Defence University); Juha Saarinen, 'The Finnish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria', *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 3 (2014); Juha Saarinen, 'Finland Raises Terror Alert as Jihadist Scene Grows More Complex', *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 14, no. 7 (2016).

¹² For example, Daniel Sallamaa, *The human bombs next door: Finnish media portrayals of home-grown terrorism's causal dynamics 2005–2011*. Master's thesis, University of Helsinki (2014); Miia Kauppila, *Väkivaltaisen ekstremismin ennaltaehkäiseminen Suomessa*. Master's thesis, University of Tampere (2016); Ann-Sofie Nyström, *Till Syrien och tillbaka. En kvalitativ studie om unga vuxnas resor till Syrien, deras livssituationer, behov och möten med myndigheter efter hemkomsten*. Master's thesis, University of Helsinki (2017); Sara Kupsala, *"Toiset kutsuu sitä uhratumiseksi": Narratiivinen tapaustutkimus radikalisoitumiseksi kutsutun prosessin yksilöllisistä merkityksistä*. Master's thesis, University of Lapland (2018).

conjunction with the study *Jihadist online communication and Finland*. The most important data used in this study is as follows:

- Internet and social media – especially the Finnish-language material and the material produced by individuals living in Finland and individuals connected to Finnish networks.
- Relevant public documents, such as documents on court proceedings and criminal investigations.
- Interviews with actors connected to the phenomenon in various ways, such as representatives of Muslim communities, journalists, actors involved in the prevention of violent extremism, security authorities, and people closely associated with individuals participating in jihadist activities. About 40 interviews were conducted for this report and about half of them were made with representatives of Muslim communities. The aim was to interview individuals who the research team understood to have access to information essential for this study through their work, other activities or social connections. This cohort of interviewees was supplemented on the basis of the tips received from earlier interviewees. It would have been possible to conduct more interviews; however, the resources allocated to this project did not facilitate this. The purpose of the interviews was to supplement the information obtained from written sources.
- Existing literature and media sources – research literature discussing the topic from the Finnish perspective and providing background information on the Finnish situation, reports, and news coverage of jihadist activism and Finland in the domestic and international media.
- Research on European jihadist networks and their global links, and consultations with leading international researchers, in order to provide information on the international context and the international connections between these networks. The research team was in contact with a large number of researchers monitoring developments in jihadist activism in Europe.

With the research permit granted by the National Police Board, the research team was able to conduct interviews that provided it with access to official police information that was not necessarily available via open sources. Access to information held by SUPO was beyond the scope of the permit.

By using the aforementioned data, the research team has attempted to produce a detailed overview of the jihadist actors and networks in Finland and the relationships

between these networks and other relevant actors. The reliability of the data collected from different sources has been assessed in accordance with the practices governing academic research, using the principles of internal and external source criticism and by making comparisons between the data. The observations have been collated into a comprehensive body of data by using models and theories of jihadist activism in Europe developed in academic research.

1.4 Limitations of the study

Even though a broad range of different sources were used in the study and new information was produced (e.g. through interviews), the study also came with major limitations. Most of these limitations do not only apply to this study alone, but rather to all research on this topic. Some of these limitations concern the nature of the phenomenon examined, while others pertain to the state of the research and official reporting on it, especially in Finland.

This research project was launched at a time when there was very little publicly available information on jihadist activism in Finland. As a result, most of the publicly available information has originated from official sources or the media. The information content of these sources, too, is extremely limited.

This is not a unique starting point when the research focus is on political movements that are still active or that have recently been dissolved, especially if the persons involved in them have tried to keep the operations secret. It is well-known in research on political violence that new information on what has happened tends to continue emerging even after several decades. For example, the information on the flow of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq remains scarce, and not only in Finland.

Even after taking the aforementioned factors into consideration, there is still unusually little publicly available information on the topic in Finland. Indeed, compared to many other Western European countries, only a limited amount of information on jihadist activism based on official sources is publicly available. This is primarily the result of the limited number of criminal investigations into terrorist offences in Finland that have resulted in charges and, consequently, led to information pertaining to these cases being made publicly available. Even though, from the perspective of academic research, the use of sources such as criminal investigation records is not without its problems, data of this kind has been highly useful in conducting research on the topic.

The situation regarding the paucity of available information is not made any easier by the fact that the authorities provide little information on terrorism-related

developments even though a more open approach has been adopted, especially over the past five years.¹³ SUPO has been by far the most active communicator in this respect. Having said this, SUPO remains relatively tight-lipped and much of the information supplied by the agency is of a general nature and is so ambiguous and obscure that even researchers specialising in the phenomenon have struggled to decipher it. For example, it is not always easy to understand what is meant by the brief and generalised comments. This is regrettable, as it is not always possible to discern what the statements and reports are referring to and, for this reason, it is very difficult for outsiders to confirm or question these accounts. This situation has also frequently led to misunderstandings in the news reports and public debate on the topic.

It would be desirable, both from the perspective of the development of research and the public debate on the topic, that the grounds for the assessments on jihadist activism would be elaborated in more detail and public reporting made more extensive. The practical needs concerning counter-terrorism operations and privacy protection do, however, impose necessary and justifiable limitations on what can be publicly shared. Finland could nevertheless adopt a more open communications policy. Indeed, in contrast, many Western countries have published substantially more comprehensive and detailed reports on jihadist activism in their territory.

Despite the considerable increase in reporting on this topic over the past five years, news coverage of jihadist activism and Finland has historically been rather limited. Such issues as the background of the individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq have been discussed more extensively in the news reports than in the information released by the authorities. At the same time, journalists have not been particularly active in seeking information on the topic. There remains, however, only a small number of journalists with in-depth knowledge of the subject. For the most part, the news coverage of jihadist activism in Finland has been based on the information supplied by the authorities. Furthermore, investigative journalism in Finland has tended to focus on individuals and cases about which official information has been available (individuals subject to criminal investigations and those on trial).

As a whole, reporting on jihadist activism has not been particularly extensive. Only a small minority of the foreign fighters that have travelled from Finland to Syria and Iraq have been the subject of notable media coverage. At the same time, there has been little reporting on the individuals that have taken part in non-violent support activities,

¹³ In 2013, the Ministry of the Interior started publishing situation overviews of violent extremism, and as a result, there is now significantly more official information available on the topic.

except for the trial connected to Al-Shabaab and the activities of Ansar al-Islam and Rawti Shax.

Furthermore, no overview of jihadist activism in Finland has been available until now. Consequently, the current study began by piecing together the information fragments on the topic. The remaining gaps in the resulting picture were filled by means of additional research. While many gaps in our knowledge persist, it was beyond the scope of this study to attempt to fill them all.

The issue of our knowledge of jihadist activism is compounded by the extremely limited amount of research information available on many of the issues that would have constituted essential background information for this study. Perhaps the most important of these is the scant research on the level of political and religious activism of Muslims living in Finland and the fact that practically no research has been conducted on the evolution of salafism in Finland.

Consequently, there are aspects of the phenomenon that have not been covered in this report and should be studied in future research. To this end, the analysis provided by this report should be considered as a preliminary and approximated assessment of the development of jihadist activism in Finland in the first two decades of the 2000s.

What are the gaps in our existing knowledge then? First of all, we know a great deal more about jihadist activism in the 2010s than about jihadist activism in the preceding decades. The SUPO annual report, which was first published in 1994, is to some extent the only official information source on jihadist activism in Finland in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. However, until recent years, the chapter of the report describing counterterrorism has almost exclusively focused on changes in the international operating environment and improvements in counter-terrorism efforts. The situation in Finland is usually described in only a few sentences of a highly general nature.

It should also be noted that, for many years, the resources allocated to counterterrorism were extremely limited and substantial increases have only been introduced in recent years. Therefore, it is quite possible that not even the authorities have been aware of all activities taking place inside Finland's borders. Media sources

add little to this picture. Almost without exception, journalism based on the information acquired by the reporters themselves was non-existent until 2013.¹⁴

The second disparity concerns operating practices. The official reports and news articles have focused on violent activism (planning and carrying out attacks and the phenomenon of foreign fighters), whereas much less attention has been paid to non-violent support activities. This is the case even though, at least in other countries, non-violent support activities have carried out on a larger scale than the planning of attacks and travelling as fighters to conflict zones.

Thirdly, it is by no means certain that the media attention has been focused on the phenomena and individuals that are the most central to the jihadist activities. The attention has been on individuals subject to criminal investigations or on those that have appeared on such platforms as the websites of armed jihadist groups. This has increased the likelihood of actors that are less important to our understanding of the phenomenon being the focus of attention while those networks and individuals of greater importance have attracted less publicity.

1.5 Research ethics

Consideration of ethical issues is fundamental to research carried out in accordance with the principles of academic research. This report was prepared in accordance with the ethical principles observed in field of humanities research. The University of Helsinki Ethical Review Board in Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences was also asked to provide a preliminary assessment of the study. In terms of the methods and data used, this study is a reasonably typical example of social sciences research. However, owing to the nature of the phenomenon under examination, it has been necessary to consider several perspectives unique to the topic in question.

This specificity particularly applies to the conducting of the interviews. Interviews are extensively used as a research method in social sciences and especially in research on phenomena that are difficult to study (solely) on the basis of written data. There are well-established good practices regarding the use of interviews in research and these were also applied in this study. The objectives of the study were comprehensively described to the interviewees and they were offered the opportunity

¹⁴ The most important exceptions have been the MOT television document on Ansar al-Islam activism in Finland produced by Yle around 2004 and the stories in the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper in 2009 of a man deported from Sweden to Finland due to suspected involvement in terrorism. These reports are discussed in sub-chapter 4.1.

to give the interviews anonymously so that they cannot be identified in the publications generated by this study. Moreover, the interviews conducted for this study done so confidentially, researchers involved being responsible for ensuring the privacy of the interviewees. In accordance with this consideration, the interview transcripts and recordings have been stored in such a way that only the research team members are able to access them. Ensuring the strict confidentiality of the interviews was of particular importance owing to the sensitive nature of the research topic.

Furthermore, in accordance with the principles of ethical research, the research material may only be used and disclosed for research purposes. The principles also state that it is particularly reprehensible to disclose details contained in the research material or disclose information in such a way that it could impact the treatment or status of the research participants or the way in which they are assessed. The principles also state that details of the individuals covered by the research may not be disclosed to tax authorities, social welfare authorities or the police.¹⁵ The purpose of humanities research is to produce scientific information on social phenomena and the researchers involved are primarily responsible for ensuring the privacy of the interviewees. The obligation of every citizen to report serious offences that are in the process of being committed and can still be prevented is an exception to this rule. There may also be circumstances provided for in the Child Welfare Act in which the confidentiality obligation is not absolute. These principles have also been strictly observed in this study.

The issues concerning the protection of privacy and social stigma have influenced the way in which this report has been written. Individuals connected to terrorism in one way or another and the people closely associated with them are often strongly stigmatised. Such stigmatisation may have a significant effect on the lives of the identified persons and people close to them, irrespective of whether this stigmatisation is based on facts or whether the stigmatised persons are actually involved in jihadist activities. It should also be emphasised that not all the activities addressed in this study are illegal, even though many of the organisations that have been supported by the networks and individuals operating in Finland have been defined as terrorist organisations. Consequently, many of the activities around them have been criminalised (such as recruitment and fundraising).

¹⁵ The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, the ethical principles for research on humanities, social sciences and behavioural sciences and a proposal for ethical preview (2009, viewable at <http://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/eettisetperiaatteet.pdf>; in Finnish).

For this reason, individual persons are not named or otherwise described in a manner that would make them identifiable in this report. This particularly applies to information that has not yet been made public. The report only names individuals whose involvement in jihadist activism is already public knowledge and has been confirmed or who have, for example, disseminated or produced openly accessible jihadist online material under their own names. This is also in line with the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study is not to determine *who* has been involved in jihadist activism but, rather, to determine *the types of* jihadist activism that are carried out in Finland. It is perfectly possible to satisfactorily answer this question without naming specific individuals.

Another reason for not describing specific individuals in detail is our intention not to associate the phenomenon with specific activists or to give these activists a higher standing within the jihadist milieu by giving them visibility in this report.

2 The relationship between jihadism, islamism and salafism

Before turning our attention to jihadist activism, itself, it is necessary to clarify what this report refers to as jihadism and how it relates to some of the other phenomena and concepts that are often mentioned in the Finnish debate on the related phenomena. There has been a lack of clarity in the public debate as a result of jihadism, salafism and, more broadly, radical islamism being discussed in such a way that these concepts and their relationship to each other are rarely clearly defined. The conceptual variance and vague definitions are probably both a reason for and a symptom of this lack of clarity.

2.1 Islamism

Throughout its history, Islam has been interpreted in such a way that it also incorporates a socio-political system defining social order. Islam was an inseparable part of the administrative systems of Islamic societies until the 20th century, even though they have always existed alongside secular law and the local culture. Indeed, even though Islam has, in this sense, incorporated a clear political dimension for many centuries, the origin of the phenomenon often referred to as islamism (or political Islam) is significantly more recent.

In part, islamism was a response to the encounter between Islam represented by declining Muslim societies and the modernity represented by technologically, scientifically, economically, and institutionally superior European empires. This led to European powers being increasingly influential in Islamic societies, especially from the 19th century onwards. This imbalance prompted Muslim intellectuals to analyse the reasons for the decline of Muslim societies and the growing disparity between them and European countries. The key question arising in this debate was whether the traditional Islamic socio-political system was actually superior.

While islamism itself is an ideology born in the 20th century, it can be characterised as one reaction to the cultural and social influences brought by European empires. Growing Western influence gave rise to a broad range of different reactions in Islamic societies. In some places, it led to violent protests, while elsewhere it gave a boost to fundamentalist (and even Messianic) movements promoting a return to 'pure Islam'

free of outside influences.¹⁶ In a small number of cases, fundamentalist movements guarding the purity of Islam tried to achieve their goals by violent means by targeting Muslims that they considered heretics or infidels.

One example of such thinking can be found in the early period of the religious movement that is now known as wahhabism.¹⁷ The aim of the group of followers gathering around Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the late 18th/early 19th century was to establish a religious community in the Arabian Peninsula (in cooperation with the Ibn Saud family, which founded Saudi Arabia) and to eradicate from the region all Muslims and Islamic movements that they considered heretic, especially the Shias, Sufi Muslims and their shrines.¹⁸

Even though the movements promoting religious purity by violent means largely remained an exception, movements aiming to achieve the same goal through non-violent means gained ground, especially in the latter half of the 19th century. However, few of these movements were political or revolutionary, as most of them focused on teaching and missionary work in their own communities. This started to change in the early part of the 20th century with the emergence of islamism.

The roots of islamism can be traced back to the growing political and cultural influence of the Western powers in societies with Muslim majorities, the decline in the global influence and weight of the historical Islamic powers (especially the Ottoman Empire) and, in particular, the abolition of the caliphate, tied to the Ottoman Empire, in the 1920s.

The key feature of the islamist ideology is the definition of Islam as a system covering all areas of life and not merely as a personal belief. According to the ideology and its representatives, the reactionary nature (in relation to the Western countries) and problems of Muslim societies (especially their political and cultural subservience to non-Islamic Western powers) were basically due to the fact that Muslims had rejected 'true Islam' and their Muslim identity. In the islamists' view, the answer to these problems was the return to 'true' Islam and the adoption of its principles in the creation of an Islamic society and state.¹⁹

¹⁶ Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*, p. 35.

¹⁷ Of wahhabism, its history and similarities and differences between wahhabism and salafism, see David Commins, 'From Wahhabi to Salafi', in Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix (ed.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 151–166.

¹⁸ Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁹ Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 44–45.

The best-known and most historically significant of the islamist movements is the Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in Egypt in 1928. During the 20th century, a diverse islamist social movement arose around the islamist ideology and this movement includes the Muslim Brotherhood, which has spread to other Arab states, as well as a wide range of political Islamic actors, which are ideologically, theologically, and organisationally different while predominantly being characterised by conservative values. The islamist world view also often includes beliefs based on conspiracy theories, according to which Islam is threatened by an external conspiracy, and anti-Western and anti-Semitic themes. Islamism is also characterised by collectivism, which means that members must be fully committed to the official line of their organisations.²⁰

Islamism is a highly diverse phenomenon and it has been strongly influenced by local contexts.²¹ Some of the islamist actors have taken part in party politics in their own countries as legal opposition parties, while others have remained outside political life, concentrating instead on social activism and charity. At the same time, others have focused on transnational activism. This has often been the case in countries that guarantee them freedom of action provided that they do not try to direct their activism against their local governments or criticise their rulers.²² This also means that islamist movements have differing opinions on how the establishment of an Islamic state and society should be promoted and what this state and society should look like.

A small minority of the islamist movements have tried to achieve their aims through violent and revolutionary means, especially in the latter half of the 20th century. These violent islamist groupings are often referred to as Islamic extremism, violent islamism and, in particular, radical islamism.

²⁰ Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p. 200; Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path*, pp. 116–117.

²¹ Anders Strindberg and Mats Wärn, *Islamism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), pp. 205–206. See also Khaled Hroub (ed.), *Political Islam: Context versus Ideology* (London: SAQI, 2010).

²² Especially the islamists of Saudi Arabia have emphasised the international dimension of the islamist movement and in particular, the solidarity between Muslims. This was highlighted during the flow of foreign fighters to Afghanistan in the 1980s. One reason for this was that they were only allowed to operate in Saudi Arabia if they refrained from criticising the royal family or did not try to gain political influence in the country. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 16–30.

2.2 Radical islamism

In public debate, research literature, and in official reports, the term ‘radical islamism’ has been used in many different meanings. As Thomas Hegghammer, a Norwegian researcher specialising in jihadism, has pointed out, in its broadest form, radical islamism has been understood in such a way that it refers to all islamist actors that use violence as part of their activities.²³ Thus, when used in this way, the term is not limited to armed groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, to which it has been commonly linked during the past two decades, and instead covers a large number of groups engaged in armed activities and which are very different in terms of their ideologies, theological thinking, and organisational structures.

According to this broad view, in addition to Al-Qaeda and ISIS, radical islamism also includes Hezbollah, a Lebanese group that represents the radical islamism connected with the Shia regime of Iran, and Hamas, a Palestinian islamist group waging war against Israel and has historically been associated with the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and its ideology.²⁴

Broadly speaking, the roots of radical islamism can be traced back to the 1950s, when radical sections supporting violent activism started emerging within the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.²⁵ Sayyid Qutb, a member of the organisation, played a key role in the articulation of an ideology emphasising armed revolution (revolutionary islamism) on the basis of the islamism represented by the group. Armed islamist groups emerged in Egypt to promote this ideology (see Chapter 3).²⁶ For many years, radical islamist groups and their violence were a marginal though growing phenomenon in the Middle East. In fact, until the late 1970s, most of the political violence affecting countries with Muslim majorities related to secular ideologies and nationalism. In practice, this first historically important ideological phase of radical islamism (revolutionary islamism) ended by the 1990s.

There are still numerous radical islamist groups in various parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. A substantial proportion of the armed groups operating in Muslim-majority countries and justifying their violence with religion has, however, partially

²³ Thomas Hegghammer (ed.), *Jihadi Culture: The Arts and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 9.

²⁴ The forms of radical Shia islamism and jihadism, which are also represented by Hezbollah, are outside the scope of this report. This is a separate phenomenon, which is closely connected with the Shia regime of Iran and its foreign policy. Of the phenomenon within the framework of the conflict in Syria, see, for example, Phillip Smyth, ‘The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects’, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy/Policy Focus* p. 138 (2015).

²⁵ Gilles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam* (London: SAQI, 2005), p. 12.

²⁶ Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*, p. 36.

adopted more international ideologies based on revolutionary islamism, which are often collectively referred to as jihadism. References to radical islamism in the public forum in the West have almost exclusively been references to jihadism and Al-Qaeda and ISIS (and their affiliates and associates as its representations. Using terminology that refers more broadly to islamist movements when solely talking about jihadism unnecessarily blurs the differences between them.

2.3 Salafism

Salafism has been one of the most commonly used and poorly understood concepts in the public debate on jihadism. Especially in some Western countries, there is a highly suspicious and reserved attitude towards salafism. Salafists have often been characterised as militants or extremists, which is partly due to their religious conservatism and their rejection of other interpretations of Islam in particular.²⁷ Countercultural salafist environments and communities have added to the negative attitudes in the West. This is due to their complex relationship with jihadism as a phenomenon and contemptuous and sometimes hostile attitude towards the values and standards of the societies in which they live.²⁸

In its simplest definition, salafism is a branch of Sunni Islam that follows and tries to revive the form and means of practising Islam originating in its first three generations, particularly by way of safeguarding the purity of the religion. In other words, salafists believe that progress can be achieved through regression and aim to bring Muslims back to form of Islam that they consider original and pure and that provides Muslims with the basis for a perfect life.²⁹ In the view of salafists, Islam was in its purest form during the first generations of the religion and they believe that they can return to this by rejecting more recent traditions and ways of interpreting the key teachings of Islam. For this reason, salafists are often described as ultra-conservative and literalist (i.e. believing that the holy scripts must be interpreted literally).

It should be noted that adopting the salafist interpretation of Islam does not in itself lead to a specific attitude towards politics or towards ways of achieving political influence.³⁰ Indeed, despite common theological bases, there are many different approaches to politics and methods of influencing it within the salafist branch. As Shiraz Maher, a researcher specialising in the history of jihadist ideology, writes in his book on the history of the salafi-jihadist ideology, the religious scholars publicly

²⁷ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, p. 5.

²⁸ Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*, p. 112.

²⁹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, p. 8.

³⁰ Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 248–249.

defending the religious authority of the Saudi Arabian royal family, the islamists opposing the scholars, and the royal family and the jihadists employing violent means to fight the two all meet the definition of salafism.³¹ There are, therefore, significant disagreements between different actors on the key issues concerning its religious and political involvement. As a result, salafist movements may simultaneously contribute to social stability in Saudi Arabia and to polarisation and friction in Western Europe while spreading havoc and suffering in Syria and Iraq.

Maher has developed a typology that is particularly useful in this context, as it helps clarify the apparent disparate structure of salafism. According to Maher, there are three main types of salafist actors:

- *Quietists* who provide rulers with advice behind the scenes (such as the religious scholars of Saudi Arabia).
- *Activists* who openly challenge the politics of their own states and work towards reforming them. These include many of the salafist political parties that became active in the Middle East after the Arab Spring.
- *Rejectionists* who deny the legitimacy of their own states and the general international on religious grounds and work to overthrow them by violent means (e.g. Al-Qaeda and ISIS).³²

Historically, most radical Islamist movements have constituted activism; that is to say that they have accepted the legitimacy of the state even if they work to reform it by violent means. Jihadist activity, which is the topic of this report, belongs to the last category.

Jihadism is often referred to as salafi-jihadism because many of the salafist religious scholars and texts have played a key role in its development. Jihadists (like islamists) also base their ideology on texts and scholars important to Islamic traditions. Scholars central to the most pious branches of Islam (salafism and wahhabism), such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, are theologically important in this respect. Their texts created the basis for the strict observance of religious purity and orthodoxy among jihadists. The salafi-jihadist view that Muslims who do not share their interpretation of Islam are not true Muslims, is also based on the religious interpretation by Wahhab.³³ At the same time, the

³¹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, pp. 8–11.

³² Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, pp. 8–11.

³³ Cole Bunzel, 'Jihadism in Its Own terms: Understanding a Movement', A Hoover Institution Essay (2017), p. 8.

interpretations of jihadists' own 'religious scholars' (few of whom have received the traditional education of religious scholars) have mostly remained without wider acceptance, especially among other Islamic religious scholars.

2.4 Jihadism

Jihadism as a modern ideology and a social movement that started taking shape within the radical wing of the islamist movement in the 1980s. As described in the next chapter, its roots can be traced back to the conflict in Afghanistan and the flow of foreign fighters to that country in the 1980s. Jihadism, which evolved into a global movement in the 1990s and adopted the salafist theological approach, is united by identity, culture, vocabulary, and a way of talking about political, strategic, and religious matters.³⁴

Even though the emergence of the jihadist movement is closely connected to the history of revolutionary islamism, the first significant branch of radical islamism, the social movements that have arisen around islamism and jihadism have since gone their own ways; both in terms of their activities and ideologies.³⁵ At the same time, in research literature, jihadism is often also considered as a branch of radical islamism. The belief that Islam and politics are inseparable still unites them. Moreover, both aim to create a society in accordance with their own interpretation of Islam. They also share an anti-Western attitude, anti-Semitism, and a view that Islam is facing an existential threat in the form of various conspiracies against it.

Despite their similarities, jihadism is, in many ways, a distinct phenomenon from radical islamism. In fact, for many years, the jihadist movement has mainly defined itself in contrast to islamists, especially in relation to the observance of religious purity.³⁶

One key difference is that, as a rule, islamists accept the legitimacy of states and the international political system, whereas jihadists categorically reject the legitimacy of both on religious grounds. The defining characteristic of the jihadism represented by Al-Qaeda and ISIS is the rejection of the surrounding social structure and international order as un-Islamic and the aim to overthrow them through forms of armed action,

³⁴ Hegghammer (ed.), *Jihadi Culture*, p. 10; Bunzel, 'Jihadism in Its Own terms'; Moghadam & Fishman (ed.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, pp. 92–94.

³⁵ Bunzel, Jihadism in Its Own terms; Hegghammer (ed.), *Jihadi Culture*, p. 10; Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path*, p. 107.

³⁶ Bunzel, 'Jihadism in Its Own terms'; Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path*.

such as insurgency and terrorism, in order for an Islamic society to be established.³⁷ Thus, they do not only reject the legitimacy of laws drafted by humans but also the system of government. This means that jihadists consider contemporary Muslim states as un-Islamic constructs.

Theologically, the islamist movement (including its radical representatives) encompasses a wide range of orientations and interpretations of Islam. At the same time, nearly all jihadist groups are theologically salafist even though there are different interpretations of the application of religious doctrines within the jihadist movement. Strategically, islamist actors (including a number of radical islamist actors, such as Hamas) mostly take part in party politics in their states and engage in social activism, while jihadists try to achieve change through armed action. Conversely, social activism and missionary work has also assumed an increasingly important role in the activities of jihadist groups in the 2010s in their attempts to govern the areas that they have temporarily occupied.³⁸

Jihadists have a distinctive interpretation of Jihad and, in many ways, this defines the entire movement, even though there are internal disagreements regarding interpretations. Interpreting Jihad as an armed struggle and the personal duty of every Muslim is typical of jihadism. Armed struggle is seen as a defensive measure because, in the jihadists' view, Islam is facing a systematic attack that threatens its very existence. Consequently, all ongoing conflicts in Muslim countries are seen as part of this universal and global conflict between Islam and its many enemies.

The belief that the armed struggle and participation in it are a significant form, if not the most significant form, of religious practice is also an essential part of the jihadist theology. Moreover, this is closely connected with the glorification of martyrdom, which, in historical terms, only played a minor role in Sunni Islam before the emergence of contemporary jihadism.³⁹

Over time, jihadist interpretations of the religion have also evolved alongside the developments in jihadist activities to justify the form and methods of violence necessitated and enabled by the strategic and political situations.⁴⁰ The conflicts arising in such new situations and contexts between the observance of religious purity on the one hand and strategic and ideological opportunism on the other have led to the emergence of various branches within the movement. There are disagreements on key theological issues as well as ideological and strategic matters. These

³⁷ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*.

³⁸ Of the efforts of jihadists to establish administrative structures, see Brynjar Lia, 'Understanding Jihadi Proto-States', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015).

³⁹ Hegghammer (ed.), *Jihadi Culture*, pp. 151–170.

⁴⁰ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*.

disagreements have caused friction, disputes, and conflicts between the leading figures of the movement and even between armed groups. One example of this is the conflict between Al-Qaeda and ISIS (an offshoot of the former) in Syria, which erupted in 2013.

There have been three main branches in the history of the jihadist movement. The first is the historically important classical jihadism, which is closely connected to the conflict in Afghanistan and the mobilisation of foreign fighters to that country and which formed the basis of the jihadist movement. The remaining two are the branches of global jihadism that have played a key role in recent world history: global jihadism linked to Al-Qaeda and the sectarian global jihadism, which is closely connected to ISIS.

The global jihadism of Al-Qaeda had become the most influential branch within the jihadist movement at the beginning of the 2000s. For its part, the sectarian global jihadism linked to ISIS gained ground during the 2010s, especially as a result of the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the military successes and expansionary drive of ISIS the period 2013–2015.⁴¹ Even though these two branches do not define the phenomenon or its history as a whole, they have played a key role in its development and manifestations in different contexts.

⁴¹ J.M. Berger, 'The Islamic State vs. al Qaeda: Who's winning the war to become the jihadi superpower?' *Foreign Policy* 2 September 2014.

3 Jihadist activism as a global and European phenomenon

This chapter will provide an overview of the history and development of jihadism, its manifestations and background, from the start of the 20th century to the present day. Before reviewing the main jihadist ideologies (the classical jihadism of Abdullah Azzam, the global jihadism linked to Al-Qaeda, and the global sectarian jihadism represented by ISIS), the chapter introduces the history of revolutionary islamism, which is a key form of radical islamism.

The purpose of the chapter is not to provide a comprehensive and detailed report on the aforementioned branches and the armed groups connected to them but, rather, to offer an overview of the diversity of jihadism, the key features of each branch, and the ways in which they have developed. The chapter then moves on to examine the manifestations of jihadism in Western Europe from the 1990s to the present day, with a focus on the impact of the conflict in Syria and ISIS on Europe.

3.1 Revolutionary islamism

The emergence and development of the international forms of jihadism can only be understood in relation to a broader historic context. This process is fundamentally connected to the birth of islamist ideology in the early years of the 20th century and in particular to the formation of the revolutionary branch of radical islamism in the latter half of the 20th century in Egypt, which have been described earlier in this report. Accordingly, the revolutionary islamism discussed in this chapter is one faction of radical islamism.

Despite the popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, it did not manage to achieve an influential position in the party politics or Islamise its system of government. The efforts of the group to Islamise the Egyptian society were more successful, however. In fact, the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian government became more problematic during the rule of President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954–1970). Frustration with its own failures and the harsh measures employed by the regime served to boost radicalism within the organisation. So much so that voices expressing more accepting attitudes towards violent activism gained strength.

One of the most important figures voicing such opinions was Sayyid Qutb. His writings (especially *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Qu'ran*) built a violent revolutionary ideology on the basis of the islamism of Al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood, and served as an inspiration for other radical islamist (and later for jihadist) thinkers.⁴² In the view of Qutb, all other ideologies except Islam have led to failed social systems. He felt that contemporary Muslim societies had turned their backs on true Islam and reverted to the pre-Islamic ignorance (*jahiliyyah*).

The solution that Qutb propagated for this situation included the revival of Islam and a struggle against the societies characterised by ignorance and governments considered as un-Islamic. He believed that the duty of the vanguard of Muslims was to impose divine authority in their societies and that this should be carried out ruthlessly and by means of armed action.⁴³

Even though Qutb was executed in 1966 for his role in an attempt to assassinate Nasser, his writings inspired radical islamists for many years after his death. The revolutionary islamism that he had created gained a foothold in Egypt and also spread to other countries in the Middle East (such as Syria, where a brief and failed uprising took place in the 1980s⁴⁴) and to Algeria, where islamists started armed resistance to the country's regime in the early 1990s after the army had refused to accept the election victory of the islamists.

The ideas promoted by Qutb also spread to Saudi Arabia, where many of his supporters had settled after fleeing the persecution of Muslim Brotherhood members, especially in Egypt and, to some extent, in other Arab socialist dictatorships hostile towards islamists, too.⁴⁵ Supported by these networks established in Saudi Arabia, thousands of Saudis took part in the conflict in Afghanistan. Many of them also joined the jihadist movement that emerged during the war and took part in conflicts in such countries as Algeria, Bosnia, Tajikistan, and Chechnya in the 1990s.⁴⁶

The assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad in 1981 marked the peak of the revolutionary islamism in Egypt. The assassination was part of a wider (and failed) operation the aim of which was to overthrow the Egyptian

⁴² Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, pp. 102–106; see also John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*, pp. 37–38.

⁴⁴ The Syrian uprising was brutally crushed by the country's regime and many of the surviving rebels fled abroad. Some of them later participated in the Afghan Jihad. Raphael Lefevre, *The Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁵ Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*, pp. 37–38.

⁴⁶ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 38–58.

government. The act led to mass arrests of islamists and radical islamists,⁴⁷ which continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The operational prerequisites of local armed groups, such as Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group, weakened significantly, especially towards the end of the 1990s. The groups that continued their activities ended up carrying out increasingly destructive and unpopular attacks and alienating their supporters (especially in the middle class). Furthermore, with less freedom to operate, the activities of many armed groups, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, were increasingly directed from other countries (Sudan and Afghanistan), as most of the leaders operating in their home countries were in prison.

Revolutionary islamism was the most significant form of violent extremism in the Middle East until the end of the 1990s. While it was at its strongest in Egypt, it also had a weaker presence in other Arab socialist dictatorships that had imposed restrictions on Islamic activism or that had taken tough measures against it.⁴⁸ In these cases, too, the groups only had limited success. An exception to this was Hamas, whose legitimacy was based on local rule and (violent) resistance to Israel.⁴⁹ By the end of 1990s, with the exception of Hamas, nearly all revolutionary islamist groups had given up violence or had become incapable of continuing their revolutionary campaigns.

Despite their failures, the groups left behind a large number of highly motivated and experienced activists and fighters, many of whom wanted to continue fighting for an Islamic society. With the development of jihadist branches emphasising more transnational violent activism, some of these groups found a home in the new conflict zones (especially Afghanistan and Pakistan).

3.2 Afghanistan conflict and classical jihadism

The birth of radical islamism aiming at revolutions in individual states can be dated back to the 1950s. The more international phenomenon of jihadism, however, only emerged thirty years later, in connection to the conflict in Afghanistan (1978-1992).⁵⁰ Classical jihadism, which builds on the writings and activism of Abdullah Azzam, a long-time Muslim Brotherhood activist and religious scholar, is closely connected to

⁴⁷ Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was one of the closest men of Osama bin Laden and who became the leader of Al-Qaeda after his death, was one of the people captured.

⁴⁸ Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam*.

⁴⁹ In the first two decades of the 2000s, Hamas has been a player in the Palestinian political system and party politics. It has, however, continued to resist Israel by violent means.

⁵⁰ Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*; Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*.

the historically extensive participation of foreign fighters in the war in Afghanistan and the community that formed around it.⁵¹

Thousands of members of radical Islamist groups that had until then focused on their own national campaigns (mainly in North Africa), and foreign fighters (from the Persian Gulf region, especially Saudi Arabia) that had travelled to Afghanistan in this new framework of Jihad, gathered in the conflict zone to defend fellow Muslims against the Soviet Union, a foreign invader and occupier. A large number of transnational fighter and activist networks were established within this community. These networks later developed into a broader jihadi social movement and played a particularly important role in the spread of the foreign fighter phenomenon to conflicts affecting Muslim countries and Muslim populations around the world; especially in the 1990s but also in the first decade of the 2000s in Chechnya and Iraq.⁵²

Azzam's interpretation of Jihad is characterised as classical in the research literature by virtue of it being closer to the historical interpretations of Jihad than the later global interpretations of Jihad or the interpretations of revolutionary Islamism preceding Azzam (see Appendix 1 to this report).⁵³ Instead of emphasising the opposition to Muslim regimes considered as un-Islamic, for Azzam, the core of Jihad was the defence of Muslim regions and regions that had belonged to Muslims.⁵⁴ He explained that if a region historically or currently belonging to Muslims anywhere in the world is attacked from outside, the situation requires an immediate armed intervention. In this view, participation in Jihad is not only the duty of the local population, but also a personal religious obligation of all Muslims. For Azzam, both the political elites and traditional religious scholars should support Jihad in such situations and if they are against an intervention, their opinions should be ignored.⁵⁵ Furthermore, in his view, the true Islamic society of the early days and the Islamic world power could only be restored through armed Jihad.⁵⁶

The narrative that is put forward in Azzam's writings continues to be repeated in the communication of different jihadist groups. According to Azzam, the community of Islam (*umma*) is facing an existential external threat. This is emphasised in the communication aimed at foreign fighters through the highlighting of the suffering

⁵¹ This refers to the multinational community of jihadists that was not limited to armed groups but also comprised a variety of personalities and networks. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 14; Moghadam & Fishman (ed.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, pp. 92–93.

⁵² Thomas Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad', *International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/2011), p. 60. See also Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 69.

⁵³ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 42.

⁵⁴ See in particular Kepel & Milelli (ed.), *Al-Qaeda in its Own Words*, pp. 81–143.

⁵⁵ Haykel, Hegghammer & Lacroix (ed.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, p. 214.

⁵⁶ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 7; Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, pp. 128–129.

experienced by Muslim civilians and the destruction of religious symbols (such as mosques) in conflict zones. This helps to reinforce the impression that a global and total war is being fought between Islam and its enemies. In order to rectify the situation, Muslims must take up arms to assist fellow Muslims living in different conflict zones. In this view, this is necessary not only because it is required by Islamic Law but also because the enemy is so cunning and deceitful that no other solution is possible. Participation in armed action in conflict zones is presented as a personal duty of each (male) Muslim. Unlike the more recent branches of jihadism discussed below, Azzam did not yet accept armed activism outside conflict zones.⁵⁷

In addition to this, the emphasis on participation in armed struggle and particularly the religious importance of martyrdom were perhaps Azzam's most important contributions to the development of the jihadist thought that emerged after him. This has been further developed within jihadism in recent decades.⁵⁸ According to one of Azzam's well-known sayings, the pride, honour, and natural status of Muslims as leaders of the international political system can only be restored through Jihad and the rifle, and not through negotiations, conferences or dialogue.

Azzam was not only the key theologian of the new doctrine of Jihad but he also actively inspired and recruited new foreign fighters to the conflict in Afghanistan. During the conflict, he made preaching and recruitment trips to many Muslim-majority countries and a number of Western countries (including the United States). The material produced by the Afghan Services Bureau, an organisation established by Azzam, was disseminated and eagerly read in the Middle East and to a lesser extent in Western countries (including Nordic countries).

Over time, Afghanistan became the destination of one of the largest flows of foreign fighters in history and it is estimated that up to 20,000 foreign fighters took part in the conflict.⁵⁹ At the same time, some of these participants, such as Anwar al-Awlaki, who later became an important figure within the jihadist movement, only arrived in the conflict zone after the Soviet withdrawal and did not actually take part in the fighting.⁶⁰ This was also the case with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, whose career is discussed later in this report. Even though, according to Islamist and jihadist mythology, the mobilisation in Afghanistan was extensive, spontaneous, and almost immediate, Azzam's writings

⁵⁷ Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters', pp. 73–74; Haykel, Hegghammer & Lacroix (ed.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, p. 214.

⁵⁸ Hegghammer (ed.), *Jihadi Culture*, pp. 154–160; Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, p. 129.

⁵⁹ Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters'.

⁶⁰ Scott Shane, *Objective Troy: A Terrorist, A President and the Rise of the Drone* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), pp. 54–55.

and active recruitment were, in practice, the main forces behind the process and they only started bearing fruit around the mid-1980s.⁶¹

Based on the lessons learned in Afghanistan, Azzam intended to train an army of experienced Muslim volunteers that would participate in conflicts in areas which they thought belonged to Muslims but were the subject of an enemy attack (such as in Afghanistan) or were occupied by foreign invaders (such as in Israel). Thus, in Azzam's interpretation of Jihad, the soldiers of the non-Islamic enemy operating in Muslim areas were the enemies. In this respect, his interpretation differs significantly from the forms of jihadism represented by Al-Qaeda and ISIS in which civilians of the enemy powers are also considered as enemies and justified targets of violence (especially) outside conflict zones.⁶²

The prominent role and importance of Azzam in the jihadi community were partially based on his charisma and the credibility drawn from his traditional religious education. His popularity also caused friction within the community, however; especially among those who did not share his views of Jihad. Azzam was killed by a car bomb in the city of Peshawar in Pakistan in 1989. Although not in the form of an organisation, his interpretation of Jihad did nevertheless outlive him.

The assassination of Azzam left a power vacuum at the top of the jihadist movement; one which several persons attempted to fill. In the end, the struggle was won by Osama bin Laden from Saudi Arabia, who had cooperated with Azzam in the 1980s and who rose to fame with the attacks of 11 September 2001. This all happened despite the fact that he left Afghanistan several months before Azzam's death (and did not return until 1996) and despite the first years of Al-Qaeda, the group he had established, being characterised by failures.

3.3 Al-Qaeda and global jihadism

The conflict in Afghanistan and the mobilisation of foreign fighters to that country were also key factors in the formation of the group known as Al-Qaeda. The origins of Al-Qaeda can be traced back to a network of foreign fighters from Arab countries in the Middle East who gathered around Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s. By that time, Al-Qaeda had split from the Afghan Services Bureau established by Azzam. It only

⁶¹ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 43.

⁶² Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*, p. 44.

achieved wider publicity, however, as a result of the attacks of 11 September 2001.⁶³ A more detailed examination of the history of Al-Qaeda is beyond the scope of this report. Indeed, its organisation, strategy, and ideology have evolved considerably over the past 30 years.⁶⁴ This report confines its examination of Al-Qaeda in the form it occupied in the first decade of the 21st century, that is to say, as an organisation promoting its salafi-jihadist ideology and comprised of three separate but intertwined sections: the central leadership (the core), local affiliates, and a wider ideological movement built around them.⁶⁵

The central leadership refers to the core of Al-Qaeda and the part of its historic organisational structure that survived the war in Afghanistan, which began in 2001, and the counter-terrorism operations targeting the organisation since then. These operations have claimed the lives of many jihadist veterans belonging to the central leadership.⁶⁶ As noted by Anne Stenersen, a Norwegian researcher specialising in the group's history, the central leadership should primarily be understood as a revolutionary vanguard that throughout its existence has supported and trained

⁶³ Al Qaeda carried out these attacks in cooperation with the terrorist network led by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, which was not part of the group. The network only merged with Al-Qaeda after the attack, as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed assumed an important role in the group. Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 1–2. See also Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark, *The Exile: The Flight of Osama bin Laden* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

⁶⁴ There is a wide range of excellent books and articles on Al-Qaeda and its history and some of them are listed below. Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf); Gilles Kepel & Jean-Pierre Milelli (ed.), *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*; Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of al-Qa'ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: SAQI, 2010) Assaf Moghadam & Brian Fishman (ed.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, especially pp. 88–107; Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Michael W. S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle Against America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Donald Holbrook, *The al-Qaeda Doctrine: The Framing and Evolution of the Leadership's Public Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Mustafa Hamid & Leah Farrall, *The Arabs at War in Afghanistan*; Barak Mendelsohn, *The Al Qaeda Franchise: The Expansion of Al-Qaeda and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrian Levy, *The Exile: The Flight of Osama bin Laden* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and the issue 6/2017 of the openly accessible publication *Perspectives on Terrorism* (<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/issue/view/67>).

⁶⁵ See, for example, Anne Stenersen, 'Thirty Years after its Foundation - Where is al-Qaeda Going?', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 6 (2017). There has been a continuous debate after 2001 on the relationship between different parts of Al-Qaeda and especially the role of the central leadership in the operations of the organisation. The most visible argument over the topic has taken place between Marc Sageman, who views jihadism mainly as an activity involving independent social networks, and Bruce Hoffman who argues that Al-Qaeda continues to have a key role in the terrorism carried out in its name. It seems that Hoffman has the facts on his side: the 2014 book, jointly compiled by Hoffman and Fernando Reinares, provided empirical evidence that Al-Qaeda had a clear role in many of the terrorist attacks carried out in its name between 2001 and 2011. See Bruce Hoffman & Fernando Reinares (ed.), *The Evolution of The Global Terrorist Threat: From 9/11 to Osama bin Laden's Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

⁶⁶ Hoffman & Reinares, *The Evolution of The Global Terrorist Threat*, p. 620.

Muslim rebels taking part in different conflicts, as well as the armed groups representing them, in order to spread its jihadist ideology and to achieve its aim (revolutions in Muslim countries and ultimately the re-establishment of the caliphate).⁶⁷ Despite becoming weaker, the Al-Qaeda central leadership continues to work actively to carry out terrorist attacks.⁶⁸

For a substantial part of its existence, Al-Qaeda has been guided by the idea of global Jihad, and international terrorism (especially highly-visible and destructive attacks against soft symbolic targets in the West) has been a key component of its activities.⁶⁹ Al-Qaeda's strategic thinking has, however, evolved considerably throughout the organisation's history, reflecting major changes in its operating environment and organisation, especially during and after the first decade of the 21st century.

From the late 1990s to the early years of the 2000s, Al-Qaeda was a united organisation with a central leadership, and it had extensive networks in different parts of the world that specialised in recruitment and various types of activism. These networks were particularly strong in Afghanistan, where the organisation was able to operate freely between 1996 and 2001.⁷⁰ The operational role of the group's central leadership decreased as its recruitment, training, and attack infrastructures in different parts of the world were dissolved by the middle of the 2000s, as a result of increasingly intensive counter-terrorism operations.

In order to be able to continue its activities and to maintain its influence after the loss of Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda's central leadership systematically tried to expand its operations by sending its fighters to such countries as Saudi Arabia and Yemen in order to establish new local organisations or to bring existing armed groups under its control, which it was able to do in such countries as Algeria, Iraq, and Somalia.⁷¹ These local organisations and allies have become increasingly important players in Al-Qaeda's operations and, as a result, the objectives of the local organisations, which are often closely connected to their local contexts and operating environments,

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Stenersen, 'Thirty Years after its Foundation'.

⁶⁹ In other words, unlike revolutionary radical islamists, Al-Qaeda has not waged its Jihad against the regimes of individual countries but against their foreign allies, especially the United States and other Western countries. According to Al-Qaeda's strategic thinking, one important reason for the failure of the revolutionary radical islamists' campaigns against 'near enemies' was the support that these regimes received from foreign powers.

⁷⁰ During these years, it carried out high-visibility terrorist attacks; first against Western targets or Western symbols outside the West and later in Western countries themselves. These included the attacks against the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the attempted attack against USS *The Sullivans* in 2000, and the attack against USS *Cole* in Yemen the same year. In addition to the September 2001 attacks, the other major attacks have included the train bombings in Madrid in March 2004 and the attacks against buses and underground trains in London in July 2005.

⁷¹ Mendelsohn, *The Al Qaeda Franchise*.

have received a higher priority in Al-Qaeda at the expense of its global interests and strategy. This has been referred to as the hybridisation of Al-Qaeda's ideology and strategy, which resulted in the boundary between nearby (local regimes considered as un-Islamic) and distant enemies (their foreign supporters and the United States and its allies), as well as the enemy hierarchy, becoming more vague in the rhetoric and activities of the local groups.⁷² Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), operating in Yemen, is the only one of Al-Qaeda's local organisations that has systematically directed its message at target groups in the West and carried out international terrorist attacks even though in its case, too, most of these operations took place between 2009 and 2011.

There have been indications in the 2010s that Al-Qaeda has tried to bring armed groups operating in different conflict zones under its control in secret or less conspicuously.⁷³ It seems that during the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda has no longer demanded that its local organisations openly declare the organisational bond by adding Al-Qaeda to their name (such as Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria) or that its new allies publicly swear an oath of allegiance to Al-Qaeda. This has probably been done in order to ensure the functioning of its new strategy by focusing on local conflicts, unlike its earlier strategy, which was based on international terrorism. After the Arab Spring, local representatives of Al-Qaeda tried to operate as part of a broader front of rebels and gain support among the local population.⁷⁴

In addition to the local organisations, a less coherent social movement sharing the ideology and goals of Al-Qaeda emerged around the central leadership by the early years of the 2000s. Al-Qaeda has, with varying degree of success, tried to inspire and even support (mostly independent) individuals, cells, and networks belonging to the movement in the carrying out of terrorist attacks.⁷⁵ Foreign fighters that have received combat experience or terrorist training in the ranks of Al-Qaeda have been particularly helpful to the organisation in the latter regard. These individuals have frequently acted as liaisons between local activists and groups operating in conflict zones. Historically, foreign fighters have played an important role in the establishment of independent

⁷² See, for example, Hegghammer, 'The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology', Hudson Institute 18 November 2009.

⁷³ Stenersen, 'Thirty Years after its Foundation'.

⁷⁴ Aaron Y. Zelin (ed.), 'How al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State: The Nature of the Current Threat'. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Focus 153 (2017), pp. 6-7.

⁷⁵ Hoffman and Reinares (ed.), *The Evolution of The Global Terrorist Threat*, pp. 625-630. See also Stenersen, 'Thirty Years after its Foundation'.

attack cells, in the carrying out of violent attacks, and in the building of extensive networks in Europe.⁷⁶

The years after the Arab Spring have been difficult for Al-Qaeda in many ways. This is largely due to the fact that ISIS, which has its origins in Al-Qaeda's former local organisation in Iraq, has challenged Al-Qaeda's leadership in the jihadist movement and replaced it as the key jihadist group in Syria, the recent focal point of the phenomenon.⁷⁷ Moreover, as a result of the military action targeting the central leadership, many of key leaders of the group have been eliminated, including its founder and first leader Osama bin Laden who was killed in an US military operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan in 2011. Despite its setbacks, Al-Qaeda has patiently, systematically, and, in many ways, successfully expanded its operations in regions in which it was already active in the past, expanded to new regions, and exploited more extensively the instability in different parts of the Muslim world.⁷⁸

Even though ISIS has undoubtedly received more visibility over the past five years, Al-Qaeda, which is built on stronger strategical foundations, may still manage to replace ISIS (which has suffered a number of setbacks) as the symbolic leader of the jihadist movement. This may well happen if Al-Qaeda is able to maintain its image as a more 'moderate' alternative to ISIS within the jihadist movement and keep its local organisations more tightly under the control of the central leadership.

The fact remains, however, that during the past five years, Al-Qaeda has been far less capable of inspiring its supporters to carry out terrorist attacks than ISIS, especially in the West.⁷⁹ In this respect, the organisation is burdened by its ageing and uncharismatic leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and a communication infrastructure that seems badly outdated (especially in comparison to ISIS) in terms of the content it produces and its distribution channels. The group has attempted to address these deficiencies by giving Hamza, the son of Osama bin Laden, an increasingly visible role in its communications. This has fuelled speculation about his future role in the

⁷⁶ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*; Thomas Hegghammer, 'Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting', *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013).

⁷⁷ Mendelsohn, *The Al Qaeda Franchise*, pp. 168–193.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Thomas Joscelyn, 'Al-Qaeda is very much alive, and widely misunderstood', *The Long War Journal* 11 September 2018 (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/09/al-qaeda-is-very-much-alive-and-widely-misunderstood.php>); Bruce Hoffman, 'Al-Qaeda's Resurrection', *CFR Expert Brief* 6 March 2018 (<https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/al-qaedas-resurrection>); Daveed Gartenstein-Ross & Nathaniel Barr, 'How al-Qaeda Survived the Islamic State Challenge', *Hudson Institute* 1 March 2017 (<https://www.hudson.org/research/12788-how-al-qaeda-survived-the-islamic-state-challenge>).

⁷⁹ Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone & Eva Entenmann, *Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West* (Milano: Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2017).

organisation.⁸⁰ Despite its strengths, Al-Qaeda faces major problems if it intends to successfully challenge the leading position of a weakened ISIS in the near future.

3.4 Global sectarian jihadism of ISIS

The organisation currently known as ISIS and its ideology represent the third major branch of jihadism. Its roots can also be traced back to the Afghanistan of the late 1980s, when the leadership vacuum following the death of Azzam (and the return of bin Laden to Saudi Arabia) led to rivalry and disagreements and the formation of new interpretations within the jihadist movement. The interpretations originating in the “Jalalabad school” played a key role in the formation of the ideology of ISIS. It emphasised religious purity (especially the role of the *takfir* doctrine⁸¹), resistance to the authority of respected jihadist leaders, and a less restrictive use of violence in conflict situations, including its use against groups that had a more liberal attitude towards religious purity. The influence of this branch of jihadism was first felt in the brutal civil war of Algeria in the 1990s, in which it was particularly closely connected to the radical Islamist group GIA and the jihadist group GSPC (an offshoot of GIA). GSPC joined Al-Qaeda in the first decade of the 2000s and adopted the name Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).⁸²

As an armed group, however, ISIS has only existed since 1999.⁸³ It was then that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a former petty criminal from Jordan, established the group in western Afghanistan. Al-Zarqawi began his jihadist career in Afghanistan at the end of 1980s. Even though al-Zarqawi travelled to Afghanistan for the first time in 1989, with

⁸⁰ See, for example, Jason Burke, ‘Hamza bin Laden - a potent weapon in the rivalry between al Qaeda and Isis’, *The Guardian* 30 May 2017.

⁸¹ Takfirism refers to the practice in which Muslims that have adopted a different interpretation of Islam are declared infidels so that a religious justification for violence against them can be provided (Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland — situation overview 1/2017*, pp. 16–17). Of the key role of the takfir doctrine in the jihadist ideology and the way in which it is interpreted and applied by jihadists, see Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, pp. 71–107.

⁸² Tore Hemming, ‘The Hardline Stream of Global Jihad: Revisiting the Ideological Origins of the Islamic State’, *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 1 (2019).

⁸³ The history of ISIS and its predecessors have been extensively covered in the following publications: Brian Fishman (ed.) *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa’ida’s Road in and out of Iraq* (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point/Harmony Project Report, 2008), <https://ctc.usma.edu/bombers-bank-accounts-and-bleedout-al-qaidas-road-in-and-out-of-iraq/>; Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*; Kepel & Milelli (ed.), *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, pp. 237–267; Jessica Stern & J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (London: William Collins, 2015); Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (London: Bantam Press, 2015); McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*; Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Charles R. Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, The Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency* (London: Hurst, 2015); Fishman, *The Master Plan*; Michael Weiss & Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2016); Mendelsohn, *The Al Qaeda Franchise*, pp. 168–193.

the intention of taking part in the Jihad against the Soviet troops that had left the country a few weeks earlier, he only joined the fighting in 1991 when Afghanistan was already in a state of chaos.⁸⁴ After returning to Jordan in 1993, al-Zarqawi continued to engage in jihadist activities and was arrested one year later for planning a terrorist attack. He returned to Afghanistan after being released from prison in Jordan in 1999.

Soon after arriving in Afghanistan, al-Zarqawi established a group of his own, which mostly attracted Arab jihadists from the Levant countries.⁸⁵ The 'start-up grant' provided by Al-Qaeda helped al-Zarqawi to establish the group. Even though the group joined Al-Qaeda in 2004, it did not fully share its jihadist ideology and interpretation.⁸⁶ Indeed, unlike Al-Qaeda, the strategic focus of al-Zarqawi's group was not on external enemies and international terrorism; instead, its aim was to overthrow the governments of Jordan (al-Zarqawi's home country) and other Levant countries.⁸⁷

As a result of the invasion of Afghanistan in autumn 2001, however, al-Zarqawi's group lost its training facilities and scattered, with some of its members fleeing for Pakistan and others heading for the Kurdish areas of Iraq close to the Iranian border. At the time, the latter area was under the control of Ansar al-Islam, which consisted of Iraqi Kurds, and was friendly towards al-Zarqawi's group. This is how al-Zarqawi arrived in Iraq in 2002; anticipating that it was only a matter of time before a US invasion and that this would create opportunities for opening up a new front. Even though the ideology of al-Zarqawi's group was partially formulated during the years spent in Afghanistan (1999–2001), its current objectives and strategy only started taking shape after the invasion and occupation of Iraq, which began in 2003. The goal of Al-Zarqawi and his group was the establishment of a pure Islamic society in Iraq and the areas adjacent to it, and they tried to promote this objective by stirring up a sectarian civil war between the country's Shia and Sunni communities.

During the first months of the conflict, al-Zarqawi became known as an exceptionally violent but effective commander whose armed group (which mostly comprised foreign fighters from other Arab countries) was one of the most visible and effective groups in the 'Sunni revolt' against the American occupation.⁸⁸ The group carried out a number of deadly terrorist attacks, targeting UN buildings and important Shia shrines and

⁸⁴ Warrick, *Black Flags*, pp. 51–52.

⁸⁵ Levant comprises Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The region is also referred to in the abbreviation ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), the other well-established name of ISIS used in the English language.

⁸⁶ Hemming, 'The Hardline Stream of Global Jihad'.

⁸⁷ Fishman, *The Master Plan*, pp. 9–23.

⁸⁸ Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*; Ahmed Hashim, *Iraq's Sunni Insurgency* (London: Routledge Adelphi Papers p. 402, 2009).

leaders. The group even achieved notoriety in jihadist circles after sending Al Jazeera a video recording in which a man dressed in black (perhaps al-Zarqawi himself) executed Nicholas Berg, an American hostage dressed in orange clothes, by severing his head.⁸⁹ The same symbolism was tragically repeated in 2014 when, in a video published by ISIS in August 2014, James Foley, wearing an orange uniform, was executed in the same manner. The execution was carried out by Mohammed Emwazi, a UK citizen known as 'Jihadi John'.

Al-Zarqawi's group officially placed itself under the authority of Al-Qaeda in October 2004 in order to benefit from its financing network and to use the Al-Qaeda brand in such activities as recruitment and fundraising.⁹⁰ However, the ideological and strategic differences between the Al-Qaeda leadership and al-Zarqawi already became evident in 2005. These differences mainly stemmed from the fact that al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda had different ideas about whom the jihadists should consider to be their main enemy. Whereas Al-Qaeda wanted al-Zarqawi to strike at the occupiers in line with the strategy of global Jihad, al-Zarqawi tried to provoke Shias to attack Sunnis. Al-Zarqawi thought that by doing this he could force Sunnis to defend themselves against Shias, whom he considered to be the worst enemies of Islam. Al-Zarqawi was killed in a US air strike in June 2006 and the disagreements with Al-Qaeda were forgotten. They resurfaced in 2013, however, provoked by the disputes around the civil war in Syria.

Al-Zarqawi still achieved his aim and a deadly sectarian civil war broke out in Iraq. During the conflict, which was at its height between 2006 and 2008, the group itself was marginalised. It lost al-Zarqawi, its leader, in a US attack in June 2006 and unfavourable changes in the group's operating environment led to major losses.⁹¹ Prompted by these changes, the group 'rebranded' itself, changing its name to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and tried to make its fighter profile more strongly Iraqi.

The group nevertheless managed to survive through its most difficult years in Iraq. By the time its current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, took charge of the group in 2010, it was already deeply rooted in the Sunni areas of Iraq and was considerably stronger than in during the period 2007–2008. Growing political tensions and the weakening of the security situation in Iraq, especially after 2009, as well as the withdrawal of the United States from the country at the end of 2011, were the catalysts for the group re-

⁸⁹ Douglas A. Ollivant, 'The Barbaric Terrorists of the Islamic State Are a Threat to the U.S. Homeland', *The New Republic* 23 August 2014.

⁹⁰ Ironically enough, Al-Qaeda's financial situation was already quite weak at this point and it soon had to ask for money from its local organisation, which was mostly self-sufficient.

⁹¹ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, p. 15.

entering the international political scene.⁹² The second key reason and the factor that led to the 'internationalisation' of the group was the development of the Syrian uprising into an armed conflict.

The group led by al-Baghdadi was involved in the Syrian conflict from the outset. Indeed, the networks it had established in Syria before and during the war in Iraq (2003–2008) helped the group gain ground. The group used these networks (often with the assistance of the Syrian intelligence) to smuggle weapons and foreign fighters into Iraq from Syria. From summer 2011 onwards, the direction of this influx was reversed, and ISI sent fighters from its Jabhat al-Nusra group to Syria with the aim of expanding its operations there by exploiting the increasingly unstable situation in the country.

Jabhat al-Nusra split from ISI in spring 2013 and officially placed itself under the authority of Al-Qaeda. This was the same Al-Qaeda from which ISI, led by al-Baghdadi, split in late 2006 (according to the group's own account) when it and a number of smaller Iraqi jihadist groups established the Islamic State of Iraq. Prompted by open involvement in the Syrian conflict, it changed its name to ISIS. Encouraged by its military successes in Syria and Iraq, the group challenged Al-Qaeda's leadership role in the jihadist movement. The declaration of the caliphate in summer 2014 particularly served to make it the most visible, most influential, and best equipped armed jihadist group in the world (at a time when Al-Qaeda seemed to be weakening).

ISIS has garnered a great deal of media attention, mainly due to the atrocities it has perpetrated and its state-building project, which culminated in the declaration of the caliphate. Even though there were still doubts about the state-building project of ISIS (in Finland it was characterised as a 'purely rhetorical goal'⁹³) in late summer 2014 (when the caliphate had already been declared), ISIS had in fact consistently worked to strengthen its position in Iraq since 2006 in order to establish an Islamic state and, at a later date, create a caliphate.⁹⁴

In fact, this is the second key feature distinguishing ISIS from Al-Qaeda. Declaring the caliphate is the aim of both organisations. Whereas Al-Qaeda has intentionally avoided and instructed its local organisations to avoid the occupation of areas and the

⁹² See Joel Rayburn, *Iraq after America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2014).

⁹³ For example, Juho Takkunen & Linda Pukka, 'Hämeen-Anttila: 'Islamilainen valtio ei realistinen'', *MTV Uutiset*, 11 August 2014.

⁹⁴ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, p. 15. See also Cole Bunzel, 'From Paper State to the Caliphate: The ideology of the Islamic State', *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper* p. 19 (2015).

establishment of administrative structures in them before conditions are favourable, ISIS has aimed to do precisely that.⁹⁵ The key aim of its Jihad is to create a 'pure' and 'true' community of Islam and, in its view, the conditions for establishing such a community already existed in 2006.

In the branch of jihadism represented by ISIS, the observance of religious purity is based on an exceptionally strict and narrow interpretation of what it means to be a true Muslim, even when compared to other jihadist groups. This can clearly be seen in the activities of ISIS over the past five years. In its eyes, all those whose approach to Islam does not meet the criteria imposed by the group are not true Muslims and it is, therefore, religiously acceptable to subject them to violence.⁹⁶ In fact, the group has openly used violence against Sunnis, who do not share its interpretation of Islam, minorities within Islam, and other religious groups with the aim of wiping them out from the areas under its rule. In this respect, it differs from Al-Qaeda, which has tried to avoid sectarian incitement and violence. While Al-Qaeda also considers groups such as Shias to be heretics, it also takes the view that heretic Muslims have forgotten what true Islam is and should, therefore, be guided back to it. In some areas, however, this principle has been less than faithfully observed, especially during the active period of the Iraqi Al-Qaeda.⁹⁷

It is well-known that the conflict in Syria and Iraq has also attracted a large number of people from outside these two countries. It is impossible to give any exact figures of the number of foreign fighters, yet, according to one estimate, more than 42,000 people from more than 120 countries had travelled to Syria and Iraq in the period 2011–2016 with the aim of joining ISIS.⁹⁸ Most of those travelling to Syria and Iraq come from areas adjacent to the conflict zones (from the Middle East and North Africa), but a large proportion has also come from more distant countries. For example, it is estimated that more than 5,000 people have travelled to the region from Europe alone.⁹⁹

In addition to operating in Syria and Iraq, ISIS has also coordinated attacks outside the conflict zones (including against targets in the West) and also urged others to carry them out. In the wider public debate, the extending of these attacks to Western countries has been connected to the international campaign against ISIS because the

⁹⁵ The fate of ISIS between 2015 and 2017 demonstrates why Al-Qaeda has avoided the occupation of geographic areas: states established by armed groups are often easy prey for a militarily overwhelming enemy.

⁹⁶ Fishman, *The Master Plan*, p. 60.

⁹⁷ There has also been considerable variation in the practical implementation of Al-Qaeda's interpretation and this also applies to areas outside Iraq.

⁹⁸ RAN Manual: Responses to Returnees: Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Families, July 2017, p. 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

group only issued its first public calls for attacks after the campaign had been launched in August 2014. There is, however, a lack of evidence supporting such link because international terrorism has been part of the group's strategic DNA from the outset. Al-Zarqawi, the founder of the group, tried to extend his network to Europe and individuals belonging to his network have lived at least in Germany and Sweden. For example, he planned a terrorist attack in Germany before the attacks of 11 September, but the plan was never implemented. The group has also been involved in many attacks and failed attacks in the West during the 2000s. Furthermore, the first terrorist attack carried out by a probable member of ISIS in the West took place in Brussels in May 2014, before the campaign against ISIS got under way. The attacks in Paris in 2015 and in Brussels in 2016 should primarily be seen as part of this process. The military operation against the group has undoubtedly prompted ISIS to intensify its attempts to incite and inspire its supporters and activists outside the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq to carry out violent acts.

Unlike other branches of jihadism, ISIS has adopted an ideology in which political and religious authority has been transferred from theoreticians, theologians, and leaders outside the battle zones to front line fighters. According to this interpretation, those who are fighting for their religion are better Muslims than those who fail to do so.¹⁰⁰ This has provided the group with a certain degree of credibility and the ethos of the group has also made its supporters less receptive to outside criticism. The same has occurred when criticism has been expressed by respected jihadist theologians and theoreticians, such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi from Jordan (al-Zarqawi's first mentor), Abu Qatada al-Filistini, a distinguished jihadist theologian, and several top figures in Al-Qaeda.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, ISIS' ideology is primarily an ideology of redemption. In its messages, ISIS has also emphasised how the 'struggle on the path of Allah' will wash away one's sins. This message has held particularly strong appeal for young Muslims with criminal backgrounds and possibly also for converts with life-management problems. The fact that an increasing number of Western jihadists travelling to conflict zones as foreign fighters have criminal backgrounds would appear to support this notion.¹⁰²

Moreover, unlike the elitist Al-Qaeda, which (at least before 2001) selected its new members carefully, ISIS took a populist approach, welcoming all newcomers to its

¹⁰⁰ According to Azzam, those participating in Jihad are better Muslims than those avoiding participation in the struggle.

¹⁰¹ Fishman, *The Master Plan*, p. 64.

¹⁰² Peter R. Neumann, 'Crime and Terrorism in the Nordic Countries', a presentation at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 23 August 2018.

ranks.¹⁰³ This has helped make ISIS more attractive within the jihadist movement, especially during the years in which it claimed the most success, and prompted people that were rarely seen in previous conflicts to take part in the struggle. For example, ISIS has been able to involve women in jihadist activities in an entirely new manner.

ISIS has nevertheless suffered several painful defeats since the start of the international campaign against it, which was launched in August 2014. It has lost its caliphate and the symbolically important cities of Raqqa and Mosul. Even though the group maintains local organisations in different parts of the Muslim world, many of them are no longer active. Currently, the organisational structures of ISIS and Al-Qaeda are in this respect almost identical even though the focus of ISIS' activities is in the central organisation and social movement, whereas in the case of Al-Qaeda, local organisations that have a longer operational history and are more firmly established in their areas play a key role.

ISIS has lost the victorious image that helped it attract thousands of new fighters from around world until 2015 and provided inspiration for countless terrorist attacks, especially in the period 2014–2017. Despite this, the group remains the most visible jihadist actor in the world and continues to operate in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. ISIS is not the same thing as its caliphate. The group is especially deeply rooted in Iraq and its operating environment still provides a good basis for continued jihadist activities. The history of ISIS and its ideology as the main branch of Jihad is still far from over, however. It is not clear, though, how long the constantly weakening group can remain the flag-bearer of global Jihad in a situation in which it is increasingly challenged by a resurgent Al-Qaeda and as its key areas of impetus (conflict in Syria and the caliphate project) have lost much of their practical importance.

3.5 Jihadist activism in Europe from the 1990s to the present

Most of the media attention on jihadist activism has focused on its manifestations in the West, especially in Western Europe. At least until around 2005, however, Europe played a secondary role in jihadism. Theoretically, Europe has not been an insignificant area in jihadist thinking. For many years, there have been occasional references to the continent in connection with the reconquest of the areas previously

¹⁰³ The group has also been able to make better use of the newcomers' non-military skills, especially in media production and information technology but also in administration, healthcare and construction.

occupied by Muslims. However, there was little concrete action in this respect before the war in Iraq in 2003.

Europe gradually assumed a larger role in jihadist thinking and communications after the war in Iraq. There has also been growing interest in jihadist activities and violence among European Muslims.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the phenomenon became more diverse and more complex partly as a result of these developments. This was also reflected in a substantial increase in the number of terrorist attacks and planned attacks in Europe in the period 2005–2010 and an increase in the number of people traveling from Europe to conflict zones with Muslim majorities. There was a further strengthening of the jihadist networks and communities as well as the wider jihadist social movement in Europe, which had already been boosted by the conflict in Syria and the attraction of ISIS. In fact, in recent years, Europe has been witnessing an unprecedented mobilisation of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq and a wave of jihadist attacks, which has only shown slight signs of decrease by early 2019.

3.5.1 Arrival of jihadism in Europe

There has been radical Islamist and jihadist activism in Europe at least since the 1990s. While it is known that a number of individuals travelled from Europe to Afghanistan in the 1980s to take part in the conflict, the jihadist activities only became more organised in the 1990s. This was partially because many Islamist and radical Islamist activists (and subsequently also jihadist activists) emigrated to Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, with the majority coming here as part of humanitarian immigration.¹⁰⁵

Among their number was Abu Qatada al-Filistini, a Palestinian from Jordan who was close to Al-Qaeda; Abu-Musab al-Suri, a Syrian jihadist veteran and well-known theoretician of global Jihad;¹⁰⁶ as well as Hani al-Sibai, a member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad who had fought in Afghanistan and supported Al-Qaeda and his compatriot Abu Hamza al-Masri who, for many years, preached his jihadist message in the Finsbury Park mosque in London and was one of the most important activists of the early years in Europe until his arrest in 2004.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Petter Nesser, 'Jihadism in Western Europe After the Invasion of Iraq: Tracing Motivational Influences from the Iraq War on Jihadist Terrorism in Western Europe', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 4 (2006).

¹⁰⁵ Robin Simcox, 'The Asylum-Terror Nexus: How Europe Should Respond', *The Heritage Foundation Report* 18 June 2018. See also Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Of the role of Abu Musab al-Suri for Jihadism, see Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Mu'sab al-Suri* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Many of the persons mentioned above and early key activists connected to the phenomenon had fought in Afghanistan or received training in the camps of armed groups operating in that country in the 1980s and early 1990s. During those years, they established contacts with key armed jihadist groups and other actors central to the phenomenon. They mostly continued their activities independently in the relatively free operating environment in Europe. Jihadists living elsewhere also visited Western European countries (especially those in which activists promoting jihadism had settled) and many of these visitors were activists representing armed jihadist groups. There were also independent activists operating in different parts of Europe who did not have combat experience. These included Abdullah el-Faisal, a convert of Jamaican background and Omar Bakri Muhammad from Syria. Both of them lived in the United Kingdom.

Activists visiting Europe and living there spread their ideology by speaking and sharing material in public events and radical mosques. They created, translated, and distributed material approved by armed jihadist groups and established networks of individuals with similar ideas — locally, regionally, and beyond.¹⁰⁷ Small groups were established around charismatic activists and individuals with foreign fighter experience gained from terrorist training from the 1990s onwards and more extensive social networks, organisations, and communities developed on this basis during the first decade of the 2000s.

While these developments were most visible in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Belgium, the phenomenon also spread to other countries (such as Scandinavia) in the 1990s, even if this development remained insignificant until the end of the following decade.¹⁰⁸ London became the centre of jihadist activism in Europe during the 1990s. Activists belonging to many different armed groups operated relatively freely in the British capital and created a basis for a viable and active jihadist scene during the first decade of the 2000s.¹⁰⁹

There were several radical mosques in London (the city was jokingly called 'Londonistan') and in the surrounding areas, such as the Finsbury Park mosque led by Abu Hamza. It was also the birthplace of al-Muhajiroun, which glorified jihadism and promoted the ideology with its own activism, which was mostly non-violent and legal by nature. Al-Muhajiroun had been established by Omar Bakri Muhammad as an offshoot of the Hizb ut-Tahrir organisation (the aim of which was to establish an Islamist caliphate). In addition to Omar Bakri Muhammad, other key members of the

¹⁰⁷ Mullins, *'Home-Grown' Jihad*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁸ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, pp. 38–39.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Pantucci, *'We Love Death as You Love Life'*.

organisation included Anjem Choudary, who later became a well-known jihadist activist.¹¹⁰

There were also radical mosques in other Western European countries and they played a key role in the phenomenon and its growth in Europe, especially between the 1990s and the early years of the 2000s.¹¹¹ Such premises served as key recruitment points and the Imams of the mosques often played a central role in promoting these activities.¹¹² This was especially true in openly radical mosques, in which Imams acted as the religious authorities of their groups, as recruitment magnets, and as points of contact between local networks and armed groups operating in the conflict zones.¹¹³ At the same time, the aim of the representatives of many armed radical islamist and jihadist groups was to bring mosques under their control so that they could be converted into recruitment and fundraising centres for their own groups or infiltrate the mosques to carry out more covert or unofficial support activities.

A small number of radical islamist groups (and later also jihadist groups) also actively tried to establish networks in different parts of Europe, especially from the late 1990s onwards. The task of these networks was to radicalise and recruit new supporters, activists and fighters, raise funds, and produce and disseminate activist material. The aim was to create 'strategic depth' for the armed groups that often operated in significantly more challenging environments in the Middle East and South Asia.

Violent activism in Europe preceding the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2011 was small scale and most of it took place in France. The reason for France becoming the target country for radical islamism was connected to the civil war raging in Algeria. In addition, an attempted terrorist attack connected to the armed jihadist group of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi took place in Germany. This attack was, however, foiled during its early stages.¹¹⁴ At this time, the violent international activism was mainly connected to the phenomenon of foreign fighters and especially the conflicts in Afghanistan and Bosnia. There are no comprehensive or reliable estimates of the extent of these mobilisations, although a few hundred people are thought to have mobilised to these areas.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ See in particular Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*.

¹¹¹ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, pp. 39–47.

¹¹² Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, p. 36.

¹¹³ Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 34–35.

¹¹⁴ Fishman, *The Master Plan*, pp. 27–28.

¹¹⁵ Hegghammer, 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?'

3.5.2 The decade-long evolution of jihadist activism: from the Afghanistan war to Syria

As it attracted young second-generation Muslim immigrants and converts¹¹⁶ during the first decade of the 2000s, jihadist activism in Europe developed into a more indigenous phenomenon. Jihadist networks continued to expand, especially in countries in which jihadists had already been active in the 1990s, such as France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany. The phenomenon also became increasingly visible in Western European countries in which individuals connected to the phenomenon had been living since the 1980s and 1990s but had yet to witness more than a few well-established jihadist networks or communities (such as in the Nordic countries).¹¹⁷ European countries also started experiencing jihadist terrorist attacks.

The formation of a jihadist social movement in Europe was the main factor behind these developments. This movement drew its inspiration from the ideology, activities, and messages of Al-Qaeda. Especially after the attacks in Madrid (in 2004) and London (in 2005), measures were introduced to significantly restrict the freedom of action of activists and networks that had openly promoted jihadism (for example, nearly all large European mosques openly associated with armed groups were closed by the year 2010¹¹⁸). However, the heightened interest in jihadism manifested in groups of young friendship groups attempting to contact jihadist networks and armed groups and subsequently participate in their activities.¹¹⁹

A new generation of activists that had mainly worked outside mosques replaced the imprisoned and deported key activists (many of whom had served as radical religious scholars). The authority of this new generation was based on a mix of charisma, ideological expertise, and organisational skills, and was often tinged with combat experience and links to armed groups operating outside Europe.¹²⁰ These activists played a key role in the establishment, maintenance, and expansion of jihadist networks and communities from the year 2005 onwards.¹²¹ Their aim was to radicalise and recruit individuals from within their own social networks but they also found

¹¹⁶ See Mullins, *'Home-Grown' Jihad*.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Michael Taarnby, *Jihad in Denmark: An Overview and Analysis of Jihadist Activity in Denmark 1990–2006*, DIIS Working Paper 36 (2006), <https://www.diis.dk/files/media/documents/publications/wp202006-3520til20web.pdf>; Magnus Ranstorp, 'Terrorist Awakening in Sweden?' *CTC Sentinel* 4, no. 1 (2011); Lia & Nesser, 'Jihadism in Norway'.

¹¹⁸ Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 22–25.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Marc Sageman: *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Pennsylvania University Press, 2008), pp. 66–69.

¹²⁰ Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*.

¹²¹ Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 37–41; Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, pp. 13–14.

receptive audiences in countercultural salafist communities.¹²² New locations, such as universities, smaller prayer houses, reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers, and prisons also replaced mosques as sites of recruitment.¹²³

One of the most significant developments in Europe in the late 2000s and the early 2010s was the spread of the salafist Sharia4 organisations from the United Kingdom to other European countries. The aim of these organisations was to promote the jihadist ideology openly and within legal bounds. The organisations were largely based on the model laid out by the al-Muhajiroun organisation. The aim of al-Muhajiroun was to establish a caliphate in the United Kingdom by means of provocative activism (especially with a presence in the national media) and proselytising. Even though it aimed to be provocative, it also tried to remain within the law, at least in its public activities. Organisations modelled on Sharia4 were established in the late 2000s and early 2010s in such countries as Italy, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, and Norway, helping to strengthen regional (and international) links between local networks and communities. These organisations helped to attract hundreds of activists from across Europe before they were banned after a few years. Many parts of the social networks behind the organisations remain active, however.

The organisations' relationship with violence has been complex. While they officially and publicly rejected violence, they nevertheless equally openly supported the jihadist ideology that praised and encouraged violence. They also praised its key figures (such as Mullah Krekar and Osama bin Laden) as well as jihadist acts of violence and the individuals carrying them out. For their members, they provided a favourable social environment and, in most cases, also an opportunity to participate in jihadist activities. This was because they had close links to the jihadist ideology and jihadist actors in various conflict zones.¹²⁴ These groups and their networks have played a central role in the mobilisation of foreign fighters from Western Europe to Syria and Iraq, especially to the ranks of ISIS.¹²⁵ The organisations also provided their members with opportunities to carry out acts of violence and participate in criminal activities connected to the phenomenon in their own operating environments.¹²⁶ In fact,

¹²² Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 112–115; Fernando Reinares, 'Jihadist mobilisation, undemocratic Salafism and terrorist threat in EU', Royal Institute Elcano Expert Comment 13/2017, 10 March 2017.

¹²³ See especially Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 25–28.

¹²⁴ On the cooperation between Sharia4 organisations and armed groups, see Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 246–260.

¹²⁵ Lorenzo Vidino, 'Sharia4: From Confrontational Activity to Militancy' *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 2 (2015); Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*.

¹²⁶ Vidino, 'Sharia4: From Confrontational Activity to Militancy'.

members of these groups have taken part in terrorist attacks and other terrorist offences in different parts of Europe (especially in the United Kingdom).

Despite the serious challenges faced by Al-Qaeda in Western Europe, it nevertheless played a major role in the attacks carried out in the period 2001–2011.¹²⁷ In fact, there was a steady increase in jihadist terror attacks between 2001 and 2004, with the attack carried out in Madrid in March 2004 being exceptionally deadly.¹²⁸ The number of jihadist terror attacks in Europe remained more or less constant in the period 2005–2008, even though this period coincided with the huge publicity and outrage sparked by the Muhammad cartoons.

The number of attacks and attempted attacks increased in the early years of the 2010s. One reason for this was that, in its own communications, Al-Qaeda had begun to more forcefully encourage its supporters to independently carry out terrorist attacks. At the same time, the local Al-Qaeda organisation in Yemen (AQAP) attempted to carry out a small number of terrorist attacks in the West and inspire attacks by producing English-language material for its target audience in the West (the most important being the *Inspire* magazine). The aim of this activity was to inspire supporters living in Europe to independently carry out simple and low-cost attacks. Towards the end of this period in particular, the modus operandi used in terrorist attacks became more versatile, with knives and vehicles being used in the attacks alongside bombs and firearms.¹²⁹

At this time, the increasing influx of foreign fighters to conflict zones was also closely connected to the growth of jihadist activism. Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, and Somalia were some of the countries attracting fighters. Most of the individuals travelling to the conflict zones came from countries in which jihadist activism had already surfaced in the 1990s. A small percentage of the returnees took part in terrorist attacks, adding to the success rate and the destructiveness of the attacks carried out in Europe.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Hoffman & Reinares (ed.), *The Evolution of The Global Terrorist Threat*, pp. 625–630. See also Stenersen, 'Thirty Years after its Foundation'.

¹²⁸ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, p. 55.

¹²⁹ Petter Nesser, 'The Modus Operandi of Jihadi Terrorists in Europe', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 6 (2014).

¹³⁰ Hegghammer, 'Should I Stay or Should I go?'.

3.5.3 Conflict in Syria and Iraq, ISIS, and the impact on Europe

The uprising in Syria, which began in early 2011, and the ensuing civil war has had an extremely strong impact on jihadist activism in Europe. At the start of the current decade, it was a commonly held belief that jihadist activism in Europe was on the wane. This was partially due to decline in the number of planned attacks the fact that there had not been any destructive terrorist attacks connected to Al-Qaeda since the bus and underground bombings in London in July 2005.

In the years to follow, however, the developments taking place beneath the surface of the events were notably more important to the evolution of jihadist activism. In many countries (especially in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Belgium), the jihadist community and activity expanded considerably during these years and there was a substantial increase in cross-border networks and activism. In other words, jihadist activism became more widespread and more international. The spread of Sharia4 organisations (modelled on al-Muhajiroun) across Europe, including countries in which jihadist activism was less developed, was an essential part of this process.¹³¹

The influx of individuals into Syria and Iraq was the most visible manifestation of the strong growth in jihadist activism. The first indications of the phenomenon could already be seen in 2011 when the uprising was transforming into an armed conflict. The conflict began in earnest in 2013 and gathered force during the second half of the year.¹³² At this stage, the conflict and the jihadist groups participating in it had already attracted an unprecedented number of foreign fighters from Europe. When ISIS declared its caliphate in the areas of Syria and Iraq that it had occupied in summer 2014, the influx of individuals into the conflict zones increased and reached a record high. For example, according to the Soufan Group, nearly 6,000 individuals had travelled to the conflict zones from Europe by the year 2017.¹³³ A large proportion of these people had joined ISIS.¹³⁴ By comparison, according to a study by Thomas Hegghammer, a total of about 700 people left Europe as foreign fighters to join all conflicts in the Islamic world in the period 1990–2010.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Vidino, 'Sharia4: From Confrontational Activity to Militancy'; Andrew Higgins, 'A Norway Town and Its Pipeline to Jihad in Syria', *The New York Times* 4 April 2015.

¹³² Aaron Y. Zelin, 'Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria; Steep Rise Among Western Europeans', *ICSR Insight* 17 December 2013.

¹³³ Richard Barrett, 'Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees', *The Soufan Group*, October 2017.

¹³⁴ Neumann, *Radicalized: The New Jihadists*.

¹³⁵ Because of problems connected with the availability of information, this figure is far too low and should be considered as a minimum. See Hegghammer, 'Should I Stay or Should I go?'.

The reasons for the exceptional appeal of the Syrian conflict and ISIS have been extensively discussed in the public forum and by researchers alike.¹³⁶ In short, local, regional, and international factors have all contributed to it. Local factors include the historically and religiously special position that Syria occupies in Islam (and in the Islamic prophecies of the end of days),¹³⁷ changes in the dynamics of the conflict, and the state-building project culminating in the declaration of the caliphate by ISIS.¹³⁸ Regional factors include the heightening of tensions between Shias and Sunnis in the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, in Europe, which came to the fore in Syria at the same time as the influx of foreign fighters from Europe to Syria accelerated during the latter half of 2013.¹³⁹ In addition to this, the mobilisation has been greatly facilitated by the role of Turkey as a country of transit and a strategic rear guard area for the armed groups taking part in the Syrian conflict (until 2015). The grass-root jihadist support networks in North Africa and Europe have also played an important role.

Development of communications technologies have also had a crucial effect on the situation. Moreover, the spread of social media, smartphones, and low-price and fast online connections have made the Syrian civil war the first conflict that people outside the war zone have been able to follow virtually, in near real time, and independently of the mainstream media.¹⁴⁰ The images of the suffering endured by the Syrian civilian population and brutal violence against it have particularly strengthened the already strong emotional reactions to the conflict among Muslims around the world.¹⁴¹ Social media has also played an important facilitating role for those willing to become foreign fighters (especially among those who have joined ISIS). In fact, jihadist groups have eagerly seized the opportunities provided by technological advances, especially in their communications and recruitment activities.

Even though most of the individuals leaving for Syria and Iraq have been young men, the factors referred to above have also prompted an exceptionally large number of women and older people to travel to these countries. A significant number of children, travelling with their parents, have also ended up in the area.

¹³⁶ See, for example, *The Syrian Jihad*.

¹³⁷ See, for example, McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, especially pp. 99–119.

¹³⁸ Aaron Zelin, 'New Zealand's Jihadis', *New Zealand International Review* 40, no. (2015).

¹³⁹ The dynamics associated with the secularisation of the conflict were fed by the prominent role occupied by jihadist groups (especially Jabhat al-Nusra and later ISIS) in the armed opposition and the involvement of the radical Islamist Shia group Hezbollah and Iran in the conflict on the side of Bashar al-Assad.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, David Patrikarakos, *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media Is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

¹⁴¹ Of the identification with distant suffering in a conflict zone through social media and radicalisation, see Kevin McDonald, *Radicalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), pp. 22–65.

Syria and ISIS have become the focal point for European jihadist circles during the 2010s. In fact, soon after the start of the conflict in Syria, there was also a sharp increase in the number of terrorist attacks and planned attacks in Europe. The first attack involving a perpetrator suspected to have fought in Syria took place in May 2014, when four people were killed in a hail of automatic fire in the Jewish Museum in Brussels. During the three years that followed this attack, a total of 51 jihadist attacks (and dozens of failed and foiled attacks) took place in Western countries. Only one of them was connected to Al-Qaeda, while all others were inspired, supported or carried out by ISIS. Some of them even took place in countries that had not previously experienced jihadist terrorist attacks.¹⁴²

The attacks also continued after this period and Finland, too, experienced its first jihadist terrorist attack (in August 2017). In fact, the year 2017 marked the peak of the ISIS terror wave inspired by the war in Syria and, since then, there has been a decline in the number of attacks and attempted attacks. The number of attacks claiming a large number of lives has also decreased. Indeed, no attacks claiming more than ten lives have taken place in Europe since early autumn 2017. During 2018, the number of attacks and attempted attacks was still significantly higher than in the years before the war in Syria.¹⁴³

The connections between the attacks carried out in Europe in recent years to the wider jihadist networks or armed groups outside Europe have greatly varied in nature. Researchers have mapped this diversity by dividing the attacks into directed, networked, and inspired attacks.¹⁴⁴

According to this categorisation, directed attacks are those that are planned and carried out by armed groups themselves (sometimes in cooperation with other partners). In Europe, such attacks have been carried out by ISIS and Al-Qaeda, including its local organisation in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). A requirement for such a definition is that the armed groups involved have a European-based external operations wing. Attacks of this type have been rare but, on average, they have caused a great deal of destruction. Directed attacks include the bus and underground bombings in London in July 2005, the attacks in Paris in November 2015, and in Brussels in March 2016.

For their part, networked attacks have been carried out by jihadists living in Europe that have connections to more extensive networks. They may even have acquired

¹⁴² See Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone & Eva Entenmann, *Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West* (Milano: Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2017).

¹⁴³ Petter Nesser, 'Europe hasn't won the war on terror', *Politico* 5 December 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Clint Watts, 'Inspired, Networked & Directed - The Muddled Jihad of ISIS & al-Qaeda post Hebdo', *War on the Rocks* 12 January 2015.

combat experience in war zones. These attacks are, however, carried out without the specific encouragement of any armed group and, in fact, such groups may not even have been aware of the attack plans. The attack against the offices of Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 was an example of a networked attack.¹⁴⁵

In inspired attacks, the perpetrators do not have any links to wider jihadist networks or armed groups. In other words, they are carried out completely independently. This has been the most common type of attacks in recent years, especially when also taking into account the planned attacks that have come to the attention of the intelligence authorities and have not been carried out. These attacks are described as inspired because, even though the linkage to ISIS and Al-Qaeda is absent, the attacks have been encouraged and inspired by these groups. Moreover, the perpetrators also state that they are acting in the name of ISIS or (less often) in the name of Al-Qaeda. On the basis of the current understanding of the jihadist stabbing that occurred in Turku, Finland, in August 2017, this attack would be defined as an inspired attack.

Even though the number of jihadist attacks in Europe has decreased, at least momentarily, it is still too early to declare that jihadist violence is on a permanent decline. We will return to this point in the final chapter of this report.

¹⁴⁵ Watts, 'Inspired, Networked & Directed'.

4 Jihadist activities and Finland

Finland has always been and still is at the periphery of jihadist activism in every way, both globally and in the European context. Whereas in the major centres of jihadism in Europe, the support activities for jihadism were already extensive in the 1990s, the first signs of such activities in Finland were not reported until the first decade of the 2000s and were substantially smaller in scale. However, the situation has changed significantly during the 2010s, as the number of individuals involved has increased substantially and new networks have arisen around the phenomenon. Nevertheless, jihadist activities in Finland are still relatively small in scale when compared to many other Western European countries.

The civil war in Syria and especially the highly visible role of ISIS in this conflict has had a major impact on jihadist activism in Finland. The fact that among the asylum seekers arriving in Europe in 2015 and 2016, there were people with ties to armed jihadist groups abroad, has also played a role in this development. Consequently, the ties between individuals living in Finland to the conflict zones and the support networks of the jihadist groups operating therein have become closer and more extensive.

This chapter discusses the evolution of jihadist activities in Finland and the ways in which these activities manifest in our country. This chapter is divided into three parts. We begin by giving an overview of what is currently known about the jihadist activities that took place in Finland in the first decade of the 2000s. We then move on to examine the ways in which jihadist activities have evolved in Finland in the period between the outbreak of the conflict in Syria and early 2019. In the third part, we summarise the different forms of jihadist activism in Finland, with a focus on the conflict in Syria and Iraq and, the phenomenon of foreign fighters linked to ISIS.

4.1 Background: jihadist activities in Finland in the 2000s

It is widely believed that, until recent years, the activities of international, armed jihadist groups had little connection to Finland. This applies both to activities on Finnish soil and communications directed at Finland. This has historically been one reason for so little attention having been paid to jihadist activities in Finland. For many years, SUPO (in cooperation with the intelligence services and immigration services

of other countries) was the only Finnish body monitoring the situation.¹⁴⁶ The possible connections between jihadist movements and Finland only started receiving public attention after the attacks of 11 September 2001. Since that date, international counter-terrorism activities and the exchange of information became significantly more extensive, even though the availability of resources lagged behind the workload that multiplied after the attacks.¹⁴⁷ It is, therefore, quite possible that the authorities do not have a comprehensive understanding of the activities that took place in Finland in the preceding decades. There has been practically no research on the history of jihadist activism in Finland.

This means that we still know little about the early history of jihadist activities and their development in Finland in the 2000s. Our current knowledge on the topic is reviewed below. This picture is probably not exhaustive, and it does not even provide a representative sample of the phenomenon in Finland.

We do not know how and when jihadism emerged in Finland. It is highly likely, however, that the course of events has been more or less the same as elsewhere in Europe. In other words, the phenomenon probably arrived in Finland with activists or individuals connected with armed groups who either emigrated to or visited Finland. For example, until the end of the last decade, SUPO' took the view (expressed in its annual reports) that the connections between armed groups and Finland were mainly limited to personal connections that some former members of the organisations or persons close to them living in Finland had.¹⁴⁸

The activism of such individuals has mainly been directed at those armed conflicts under way in their countries of origin that have involved armed radical Islamist and jihadist groups as one of the parties involved. Most of the new supporters were recruited among people coming from these same areas. Whereas elsewhere in Western Europe, networks, communities, and small groups engaged in different types of activism arose around such individuals, it is believed that the activities in Finland were on a considerably smaller scale. In official reports, jihadist activism was characterised as a marginal phenomenon until the early years of the 2010s.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ For example, according to SUPO annual report for 1996, the focus in counter-terrorism activities had been on the monitoring of Islamist extremist organisations and armed groups of Kurds. SUPO, *Annual Report 1996*.

¹⁴⁷ Of the development of counter-terrorism activities in Finland, see Leena Malkki, 'International pressure to perform: Counterterrorism policy development in Finland', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 39, no. 4 (2016).

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, SUPO, *Annual Report 1997* and *Annual Report 2011*.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2013*, pp. 5–6.

At the same time, however, there were already signs of more organised activities in Finland before the 2010s. Such activities have involved Ansar al-Islam, an Iraqi-based Kurdish jihadist group, and Al-Shabaab, a group established in Somalia in 2006. There are also indications of activism connected to Al-Qaeda and the global jihadism that it represents.

4.1.1 Ansar al-Islam and Rawti Shax

Individuals living in Finland are known to have maintained links to Ansar al-Islam, an armed group operating in Iraq, and the organisation known as Rawti Shax and Didinwe, which later supported the fighting from Europe.

Ansar al-Islam was established in late 2001 in the Kurdish areas of Iraq. From the outset, it maintained close links to the central leadership of Al-Qaeda through the prior activities of the individuals belonging to it. It is assumed that it received at least some logistical support and funding from Al-Qaeda.¹⁵⁰ The aim of the group was to overthrow the Kurdistan regional administration and to replace it with an Islamic administration based on Sharia law. Before the outbreak of the 2003 war, the group also controlled a small area that included villages close to the border between Iraq and Iran. Most of the individuals involved in its activities were Kurds, even though groups with mainly Arab backgrounds have also joined it. During the war in Iraq, the organisation is known to have openly cooperated with a number of jihadist organisations operating in Iraq and it provided a safe haven and a base for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and many of his Arab fighters between 2002 and 2003.

Mullah Krekar (aka Najmuddin Faraj Ahmad) was the first leader of Ansar al-Islam. Krekar, who had been involved in the establishment of the group and had already been an active member of the Kurdish Islamist movement in the 1980s. He arrived in Norway as a quota refugee in 1991 but continued to visit Iraq after that time. He also made trips to other European countries, especially Germany, to raise funds and to inspire and recruit additional people for its activities.¹⁵¹ In fact, the group has received support from followers living outside the region (in Europe and other Middle Eastern countries). The networks are known to have recruited fighters to the region among Kurds living in other parts of the world. There are also indications that attacks in

¹⁵⁰ For a brief overview of Ansar al-Islam, see 'Ansar al-Islam', Mapping Militant Organisations, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/13>. See also Fishman, *The Master Plan*.

¹⁵¹ US. Department of Treasury, 'Treasury designations target terrorist facilitators', 7 December 2006, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp191.aspx>.

Europe have been planned but the plans known to have been made in the first decade of the 2000s were relatively unsophisticated.¹⁵²

Even though Mullah Krekar resigned from the leadership of the movement after the start of the Iraqi war and no longer travelled extensively outside Norway, he is known to have retained an important role in the European support networks of Ansar al-Islam. In fact, he has even revived support networks under the auspices of a new organisation named Rawti Shax since the end of the 2010s. From his base in Norway, he also continued to encourage violent attacks in Iraq and Europe.¹⁵³ Indeed, by 2015, Krekar had also openly expressed his support for ISIS and stated that he considers its caliphate legitimate.¹⁵⁴ Most of the members of Ansar al-Islam joined ISIS in 2014.

The Norwegian authorities have characterised Krekar as a threat to the country's security. He has been served with a deportation order, but it has not yet been carried out for a number of practical reasons.¹⁵⁵ In Norway, he has received several prison sentences for glorifying and inciting terrorist attacks, for assisting terrorists, and for making illegal threats against Kurds and Norwegian politicians. Researchers generally view Mullah Krekar as one of the key jihadist activists in Europe.

Whereas Ansar al-Islam has primarily been an armed group operating in Iraq, Rawti Shax has its operational focus on Western Europe. Its activities involve a large number of individuals living in different European countries who communicate with each other using such means as the Internet. According to European security authorities, Rawti Shax has been particularly active in Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Finland, Italy, Greece, Sweden, and Norway in addition to Iraq, Iran, and Syria.¹⁵⁶

Rawti Shax has engaged in public activities, such as the dissemination of Kurdish-language political-religious texts on the Internet, especially on Facebook, PalTalk, and on its own website. The organisation has also maintained its own 'online university' for the study of religious and political topics.¹⁵⁷ Supporters of the group have also repeatedly and vocally demonstrated support of Mullah Krekar, including demanding

¹⁵² Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, p. 136.

¹⁵³ Lia & Nesser, 'Jihadism in Norway', pp. 122–123.

¹⁵⁴ 'Mullah Krekar: Only ISIS can fulfill Muslim 'ambitions and dreams'', RUDAW 5 February 2015, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/050220151>.

¹⁵⁵ Yrjö Kokkonen, 'Terrorihanketta johdettiin norjalaisesta vankilasta', *Yle* 12 November 2015.

¹⁵⁶ Eurojust, 'Joint action against radical Islamist terrorist group coordinated at Eurojust (Operation JWEB)', <http://www.eurojust.europa.eu/press/PressReleases/Pages/2015/2015-11-12.aspx>.

¹⁵⁷ The organisation's online activities are discussed in more detail in the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*.

his release from prison. Mullah Krekar himself has given polemic and provocative media statements that have attracted a great deal of attention.¹⁵⁸

Even though Rawti Shax is ideologically and operationally committed to global jihadism (especially ISIS), it is ethnically structured around shared Kurdish ethnicity (in the same way as Ansar al-Islam). In fact, young Kurds living in different countries have been the main target audience of Rawti Shax. A small number of people from other ethnic backgrounds are also involved in its activities but these people are probably only a small minority. In the 2010s, the aim of Rawti Shax has been to encourage young Kurds living in Europe to join the organisation and to travel to Syria and Iraq as fighters (particularly to fight in the ranks of ISIS) and to assist people leaving for the conflict zones in their travel arrangements. It is clear that it has tried to do this as inconspicuously as possible.

It has also been reported that Rawti Shax has planned attacks in Europe with the aim of pressuring Norway to release the then-imprisoned Mullah Krekar, the leader of the group, by attacking Norwegian embassies and kidnapping diplomats.¹⁵⁹ According to the available information, these plans were not particularly well-advanced.

There have been reports of activities in support of Ansar al-Islam (and later Rawti Shax) in Finland since the first half of the 2000s. For example, according to the 2004 annual report of SUPO, possible links between individuals residing in Finland and armed resistance in Iraq and its funding had attracted interest.¹⁶⁰ This is probably a reference to the support networks of Ansar al-Islam discussed in the 2005 annual report. The annual report only states, however, that there have been observations of the support activities in other European countries and there are no comments on the situation in Finland.¹⁶¹

There is very little detailed information available on the support activities of Ansar al-Islam in Finland. For example, it was reported by the Finnish national broadcaster, Yle, in 2004 that there are about 20 Kurds in Finland with links to Ansar al-Islam. At the time, SUPO confirmed that it, too, had received information that supporting this

¹⁵⁸ For example, Giulia Paravicini, 'Busted jihadist network plotted to snatch diplomats: Arrests in 'Operation Jweb' include Ansar al-Islam founder Mullah Krekar', *Politico* 12 November 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Jukka Huusko et al., 'Ryhmä suunnitteli terrori-iskujen sarjaa Eurooppaan – Jihadisteilla yhteyksiä Suomeen', *Helsingin Sanomat* 13 November 2015; 'SUPO tietoinen Uusi Suunta -jihadistijärjestön Suomi-kytköksistä' *Ilta-Sanomat* 13 November 2015.

¹⁶⁰ SUPO, *Annual Report 2004*, p. 6.

¹⁶¹ SUPO, *Annual Report 2005*, p. 4.

finding.¹⁶² Since then, similar claims have been presented several times in a variety of open sources.

The support for the group probably finds its origins among those quota refugees who were accepted by Finland from the Kurdish regions of Iraq during the mid-1990s. In the Turku region in particular, a small group of people with Kurdish background has considered Mullah Krekar to be their spiritual leader for many years. These individuals have variously participated in the activities of Krekar-led networks supporting armed action. Furthermore, Awat Hamasalih, one of the key leaders of the organisation and a close associate of Mullah Krekar, lived in Turku between 2013 and 2014.¹⁶³ Persons linked to the aforementioned activities have also lived in the Helsinki region.

As is the case in other countries, Rawti Shax has also tried to carry out its support activities in Finland without attracting too much attention. This is also a reason that getting detailed information on the organisation's activities is difficult. The activities in Finland are, however, probably limited to the recruitment, radicalisation, and fundraising activities that Rawti Shax has been carrying out within its own small community, which is largely separated from other local Kurdish communities. It was suggested in the MOT TV programme and the discussions carried out for this study

¹⁶² 'Suomesta yhteyksiä terroriepäiltyyn?' *Yle* 15 October 2004; Toby Archer & Ann-Nina Finne, 'Pizzaa islamisteille', *Ulkopolitiikka* 4/2005. The persons mentioned in Yle's MOT programme 'Pyhä sota Turussa' discussing the matter sued Yle and the reporters behind the story. Ultimately, Yle and the reporters were ordered by the Finnish Supreme Court to pay compensations to the plaintiffs for libel ('Korkein oikeus kovensi MOT-ohjelman tuomiota', *Yle* 9 December 2010). The fact that the reporters refused to disclose their sources during the trial was taken into account by the court when considering the sentence.

¹⁶³ According to newspaper reports, Awat Hamasalih, who has also used the name Awat Karkuky, moved to the United Kingdom in 2002 and became a UK citizen in 2008. Hamasalih is known to have maintained a close relationship with Mullah Krekar for many years and he has been involved in the European networks led by Krekar since the early years of the 2000s. According to the Italian police, he has been a member of the organisation's top leadership. Hamasalih seems to have been particularly active in the communication activities of Rawti Shax. He has probably also been responsible for the organisation's finances and has had extensive knowledge of its activities. He also has links to other key jihadist figures in Europe. Hamasalih moved to Turku in spring 2013 and married a woman living in Finland. He was ordered to leave the country because, according to SUPO, he endangered public order and safety with his activities. The decision to deport Hamasalih was made in early 2014 but because of an appeals process it was only carried out at the end of the same year. Hamasalih has also been banned from entering Finland for 15 years and it is reported that he has violated this ban at least once. Awat Hamasalih is currently serving a multi-year prison sentence that he received in the United Kingdom in 2017 for ISIS membership and for supporting the organisation. See Anu Nousiainen, 'Suomessa lietsotaan ääri-islamia: Turussa asuva mies julkaisi värväysvideon', *HS Kuukausiliite* 4 October 2014; Rebekka Härkönen, 'Poliisi pidätti Suomesta karkotetun ääri-islamistin Turussa', *Turun Sanomat* 1 April 2015; for example, 'Birmingham man convicted of Islamic State membership', *BBC News* 17 June 2017. Aine Fox, Lizzie Dearden, 'Isis recruiter who acted as 'ambassador' to UK is jailed after sending jihadist to Syria', *Independent* 4 August 2017.

that at least at some point, they have also tried to gain influence over prayer houses frequented by Kurds.

According to the news reports referred to above and the interviews conducted for this study, individuals living in Finland are also suspected of having raised funds for the organisation in the form of donations and proceeds from restaurant operations. There have also been suspicions that the support activities or individuals involved in them have received funding from outside Finland. For example, in 2004, it was also reported in the Norwegian media that a person who had previously lived in Finland and had connections to Ansar al-Islam had been arrested in Estonia on suspicion of planning an attack against the Norwegian embassy in Latvia.¹⁶⁴

It is also possible that persons connected to the support networks have carried out support activities in Iraq during the first decade of the 2000s. Indeed, according to the information presented in the MOT TV programme, three men with Kurdish backgrounds that had lived in Finland were arrested in Iraq in summer 2005 on suspicion of supporting jihadist activities. It is impossible to verify from open sources what they were doing in Iraq and the persons themselves have denied any guilt.

It is nevertheless known that a small number of persons linked to Rawti Shax took part in the conflict in Syria and Iraq in the 2010s. There is little information available on the current situation of Rawti Shax. According to the interviews carried out for this study, it would seem that some of the individuals connected to the network are still living in Finland. This is also indicated by some of the claims made in the media.¹⁶⁵ The network is not known to have planned any attacks in Finland. According to SUPO, attacks in Finland are not likely.¹⁶⁶

4.1.2 Activities in support of Al-Shabaab

Another area of activities that attracted considerable publicity in the first decade of the 2000s was connected to the civil war in Somalia. There are suspicions that activities in support of Al-Shabaab, an organisation involved in the conflict, were carried out in Finland during the latter half of the first decade of the 2000s. The activities of Al-

¹⁶⁴ 'Ansar al-Islam knyttes til terrortrussel: Ansar al-Islam, som tidligere ble ledet av mullah Krekar, blir knyttet til terrortrusselen mot den norske ambassaden i Riga', *Aftenposten* 2 November 2004.

¹⁶⁵ For example, the *Ilta-lehti* newspaper reported in December 2015, that there are still three top terrorists with connections to Rawti Shax living in Finland. According to *Ilta-lehti*, these individuals had not been granted asylum in Finland but attempts to deport them had failed. Juha Ristimäki, 'Lähde vahvistaa: Suomessa majailee kolme kovan luokan terroristia', *Ilta-lehti* 5 December 2015; Rebekka Härkönen, 'SUPO: Jihadistien toiminta jatkuu', *Turun Sanomat* 14 November 2015.

¹⁶⁶ 'SUPO tietoinen Uusi suunta -jihadistijärjestön Suomi-kytköksistä', *Ilta-Sanomat* 13 November 2015.

Shabaab have involved a strong local dimension and the organisation's popularity was partially based on its ability to bring stability to the areas under its control and to fight Ethiopia, the arch enemy of Somalia, especially during the early years of its activities (since around 2005). At the same time, its key founders were sympathetic to Al-Qaeda from the outset, with many of them having fought in Afghanistan or received training at camps located in that country. This explained their close links to Al-Qaeda and its members. The themes of global Jihad have been particularly prominent in the communications Al-Shabaab has directed at people living outside Somalia. As an organisation, however, Al-Shabaab has mostly operated separately from Al-Qaeda. Indeed, it unsuccessfully attempted to join Al-Qaeda for many years before finally becoming an official part of the organisation in 2012.¹⁶⁷

The conflict in Somalia has also touched Somalis living outside their home country in many ways. This sympathy has occasionally manifested in the form of support for Al-Shabaab. During the early years of the conflict between Al-Shabaab and Ethiopia, the attitudes towards the organisation were relatively positive and was viewed as a fight for the independence of Somalia and the restoration of order. The idea of global Jihad and the struggle against the United States (which was supporting Ethiopia), running parallel to nationalistic aspirations, provided an ideological basis on which international support could be built. Support for Al-Shabaab among Somali expatriates (including those living in the West) seems to have been at its peak during the early years of the organisation's activities, between 2006 and 2009.¹⁶⁸

Support for Al-Shabaab manifested itself in the form of activities related to fundraising, volunteering as fighters, and recruitment. While most of the Al-Shabaab fighters have come from the local population, foreign fighters have also played an important role in the organisation's activities. Indeed, many of the suicide attacks attributed to the organisation have been carried out by foreign fighters. Fighters have travelled to Somalia from the neighbouring countries and from the West, with most of the latter group being ethnic Somalis. Their total number has been estimated to be between a few hundred and slightly more than one thousand.¹⁶⁹

Websites and social media have served as important channels in communicating with activists living outside Somalia and recruiting them to the fight. Many of these websites have been maintained by Somalis living in foreign countries. The global aspect of Al-Shabaab's ideology has played a prominent role in the online

¹⁶⁷ For example, Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Roland Marchal, 'A tentative assessment of the Somali Harakat Al-Shabaab', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁶⁸ Marchal, 'A tentative assessment', p. 394.

¹⁶⁹ For example, David Shinn, 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (2011).

communications.¹⁷⁰ Al-Shabaab has also carried out extensive 'offline' recruitment activities. Such activities have been carried out in the United States (especially in Minnesota¹⁷¹) and in the Nordic region. According to Stig Jarle Hansen, the first recruiters in the Nordic countries operated in the Rinkeby district of Stockholm. In later years, Gothenburg became the centre of the recruitment activities. Recruiters operating in Sweden have also been active in Norway and Denmark. Mosques in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö have been key recruitment centres in Sweden, whereas in other Nordic countries, mosques are not believed to have been closely linked to recruitment activities.¹⁷²

Finland was also a site for activities in support of Al-Shabaab at the beginning of the 2010s. Al-Shabaab and especially its relationship with Somalis living in Finland were only cursorily discussed in the publications of SUPO during the organisation's early years. The first detailed references were made in 2011, when SUPO noted that Al-Shabaab was also in the process of establishing itself in Finland and expressed the fear that young people sent from Finland to Somalia would end up as fighters or at training camps.¹⁷³

It is, however, probable that the support activities in Finland have been conducted on a significantly smaller scale and have been less organised than in countries such as Sweden. Representatives of Finland's Somali community have systematically denied that support for Al-Shabaab in Finland is more than a marginal phenomenon.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, according to SUPO, there are no signs of organised al-Shabaab recruitment activities in Finland. Foreign speakers have nevertheless visited various events in Finland and they may have encouraged participation in fighting in Somalia.¹⁷⁵ For example, according to a media report in 2011 on the documents leaked to Wikileaks, Hassan Hussein, the spiritual leader of Al-Shabaab had visited

¹⁷⁰ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, pp. 59–67. For more details of Al-Shabaab's online communications, see the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*.

¹⁷¹ Jack Healy, 'For Jihad Recruits, a Pipeline from Minnesota to Militancy', *New York Times* 6 September 2014.

¹⁷² Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, pp. 96–99; Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci & Evan Kohlmann, 'Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: Al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict', *African Security* 3, no. 4 (2010), 227; Matti Mielonen, 'Al-Shabaab rekrytoi ulkomailta', *Helsingin Sanomat* 18 September 2011.

¹⁷³ 'Terroristeilla Suomi-kontakteja', *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* 4 January 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Juha Salonen & Kristiina Markkanen, 'Somaliyhteisö tuomitsee terroristiyhteydet', *Helsingin Sanomat* 18 September 2011.

¹⁷⁵ Jukka Huusko, 'SUPO: Suomessa ei al-Shabaabin järjestäytynyttä värväystä', *Helsingin Sanomat* 27 September 2013; Erik Nyström, 'Somaliliitto: Suomessa ei tietoa al-Shabaabin värväystoiminnasta', *Helsingin Sanomat* 19 October 2013.

Finland in 2009 in order to seek support and recruit new members for the organisation. He reportedly visited Sweden and Norway during the same trip.¹⁷⁶

People living in Finland have also gone to Somalia in order to fight in the ranks of al-Shabaab. Those monitoring the situation in Somalia have reported that people coming from Finland have been observed in the organisation's ranks.¹⁷⁷ It is hard to say with certainty how many people have gone to Somalia and when they have done so solely on the basis of the information available to the authors of this report. It is clear, however, that the number of people travelling to the East African country is considerably lower than the number of individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq. According to a Yle documentary programme shown in 2013, there were about half of dozen such people.¹⁷⁸ People from Finland are not currently known to have taken part in suicide attacks.¹⁷⁹

Recruitment activities associated with Al-Shabaab (and later with ISIS) have been the source of great concern in the Somali community. Members of the community have been particularly worried about activities in which young people struggling with problems related to substance use and crime are targeted for recruitment.¹⁸⁰

Fighters originating from Finland are mentioned in three sources. In his book on Al-Shabaab, Stig Jarle Hansen, a Norwegian researcher, mentions Amiir Musa Ibrahim from Finland as one of the foreign fighters killed in 2011.¹⁸¹ Secondly, a young man raised in Finland and presenting himself as Mohamed Muse is interviewed in a Danish documentary programme. The man discusses (in Finnish) the reasons that prompted him to travel to Somalia and become a foreign fighter.¹⁸²

A third reference can be found in the Yle documentary programme on Al-Shabaab's recruitment activities shown in spring 2013. It presents the case of a young man named Ahmed. Ahmed came to Finland at primary school age. After quarrelling with

¹⁷⁶ 'IL: Al-Shabaabin johtomies värväsi Suomessa', *Helsingin Sanomat* 15 October 2011. The visit is also mentioned in the criminal investigation record of the trial connected to Al-Shabaab (discussed below).

¹⁷⁷ Jukka Huusko, 'Tutkija: Al-Shabaabin riveissä useita suomalaistaustaisia', *Helsingin Sanomat* 27 September 2013.

¹⁷⁸ 'Me tehdään susta rohkea mies', *Yle* 11 April 2013.

¹⁷⁹ According to the Twitter messages disseminated after the shopping centre attack in Nairobi in September 2013, a man living in Helsinki had taken part in the attack. However, these reports proved to be false. 'Twitter-väite: Yksi Nairobin iskun tekijöistä Suomesta', *Yle* 22 September 2013; Matti Koskinen & Erik Nyström, 'Lähde: Suomalaiseksi epäilty olikin norjalainen', *Helsingin Sanomat* 20 October 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Emilia Kemppi, 'Pohjolan somalien painajainen', *Yle* 20 December 2010; interviews conducted for the research.

¹⁸¹ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, p. 135.

¹⁸² 'Dokumenttiprojekti: Pohjolan terroristit', *Yle* 8 December 2014. Dokumentti YLE Areenassa: <https://areena.yle.fi/1-2388874>.

his family and encouraged by his friends, he ended up in criminal activities. In his own words, in that situation he had met nice people who showed that they cared about him, bought him things and gave him money. Ahmed travelled to Denmark and to the United Kingdom with them. When the people helping him said that they were going to Somalia to help starving young people there, Ahmed said that he would like to join them. However, when in Somalia he ended up in an Al-Shabaab training centre. It transpired that the persons helping him were Al-Shabaab recruiters from Denmark.¹⁸³ At the time the documentary programme was made, Ahmed was living in Kenya where he had fled Al-Shabaab.

The first trial in Finland involving offences with terrorist intent concerned activities aimed at supporting Al-Shabaab. The first arrests in the case were made in autumn 2011. Investigations connected with the case had continued for at least two years. In 2014, four persons were charged with financing terrorism. The charges concerned the transfer of relatively small sums of money to Al-Shabaab through the Hawala system. The main defendant in the case was also charged with recruiting his brother as an Al-Shabaab fighter and planning to take his brother's children who were living in Finland to combat training at an Al-Shabaab camp in Somalia without their consent.¹⁸⁴

In December 2014, the Helsinki District Court sentenced the four defendants for terrorist financing and one for recruitment for a terrorist offence and for preparing a terrorist offence.¹⁸⁵ The Court of Appeal rejected the charges in March 2016 because, in its view, no evidence for the transfer of funds required under the legislation on terrorist financing in effect at the time had been presented. It had been concluded that money had been sent to individuals who probably had links to Al-Shabaab but, according to the Court of Appeal, no evidence had been presented showing that the money was specifically intended to support terrorist activities. The Court of Appeal also stated that not enough evidence had been presented in relation to the charges raised for recruitment and human trafficking.¹⁸⁶ The main defendant and his family moved to Syria between the two court hearings.¹⁸⁷

Even though there were, according to the assessments carried out by SUPO, still people in Finland in 2015 willing to go to Somalia to fight in the conflict there, the

¹⁸³ 'Me tehdään susta rohkea mies', *Yle* 11 April 2013; 'En tahtonut terroristiksi', *Yle* 22 March 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Paula Tapiola, 'Suomen ensimmäisessä terrorismijutussa syytteitä neljälle', *Yle* 17 September 2014; Esitutkintapöytäkirja 2400/R150/11.

¹⁸⁵ Tuuli Toivanen, 'Suomen ensimmäisessä terrorismioikeudenkäynnissä vankeustuomio neljälle', *Yle* 19 December 2014.

¹⁸⁶ Matti Koivisto, 'Hovioikeus hylkäsi syytteet Suomen ensimmäisessä terrorismijutussa', *Yle* 23 March 2016.

¹⁸⁷ Sara Rigatelli, 'Somalimiehen hätkähdyttävä tarina: Vapautui Suomessa terrorismituomiosta, oli jo Isisissä', *Yle* 4 March 2017.

interest in Al-Shabaab has declined in Finland and elsewhere.¹⁸⁸ The interest in jihadist activities has been mainly channelled to the jihadist organisations operating in Syria and Iraq (especially ISIS).

4.1.3 Links to Al-Qaeda's support networks

There are indications that individuals with links to Al-Qaeda lived in Finland in the first decade of the 2000s. The best known of these is the Finnish citizen deported from Sweden in summer 2008. The deportation was based on the statement of the Swedish Security Service (SÄPO), according to which the man was a leading figure in a 'radical Islamist' group based in Sweden that was funding and supporting terrorist activities.

The man denied any links to terrorism and provided an account of the events in an interview with the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper in 2009, which was apparently given of his own accord. The man is of Moroccan background and had moved to Finland in the 1990s to live with his girlfriend. He was granted Finnish citizenship in 2000. He has since then divorced his first wife and married a woman living in Sweden. He has one daughter from this marriage, which also ended in divorce.¹⁸⁹

In talking about a radical Islamist group, SÄPO were probably referring to what is known as the North African network, which has one its centres in the Brandbergen mosque near Stockholm. A group of veteran jihadists are at the core of this network and they have maintained close contacts with the leaders of Al-Qaeda and GIA (Armed Islamic Group), a radical Islamist group that has operated in Algeria. Some of these leaders had spent time at Al-Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan in the 1990s. The network has supported the activities of jihadist movements in Iraq and Algeria financially, by disseminating their material and message, and by recruiting fighters. In the early 2000s, individuals linked to this network joined Islamist groups (especially the Iraqi Al-Qaeda) as fighters. At the time, Nordic countries seemed to play a relatively important role in the European fighter recruitment network, with one probable reason being the few restrictions imposed on their support activities in these countries. It is worth noting, however, that carrying out attacks in the Nordic region was not in the interests of the network in the 1990s nor in the early years of the 2000s.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸Suojelupoliisi, 'Suojelupoliisin toimintaympäristö vuosina 2015–2016'.

¹⁸⁹ Minna Passi, 'Karkotettu kiistää terrorismiyhteydet', *Helsingin Sanomat* 18 November 2009.

¹⁹⁰ On the network, see for example, Magnus Sandelin, *Svenska IS-krigare: Från al-Qaida till Jihadi cool* (Fri Tanke, 2016), 'De fyra spindlarna i svenska IS-nätet', *Expressen* 3 December 2016; Magnus Ranstorp et al., *Mellan salafism och salafistisk jihadism: Påverkan mot och utmaningar för det svenska samhället* (Förvarshögskolan/CATS, 2018).

Mohamed Moumou (also known as Abu Qaswarah) was one of the leading figures in the North African network and the man deported to Finland was said to be a long-time friend of his. Moumou was also of Moroccan background. He was extremely well connected and active in European jihadist circles and he had close links to many key jihadist figures in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and North Africa. The contacts can probably be traced back to the 1990s, when he was training at Al-Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan.

Moumou's name has been mentioned in several terrorist investigations in Nordic countries and he is known to have at least encouraged many individuals to travel to Afghanistan and Iraq as fighters or to go to training camps in those countries. Moumou himself also travelled to Iraq in 2006 and served in leading positions in the Iraqi Al-Qaeda until he was killed in a US military attack in Mosul in October 2008.¹⁹¹ Prior to this, he is likely to have been a close associate of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of the Iraqi Al-Qaeda and possibly even served as his representative in Europe.¹⁹² Moumou's name has been mentioned in connection with many foreign fighters who have travelled to Syria and Iraq and joined ISIS.

There is no doubt that the aforementioned man who had been deported to Finland knew Mohamed Moumou well, but the only evidence of him being a leading figure in jihadist networks in Sweden is the statement on this matter provided by SÄPO. He is not, however, among the names to have been publicly mentioned or that would be familiar to the researchers monitoring jihadist circles. What he did while living in Finland is also a mystery. The fact that he was granted Finnish citizenship indicates that his role in Afghanistan was not necessarily known by the authorities in the late 1990s or that insufficient attention was paid to this matter.

His current whereabouts are unknown. Furthermore, there were no indications during the preparation of this report that he would still be in Finland. Indeed, there were no indications that he would have played a key role in the development of jihadist activism in Finland during his time in the country. If the information collected by SÄPO is to be taken at face value, the man is an example of a 'visiting jihadist'¹⁹³ or a person

¹⁹¹ Moumou's background is discussed in a number of blogs written by Per Gudmundson, who has monitored jihadist circles in Sweden for many years; for example, in 'Terroranklagelserna punkt för punkt', 17 December 2006, <http://gudmundson.blogspot.com/2006/12/terroranklagelserna-punkt-fr-punkt.html>; 'Mohamed Moumou fick sina 72 jungfrur', 15 October 2008, <http://gudmundson.blogspot.com/2008/10/mohamed-moumou-fick-sina-72-jungfrur.html>. See also Bill Roggio, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq's Second in Command Was a Swedish Citizen', *The Long War Journal* 16 October 2008.

¹⁹² Bill Roggio, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq's Second in Command Was a Swedish Citizen', *The Long War Journal* 16 October 2008.

¹⁹³ Lia & Nesser, 'Jihadism in Norway'.

that stays in a country for a short period but has few contacts with local jihadist circles during the stay.

4.1.4 Interest in the phenomenon in convert communities

Salafist and wahhabist interpretations of Islam and conflicts in the Muslim world have also sparked interest among a small number of people to have converted to Islam in Finland. The interest in jihadist activities among the converts has also been noted by SUPO. According to the observations SUPO made in its 2007 annual report, the potential security threats arising from the convert phenomenon are not unknown in Finland either.¹⁹⁴ Previous research in this area has shown that the number of converts involved in the European jihadist networks has been considerably higher than could have been assumed on the basis of the total number of converts.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, however, only a fraction of the converts in Finland or in the West in general is in any way interested in jihadism.

It is known that there have been converts, especially in the Helsinki region, interested in conflicts in Muslim-majority countries and the jihadist groups fighting in them; initially among the activists in the organisation *Islamin aika* (The Era of Islam) and later in the organisation *Helsingin muslimit* (The Muslims of Helsinki). The establishment of *Islamin aika* in 2006 can be seen as a further step in the organisation of Finnish-speaking converts and attempts to create structures that would serve their needs. The organisation carried out *dawa* (missionary) work through its educational activities and by producing and disseminating written material, mainly by translating key texts of the conservative interpretations of Islam (such as wahhabism and salafism). These texts have been published by such partners as the Iqra-Islam association. *Islamin aika* activists have also been among the small number of people travelling from Finland to Saudi Arabia each year to study Islamic subjects in the Islamic University of Madinah. Many of these persons were also among the founders of the Islamic party in Finland in 2007, although this organisation never met the requirements to become a registered political party.¹⁹⁶ In 2010, *Islamin aika* changed its name to *Helsingin muslimit*. A mosque in the Helsinki district of Roihuvuori,

¹⁹⁴ SUPO, *Annual Report 2007*.

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, Bart Schuurman, Peter Grol & Scott Flower, 'Converts and Islamist Terrorism: An Introduction', *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Policy Brief 7*, no. 3 (2016).

¹⁹⁶ Tommi Sarlin, 'Muslimivähemmistö kasvaa Suomessa', *Kirkko & kaupunki* 18 April 2007: 2; Hanna Kaarto, 'Islamilainen puolue poistaisi oluen kaupoista ja edistäisi ympärileikkauksia', *Helsingin Sanomat* 7 September 2007.

operated by the association, was established the same year. The mosque moved to the district of Malmi in 2016.

The mosque in Roihuvuori has acquired a reputation as a 'radical mosque' in the public debate, especially because individuals that have visited it and met there have been among those travelling from Finland to Syria and Iraq. It also attracted attention in early summer 2015 when a banner declaring 'Jesus was a Muslim' was hung on its wall.¹⁹⁷ There are good grounds for characterising the mosque as salafist-oriented but not jihadist. Partially because of the sermons held in Finnish and its Finnish-language membership, the mosque has attracted a large number of Finnish converts. As a community, it is multi-ethnic. The same also applies to the orientation of *Islamin aika* and *Helsingin muslimit* in general.

Irrespective of the aforementioned factors, there has been a group of people active within the mosque and the association behind it who have shown interest in the activities of jihadist groups in conflict zones, as well as in supporting them and, in some cases, even in participating in their activities. It is, however, difficult to form a exhaustive overview of how extensively the community associated with mosque has been aware of this and what the reactions have been. The first known signs of interest in jihadist activities can be traced back to around 2005. At this time, the activists of the *Islamin aika* group followed the conflict in Chechnya with particular interest and sympathy. Those involved in the activities and those closely monitoring the community give varying accounts of the extent to which the interest developed into support or about how many people decided to go to a conflict zone in order to fight there or seriously considered this option. It is, however, known that at least one active member of this group attempted to take part in the Chechnyan conflict and that he was detained in Georgia.¹⁹⁸ Abdullah Rintala, who is mentioned in the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*, was also an activist in *Islamin aika*. He has produced a large amount of Finnish-language jihadist online material and has also appeared in court because of his writings.

Later, after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, many individuals active in these circles and their friends have gone to Syria and Iraq. These include the three persons charged with offences with terrorist intent that had travelled to Syria in summer 2013. In their own words, they had travelled to that country to carry out humanitarian work in the name of the Northern Relief organisation established for this particular purpose. Some of them were also charged with tax fraud and accounting offences, which were

¹⁹⁷ Lari Malmberg, 'Roihuvuoren moskeijan Jeesus-banderolli revittiin alas', *Helsingin Sanomat* 23 August 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Mika Parkkonen, 'Suomalainen muslimi halusi auttaa sodan piinaamia veljiään', *Helsingin Sanomat* 15 September 2006.

carried out to finance the trip.¹⁹⁹ The charges for terrorist offences were, however, rejected by the court.²⁰⁰ All three have returned to Finland (one of them already turned back before crossing the Syrian border). At least two other persons also travelled with the group. One of them, known by his nom de guerre Abu Anas al-Finlandi, died while fighting in the ranks of ISIS²⁰¹ and the other was probably still in the area in early 2019.²⁰²

4.2 Jihadist activism in the 2010s

As far as we know, jihadist activities were still very small-scale in the first decade of the 2000s. During the 2010s, however, the scene has become somewhat more active. Even though there were already indications of the growth of the phenomenon around the turn of the decade, the changes that have taken place are primarily connected to the conflict in Syria and Iraq and, to a lesser extent, to the influx of asylum seekers to Finland in 2015 and 2016. Manifestations of jihadist activities in Finland have become an object of significant interest since 2013–2014 and there is now considerably more information and public assessments on the development of the phenomenon than before.

As a whole, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals linked to the phenomenon and the activities have become more varied and organised and more closely connected to international jihadist actors and circles. Even though jihadist activism is still partially carried out by immigrants and targeted at their countries of origin and the conflicts under way in them, global jihadism (especially with connection to ISIS) has become substantially more widespread. It would appear that more extensive social networks connected to jihadist activities have been established in Finland. Social networks have played a key role in the influx of people to Syria and Iraq in particular. Growing jihadist activism has manifested in the form of the phenomenon of foreign fighting, but there are also indications of growth in non-violent support activities – both in terms of quality and quantity. Similar developments have also been witnessed in other Western European countries.

¹⁹⁹ Keskusrikospoliisi, esitutkintapöytäkirja 2400/R/234/14.

²⁰⁰ Helsingin käräjäoikeus, tuomio 18/103187.

²⁰¹ Jukka Huusko, 'Islamistit väittävät suomalaisen kuolleen Syyrian taisteluissa', *Helsingin Sanomat* 22 February 2014.

²⁰² Jessica Stolzmann, 'Poikani, terrorismista epäilty', *Yle* 25 September 2018.

4.2.1 The number of individuals involved in jihadist activities

It is difficult to define the extent and boundaries of jihadist activism as a phenomenon. The phenomenon is connected to a wide range of individuals, whose role in the development of jihadist activities also varies greatly. Links to jihadist activities range from passive support to continuous promotion of an ideology or the agenda of the actors that have adopted this ideology. In talking about participants in jihadist activities below, we are referring to individuals involved in the activities in one way or another. In addition to the explicit involvement in jihadist activities, it is also likely that there is at least some passive support for jihadism in Finland. It is, however, impossible to give any estimates of its scale.

The total number of counterterrorism targets provided by SUPO constitutes the only estimate of the number of people involved in jihadist activities in Finland. This figure includes all persons listed as counter-terrorism target individuals. There are no exact figures on how many of those individuals listed as target persons of counterterrorism are connected to jihadist activism but SUPO's communications implicitly suggest that most of these individuals are involved in jihadist activities. Obviously, this list of counterterrorism targets only includes those individuals about whom SUPO is aware and cannot, therefore, be assumed to be exhaustive. The list is continuously updated, meaning that individuals are also removed from the list if there are no longer any reasons to consider them as counterterrorism targets.²⁰³

When the number of persons connected to jihadist activities first became a topic for public discussion in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, SUPO stated that dozens of people that have or have had terrorist connections have lived in Finland.²⁰⁴ The first public comment with a more specific estimation of the number of people defined as counterterrorism targets dates back to 2014, when SUPO stated it had updated its previous survey from the year 2012. In 2012, the number of counterterrorism targets was estimated to be 200 and almost 300 two years later.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ By relying solely on open sources, it is impossible to produce a detailed picture of the criteria used by SUPO when identifying individuals as counter-terrorism targets. SUPO has, however, stated in its 2017 yearbook that a counter-terrorism target is an individual that is actively working to promote terrorism or pro-terrorist ideology. According to the yearbook, such activities may include participation in terrorist activities, receiving or imparting training, producing or disseminating propaganda, financing, recruitment or supporting a terrorist organisation. If an individual has links to terrorism or terrorist activities referred to above, they can, in a specific assessment process, be defined as a counter-terrorism target. SUPO, *Yearbook 2017*, p. 10.

²⁰⁴ Christian Jokinen, *Terrorismista ja sen torjunnasta: Suojelupoliisi ja kansainvälinen terrorismi 1958–2004*. Turun yliopiston julkaisu (Turku, 2015), p. 309.

²⁰⁵ SUPO *Annual Report 2014*, p. 4.

The estimate of the number of counterterrorism targets identified by SUPO has risen each year and totalled about 370 at the end of 2017.²⁰⁶ At the same time, the number of counterterrorism targets mentioned in SUPO's National Security Review published in December 2018 had remained unchanged. Based on this information, it can tentatively be assumed that the growth in the number of the targets has at least slowed down after an exceptionally rapid growth in the period 2012–2017.²⁰⁷

According to SUPO, the main factors contributing to the growth in the number of counterterrorism targets have not only been the allure of ISIS and the conflict in Syria and Iraq, but also the arrival of an exceptionally large number of asylum seekers in Finland in 2015 and 2016. A small proportion of the asylum seekers (mainly those arriving from Syria and Iraq but also, to a lesser extent, those coming from other conflict zones, such as Afghanistan) had links to the phenomenon. There may also be a small number of individuals among the asylum seekers that have acquired combat experience in the ranks of different jihadist groups.²⁰⁸ It is not clear, however, how many of these individuals are included in SUPO's list of counterterrorism targets or how extensively SUPO has been capable of monitoring the asylum seekers' jihadist connections. For example, Abderrahman Bouanane, who carried out the terrorist attack in Turku in August 2017, was not on SUPO's list of counterterrorism targets.²⁰⁹

Individuals living in our country are not the only persons relevant to the situation in Finland.²¹⁰ Persons visiting Finland and spending their holidays here may include jihadist activists that are only important from the Finnish perspective because SUPO is monitoring such travel as part of international cooperation.

In addition to the individuals now living in Finland, there are also former residents of Finland that are currently living in other countries and may be relevant to the situation in Finland. It is likely that these individuals are also included in the total number of counterterrorism target individuals listed by SUPO. Individuals that have left Finland and play a key role in jihadist activities include the persons deported from Finland for security reasons, such as Awat Hamasalih, a UK citizen of Kurdish background and a senior member of the leadership of Rawti Shax, and individuals that have travelled to conflict zones from Finland and participated in the activities of jihadist groups. Hussein al-Maadidi, who arrived in Finland from Iraq as a quota refugee in 2007, is

²⁰⁶ SUPO, *Yearbook 2017*, p. 10.

²⁰⁷ SUPO's National Security Review 2018, 10 December 2018.

²⁰⁸ Kari Ikävalko, 'SUPO: turvapaikanhakijoista merkittäviä vaikutuksia Suomen turvallisuudelle - tulijoilla kytköksiä väkivaltaisiin ryhmiin', *Yle* 3 November 2015.

²⁰⁹ Paula Tiessalo, 'SUPO: Turun puukotuksista epäilty ei ole ollut terrorismintorjunnan erityisrannassa', *Yle* 19 August 2017.

²¹⁰ As a whole, Jihadism is an international phenomenon, which is characterised by cross-border networks and activism. This is also the situation in Finland.

probably also such a person. His writings that are sympathetic towards ISIS have appeared online.²¹¹

There are also known cases of activists living in other countries having been invited to visit Finland to promote jihadist activities in this country. Moreover, there have been rumours of foreign recruiters visiting Finland to encourage young people to travel to Syria, but such reports are impossible to verify. There have also been attempts to influence individuals living in Finland through social media.

Several Finnish citizens living abroad have also taken part in jihadist activities outside Finland and a small number of Finns have been arrested in other countries in connection with terrorist offences. For example, at least one Finnish citizen is known to have travelled from the United Kingdom to join the ranks of ISIS. He was later sentenced to prison in Denmark for the crimes he had committed in Syria.²¹² A second such individual trying to travel from the United Kingdom to the conflict zone was arrested in London in 2016.²¹³ It is difficult to estimate the total number of such persons and their potential effect on the phenomenon in Finland. It is probable, however, that there have only been a small number of such cases and that they are mainly of marginal importance to jihadist activities in Finland.²¹⁴

It is difficult to give any exact estimates of the individuals involved in jihadist activities in Finland (and in connection to Finland) on the basis of the publicly available sources. The total number is probably between 500 and 1,000. Most of these individuals live or have lived in Finland for long periods of time. It is worth noting, however, that the numbers of individuals actively promoting the phenomenon have increased considerably over the past seven years.

4.2.2 Individuals involved in jihadist activities

As stated above, a few hundred persons living in Finland are involved in jihadist activities in one way or another. They channel their activism to different conflicts and are mostly loosely organised. It would, admittedly, be interesting to know more about the backgrounds and motives of these people and the activities in which they have

²¹¹ The total number of persons deported from Finland for security reasons is not publicly available and, despite requests, was not provided for this study. According to the information revealed in the interviews, there have been a small number of such cases in recent years. All these cases are not necessarily connected to Jihadism. For more details about al-Maadidi's writings, see the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*.

²¹² Timo Seppänen, 'Suomen kansalainen tuomittiin Syyriassa tehdyistä terrorismirikoksista - Mies sai tuomion Tanskassa', *Yle* 23 March 2018.

²¹³ 'Finnish terrorism suspect aimed to join Islamic State in Syria', *Yle* 8 February 2016.

²¹⁴ See, for example, Niko Ranta, 'SUPO: Terrorismirikoksista syytetyn suomalaisen tapaus ei liity Suomeen', *Iltä-Sanomat* 8 February 2016.

participated or in which they would be willing to participate. Currently, there is so little information available on such individuals living in Finland that forming an exhaustive overview on the basis of open sources is virtually impossible.

Some general observations can, however, be made. Based on research on jihadist activities in other European countries, it is known that the individuals involved in these activities have very different backgrounds and motives. This also seems to be case in Finland. According to the situation overview on violent extremism in Finland (1/2018) published by the Ministry of the Interior, there are two types of individuals in Finland's jihadist circles. On the one hand, there are persons strongly committed to the jihadist ideology and who approve the use of violence. On the other hand, there are also individuals who have less of an ideological commitment and are involved in the activities for other reasons.²¹⁵

This reflects the view of the jihadist activities in Europe expressed in the relevant research literature, especially concerning the cells that have carried out terrorist attacks. In this body of literature, persons belonging to the first category are usually referred to as 'entrepreneurs' or key activists.²¹⁶ These entrepreneurs play an important role in the formation of groups and networks and in the planning of activities and, thus, also influence the way in which jihadist activism has evolved and expanded to new areas. Moreover, these individuals have acted as contact persons between small local groups and more extensive networks on the one hand and foreign jihadist actors on the other. This is because many of them have taken part in fighting in the ranks of jihadist groups or stayed at training camps outside Europe.²¹⁷ They have also often helped local activists join these groups as foreign fighters.²¹⁸

Participants of the second type may have life-management problems or they may be in a difficult life situation. For them, joining jihadist activities may present itself as a solution to their challenges. Some people become jihadists because they do not want to break the bond with their friends or family members that have already participated in these activities.²¹⁹ Occasionally, people may also be motivated by a willingness to be saved and to atone for the sins they have committed before conversion or religious awakening (such as the use of alcohol/drugs or extramarital relationships) by fighting

²¹⁵ Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018*, p. 17.

²¹⁶ In a further differentiation, similarly motivated but younger individuals who are growing into this role are defined as 'protégés'. See Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, pp. 14–15.

²¹⁷ In addition to the aforementioned book by Nesser, similar actors (though mostly those lacking fighter or training experience) are excellently described by Graeme Wood in *The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State* (New York: Random House, 2017).

²¹⁸ See, for example, Timothy Holman, 'Gonna Get Myself Connected': The Role of Facilitation in Foreign Fighting', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 2 (2016).

²¹⁹ Nesser *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, pp. 15–16; Neumann, *Radicalized: New Jihadists*, pp. 95–97. See also Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, pp. 66–69.

on the path of Allah.²²⁰ ISIS and European jihadists in general have produced a great deal of communications material with the aim of encouraging people to take part in the conflict in Syria and Iraq by exploiting these themes. This partially explains the substantial increase in the number of people with criminal backgrounds in jihadist circles and especially among foreign fighters.²²¹ In academic research, such persons have been referred to as 'misfits', 'drifters' and 'hangers-on'.²²²

Traditionally, individuals with foreign fighter experience and terrorist training or those that have been active in armed groups have played a key role in jihadist activities. According to SUPO, about one quarter of the current counterterrorism target individuals have such experience.²²³ The number of such persons in Finland has increased in recent years. However, it is not known how many of these persons have actually played the role of key activists in jihadist milieus in any way.

As in other countries, men are likely to comprise the majority of jihadist activists in Finland. The increasing involvement of women in jihadist activism has been one of the most important trends in Europe in recent years. Even though there have been female participants in jihadist movements throughout the history of the phenomenon,²²⁴ interest in jihadism among women and their willingness to actively promote it have only significantly increased during the conflict in Syria and Iraq, especially as a result of ISIS' state-building project and the declaration of the caliphate.²²⁵ There has not yet been any research conducted on this topic with a focus on Finland. There is also little public information on the role of women in the phenomenon, especially outside the influx of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. For example, SUPO has refused to comment on whether there are any women among their counter-terrorism target individuals. The fact that several women have also left Finland for Syria and Iraq shows that women living in Finland are also interested in the phenomenon and are willing to take part in jihadist activities.

²²⁰ See, for example, Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann & Claudia Brunner, *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*, ICSR Report (2016), pp. 24–26.

²²¹ Rajan Basra & Peter Neumann, 'Crime as Jihad: Developments in the Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe', *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 9 (2017).

²²² Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, pp. 15–18; Neumann, *Radicalized: New Jihadists*, pp. 95–97.

²²³ Jarkko Sipilä, 'SUPO: Isis suoltaa nettiin radikalisoivaa materiaalia - propagandaa tehtäillään myös suomeksi', *MTV Uutiset* 21 March 2018.

²²⁴ See, for example, Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Jessica Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017).

²²⁵ See, for example, Erin Marie Saltman & Melanie Smith, 'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part': *Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015); Anita Peresin, 'Fatal Attraction: Western Muslims and ISIS', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 3 (2015); Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford & Ross Frenett, *Becoming Mulan: Female Western Migrants to ISIS* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015).

4.2.3 Organisation and links to foreign countries

Since 2015, the authorities have repeatedly emphasised that jihadist activities in Finland have become increasingly organised. For example, in November of the same year,²²⁶ when SUPO raised the level of the terrorist threat facing Finland for only the second time in its history, it mentioned the establishment of networks supporting jihadist activities as one motivation for the reassessment.²²⁷ In spring 2017, Jyri Rantala, SUPO's then Head of Communications, stated that a jihadist underworld had developed in Finland.²²⁸ Indeed, jihadist activism in Finland seems to have become increasingly organised over the years, at the same time as the number of persons involved in it having grown.

The level of organisation in the phenomenon should not, however, be exaggerated. As such, comments made regarding networks or a jihadist 'underworld' should not be interpreted as corresponding to a coherent milieu consisting of closely connected actors in Finland.²²⁹ In light of the information that has emerged from this study, this does not seem to be the case. In fact, according to this study, the jihadist scene in Finland is fragmented and would appear to comprise several different and separate actors. Nevertheless, the conflict in Syria and Iraq has made this scene more coherent, at least temporarily, as it has become the focal point uniting different sectors of jihadist activism.

The jihadist scene in Finland consists of individuals, small groups, and social networks of different sizes, most of which are probably quite loose. They are connected to foreign actors in varying ways, especially to armed jihadist groups operating in conflict zones. According to SUPO, individuals living in Finland have links to all key terrorist organisations (jihadist groups) in major conflict zones.²³⁰ If the situation in Finland follows the same pattern as in other European countries, there are probably also links to the supporters of these actors in other countries, especially in Europe.

The fragmented nature of the jihadist scene stems at least partly from the historical fragmentation and diversity of Finland's Muslim community. Regardless, Finland has been home to individuals and small groups supporting jihadist activities among immigrants and their descendants, especially among those whose families come from

²²⁶ SUPO raised the level of terrorism threat three times between 2014 and 2017: in June 2014, in November 2015, and in June 2017.

²²⁷ Suojelupoliisi, Lehdistötiedote, Terrorismin uhka-arvio, 3 November 2015.

²²⁸ Ismo Virta, 'Jihadistinen alamaailma leviää Suomeenkin – Huolestuttavinta ovat Suomeen viime vuosina syntyneet radikaali-islamistiset verkostot', *Talouselämä* 13 April 2017.

²²⁹ Katariina Karjalainen, 'Poliisihallitus: Naisia värvätty Syyriaan ja Irakiin', *Iltta-Sanomien* 24 March 2016.

²³⁰ Ismo Virta, 'Jihadistinen alamaailma leviää Suomeenkin – Huolestuttavinta ovat Suomeen viime vuosina syntyneet radikaali-islamistiset verkostot', *Talouselämä* 13 April 2017.

the conflict zones in which jihadist groups operate.²³¹ Support activities connected to Ansar al-Islam are probably the best known of such activities in Finland. The support activities for Al-Shabaab discussed above have also received a great deal of publicity. The Finnish branches of such support networks have mainly had a limited impact (at least superficially) and they have often failed to have any wider effect on the development of jihadist activism in Finland.

At the same time, an increasing number of jihadist activists in Finland are Muslims that were born here or emigrated to this country as children. In official reports, this is often expressed by saying that the phenomenon has become increasingly homegrown. Most of the social networks of people born in Finland that have existed during and before their involvement in jihadist activities are more multi-ethnic than the networks of individuals that moved to Finland as adults. Many of them are also more strongly oriented towards the global Muslim community than exclusively towards the situation in their parents' home countries. This is probably one reason for Finland having seen more networking among individuals interested in global Jihad and jihadist activities across ethnic boundaries in recent years. The conflict in Syria and Iraq has been the key uniting factor in the activism of the young generation. Indeed, this conflict and the associated mobility of foreign fighters have contributed to the establishment of new links.

Even though the jihadist scene is now more networked and organised than in the past, it remains fragmented and has clearly been subject to some kinds of restraints relating to the adoption of new and more sophisticated forms of action. For example, it is noteworthy that no Sharia4 type organisation has been established in Finland. Indeed, while the establishment of such an organisation in Finland has been proposed, the idea has never received wider support. One example of these attempts is the Facebook page established under the name Millatu Ibrahim Finland.²³² Jihadist activist organisations working under the same name have also existed in such countries as Germany and Denmark.²³³ However, in the case of Finland, all information suggests that it never became more than a short-lived Facebook page that only attracted a few dozen people interested in the phenomenon. However, a small number of individuals that later fought in the ranks of ISIS were associated with the page.

The second example (which also attracted international attention) concerns discussions about setting up Sharia4Finland. When Anjem Choudary (one of the founders of al-Muhajiroun) visited Finland in spring 2013, he announced the

²³¹ Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview* 1/2013.

²³² Christoffer Gröhn, 'Extremister hittar varandra på sociala medier', *Svenska Yle* 27 August 2014.

²³³ 'New jihadist group established in Denmark', *The Local* 15 September 2014.

establishment of Sharia4Finland (as an idea rather than an organisation).²³⁴ It would appear, however, that the idea has failed to get off the ground. This may be partially explained by the fact that there have not been any suitable activists in Finland interested in playing a leading role in such an organisation. Choudary visited Finland at a time when many of the individuals with a potential Sharia4 leadership profile had already left or were about to leave for Syria. The second explanation may be that Choudary visited Finland at the invitation of the Rawti Shax organisation and spoke at an event organised by it. According to news reports, most of the people attending the meeting were Kurds.²³⁵ It seems that setting up the Sharia4Finland organisation was not in the interests of the local Rawti Shax activists, despite the cooperation between Awat Hamasalih (a Rawti Shax leader who lived in Finland at the time) and Choudary.²³⁶

Geographically, the small groups involved in jihadist activities have mostly concentrated on certain localities and cities (or specific city districts). Nevertheless, Finland lacks suburbs, such as Molenbeek in Belgium, that would have an exceptionally large concentration of individuals or networks associated with jihadism.²³⁷ It seems that the activities are concentrated in the same large cities in southwest and southern Finland where most Finnish Muslims live. Traditionally, a large proportion of the persons connected to the phenomenon have lived in the Helsinki region.²³⁸ Additionally, details of jihadist activism in the Turku and Helsinki regions have emerged during this study. Moreover, there are individuals linked to the phenomenon living in different parts of Finland. In fact, individuals who are known to have travelled to Syria and Iraq come from various regions.

It is difficult to single out any meeting places in Finland that would be well-known or especially important for the phenomenon, which is also a sign of the fragmented nature of jihadist activism in Finland. Elsewhere in Europe, jihadist actors and their

²³⁴ Anssi Miettinen, 'Suomessa käynyt islamisti: 'Bin Laden oli sankari'', *Helsingin Sanomat* 7 April 2013.

²³⁵ In an advertisement for Choudary's visit, he was referred to as the manager of the Didinwe organisation. Didinwe is another name used for Rawti Shax. See, for example, Valtteri Varpela, 'Kohumuslimin Suomi-julistus tallentui videolle: tämä sai yleisön huutamaan Allahia', *Ilta-Sanomat* 2 April 2013; Laura Halminen, 'SUPO: Radikaalisuunnitelmien vierailuja vaikea estää – järjestäjä välttelee vastuuta', *Helsingin Sanomat* 2 April 2013.; Anu Nousiainen, 'Suomessa lietsotaan ääri-islamia: Turussa asuva mies julkaisi värväysvideon', *HS Kuukausiliite* 4 October 2014; Marika Kataja-Lian, 'Radikaali muslimisuunnitelmien puhuu Helsingissä salaisessa paikassa – vaatimuksena terroristien vapauttaminen', *Yle* 28 March 2013.

²³⁶ Nick Lowles & Joe Mulhall, *Gateway to Terror: Anjem Choudary and the al-Muhajiroun network* (Hope not Hate, 2013), <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/gateway-to-terror-2013-11.pdf>.

²³⁷ Of Jihadism in Molenbeek, see Petter Nesser, 'Molenbeek: One of several Jihadi hotspots in Europe' Hurst Blog 19 November 2015. <https://www.hurstpublishers.com/molenbeek-one-of-several-jihadi-hotspots-in-europe/>.

²³⁸ Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 2/2013*, p. 9.

activism are associated with specific religious communities and public spaces. There has been a great deal of public debate about the possible role of mosques in jihadist activities and especially in the radicalisation of new participants. Even though promotion of jihadist ideology had largely moved from radical mosques to locations outside them by the latter half of the first decade of the 2000s²³⁹, dozens of 'radical mosques' and places of worship with links or suspected links to the phenomenon have been closed in different parts of Western and Central Europe during the influx of people to Syria and Iraq.

In Finland, there are signs that people involved in jihadist activities have been seeking new recruits among individuals visiting mosques and prayer houses. It is likely that there are no mosques or prayer houses in Finland that openly advocate a jihadist interpretation of Islam. There may, however, have been a limited number of people or small groups in some religious communities expressing interest in jihadist activities. Moreover, there have been indications of this at least in the Roihuvuori mosque in eastern Helsinki.

4.3 Jihadist activism in Finland

What does jihadist activism in Finland mean in practice? In the West, jihadism as a violent ideology is specifically associated with violent terrorist attacks against civilians. In fact, achieving objectives by violent means is a key component of the phenomenon. However, jihadism also includes different types of non-violent activism. This chapter provides a detailed discussion of current knowledge on jihadist activities associated with Finland.

4.3.1 Non-violent support activities

Non-violent activism refers to all activities aimed at promoting jihadism without the use of violence. The aim is often to expand the support base of the phenomenon, recruit individuals for violent activism or to facilitate access to armed jihadist groups, to give examples. Non-violent activism also includes incitement to violence and the production, translation, and dissemination of jihadist material. Jihadist activism or specific individuals involved therein can also be supported by accumulating economic or other essential resources. In many cases, these forms of non-violent activism are

²³⁹ Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 24–25.

connected to each other. In Finland, jihadism has mostly manifested as non-violent activism.

4.3.1.1 Radicalisation, recruitment, and facilitation

The authorities have, in recent years, repeatedly stressed that Finnish-based networks supporting jihadist activities are working to radicalise Muslims and to recruit new supporters.²⁴⁰ *Radicalisation* means the activities aimed at making potential supporters more sympathetic towards jihadist activities or ideology. The hope is that this will ultimately lead to the adoption of the jihadist ideology and support for jihadist movements. When the aim is also to commit individuals to act within the framework of jihadism, we refer to this as *recruitment*.²⁴¹ In practice, however, these two modes of activism are often closely connected. They can take place in physical or virtual environments and they are often carried out in both simultaneously.

Recruitment may entail *peer-to-peer recruitment* or *top-down recruitment*. The latter often refers to the activities of jihadist groups, or other organisations and individuals linked to them and which aim at recruiting new members.²⁴² In peer-to-peer recruitment, on the other hand, individuals already involved in the activities or interested in jihadism recruit people close to them, such as friends or family members. It is also noteworthy that people or groups of friends often join jihadist activities at their own initiative. In most cases, people only start seeking the necessary contacts after they have become interested in jihadism.²⁴³

In Europe, recruitment activities are rarely carried out by the armed groups operating outside the region. Instead, they rely on independent parties representing them or parties loosely associated with them as the instigators of more extensive grass-roots support networks. These have included radical Imams (especially in the 1990s), key activists and the networks formed around them, and non-violent jihadist organisations promoting the ideology and inspired by the Sharia4 model.²⁴⁴ These organisations have systematically worked to recruit new supporters and activists to their ranks.

There are several differences between *facilitation* and recruitment. In facilitation, an individual that already has links to an armed jihadist group helps another person

²⁴⁰ See, for example, Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018*, p. 23.

²⁴¹ Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 6–7.

²⁴² Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, p. 7.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* See also Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, especially pp. 66–69; and Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values and What it Means to be Human* (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

²⁴⁴ Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda*, pp. 31–41.

interested in the activities to join its ranks. The difference between facilitation and recruitment is that the aim of recruitment is also to persuade the individual to become a member even though facilitators can sometimes also act as recruiters. The spread of social media in particular has made virtual facilitation (and recruitment) possible over long distances.²⁴⁵

These forms of activism are all found in Finland, even though it is difficult to say anything definite about their extent and exact nature owing to the paucity of available information. Most of the radicalisation and recruitment efforts probably take place within peer groups (influencing friends and family members).²⁴⁶ The role of peer-to-peer activism has been highlighted in Finland, as there has been so little organised jihadist activism in our country. This was especially true in the years preceding the Syrian conflict. Groups operating in foreign conflict zones or jihadist organisations operating elsewhere in Western Europe have not targeted Finland in their activities (except for a small number of visits).

The support activities linked to Ansar al-Islam and Rawti Shax among Kurds constitute one example of more organised activism connected to recruitment, radicalisation, and facilitation. People living in Finland have taken part in the efforts to radicalise new supporters for the organisation, especially on the Internet. One specific aim of the organisation has been to recruit foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. The fact that only a small proportion of those travelling to the conflict zones from Finland are associated with Rawti Shax shows the limitations of these activities.

Finland has also witnessed some relatively amateurish radicalisation and recruitment attempts, in which an individual unknown to the target persons has approached them in a public place with the intention of discussing participation in jihadist activities, especially in connection with ISIS and the conflict in Syria.²⁴⁷ There were indications of such activities in early autumn 2014, when, according to SUPO, a small number of persons in Finland were trying to persuade people to travel to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.²⁴⁸ The latest indications of such activities in open sources are from the years 2016 and 2017. However, according to the publicly available information, such activities have had little results.

²⁴⁵ Holman, 'Gonna Get Myself Connected'.

²⁴⁶ SUPO, *Yearbook 2016*, p. 20.

²⁴⁷ A small number of unconfirmed examples of such activities can be found in public sources. See, for example, Markus Kuokkanen, 'Helsinkiläisiä on houkuteltu kaduilla Syyriaan taistelemaan', *Yle* 26 August 2014; Minna Rajainmäki, 'Espoolaisnuori kertoo: 'Näin Isis painostaa Suomeksakin', *Länsiväylä* 21 March 2015; 'Vaasan Isis-rekrytointi: 'Värvääjät pelottelivat', *MTV Uutiset* 14 January 2016.

²⁴⁸ Antti Koistinen, 'SUPO: Suomessa toimivista terroristivärvääjistä tihkuu aiempaa enemmän tietoja', *Yle* 6 September 2014.

Radicalisation and recruitment activities also take place online. Online communications play an important role in the interaction between people also in contact with each other by other means. This is because the Internet is the key means of communication, especially between young people. Moreover, people are also known to view jihadist material available online with their friends. As is suggested in the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*, communications through social media may play a particularly important role in Finland because jihadist activism in Finland is so fragmented and Finland is such a large country. This makes it quite difficult for individuals interested in jihadism to establish the necessary contacts.

There have also been reports of jihadist support activities and activism in prisons in Finland even though the extent of the phenomenon remains unclear and it would not yet appear to play a major role in jihadist activism in Finland.²⁴⁹ It has also been claimed that individuals arriving in Finland as asylum seekers have been targeted for radicalisation and recruitment.²⁵⁰ For example, Yle reported in summer 2015 that ISIS was focusing its recruitment efforts on young boys arriving in Finland as unaccompanied asylum seekers and that, according to these boys, dozens of boys in the Helsinki region were considering joining ISIS.²⁵¹ Individuals claiming to be religious scholars also toured reception centres in Eastern Finland during 2016.²⁵² There have also been reports of amateurish radicalisation attempts by asylum seekers.²⁵³ More detailed examination of these phenomena is, however, beyond the scope of this report.

More information is also needed about the radicalisation and recruitment activities targeting women and the role of women play in the conflict zones. According to the situation overview on violent extremism in Finland published by the Ministry of the Interior, women that have travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq have established mutual networks before leaving their country of origin and peer-to-peer recruitment seems to have played an important role in this process.²⁵⁴ Giving birth to and raising a new generation is seen as a key task of women in Jihad²⁵⁵, even though

²⁴⁹ Peter Neumann, Juha Saarinen & Rajan Basra, *The Crime-Terror Nexus in Finland and the Baltics*, Crime Terror Nexus Country Papers (2018), https://crimeterrorenexus.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Crime-Terror-Nexus-10-FinlandBaltics_en_web.pdf, 16.

²⁵⁰ Kari Ikävalko, 'SUPO: turvapaikanhakijoista merkittäviä vaikutuksia Suomen turvallisuudelle - tulijoilla kytköksiä väkivaltaisiin ryhmiin', *Yle* 3 November 2015.

²⁵¹ Sara Rigatelli, Juha Rissanen & Anna Hurta, 'Isis haluaisi minut - näin taistelijoita värvätään Suomessa', *Yle* 17 June 2015.

²⁵² Asta Tenhunen, 'Kolme miestä kiersi vastaanottokeskuksissa kehumassa Isistä', *Savon Sanomat* 20 April 2017.

²⁵³ See, for example, Tiina Örn, 'Turvapaikanhakija levitti islamistista propagandaa vastaanotto-keskuksessa - 'Sai silti oleskeluluvan'', *Helsingin Uutiset* 21 August 2017.

²⁵⁴ Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018*, p. 27.

²⁵⁵ See also Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018*, p. 28.

some of the women have also been motivated by the willingness to take part in fighting.²⁵⁶ It is also noteworthy that one of the first known Finnish-language jihadist writings concerned the role and tasks of women in Jihad.²⁵⁷

4.3.1.2 Producing, translating and disseminating jihadist material

The Internet has provided an effective platform for jihadist groups to disseminate their material. ISIS, in particular, has allocated substantial resources for this purpose. In fact, it has been noted in Finland (especially in 2013 and 2014) how material produced by ISIS has been disseminated at discussion forums used by Muslims, as well as in social media. There are also examples of supporters translating such material into Finnish and disseminating it in Finland. The most important example of this is An-Nida Media. It has also been noted that a small number of ISIS supporters in Finland have produced and disseminated their own (text-based and visual) material sympathetic towards ISIS.

There have, however, been few indications of such activities in open forums and in social media, especially after 2015. In many cases, the purpose of disseminating jihadist material is to influence attitudes towards jihadist actors or jihadism in general, and the aim of the parties disseminating the material may also be to recruit individuals if the distribution is followed by attempts to directly contact the consumers of the material. In such cases, the discussion usually moves to closed forums. This topic is examined in more detail in the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*.

4.3.1.3 Fundraising

Money for a variety of armed groups, such as Al-Shabaab and Ansar al-Islam and persons in their ranks, have been collected in Finland and sent abroad from our country. Unfortunately, no details of the extent of these transactions are available. The transactions are usually carried out through unofficial networks and middlemen (especially the Hawala system), which also makes it difficult for the authorities to monitor the flow of funds. In Finland, the assets of a small number of individuals and associations have been frozen under anti-terrorism legislation, but these parties are mainly connected to persons that have travelled to Syria and Iraq and to the trial connected to funding for Al-Shabaab.

²⁵⁶ Nina Dale, 'Isisin riveissä toiminut yli 40 000 ulkomaalaista: Vierastaistelijat haluavat nyt kalifaatin kaatuessa palata kotimaihinsa - myös Suomeen', *Ilta-lehti* 21 February 2019.

²⁵⁷ See the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*.

There are many different sources of funding. In the Europe-wide context, they include criminal activities (especially tax, loan, and credit frauds), social benefits, and fundraising for charity.²⁵⁸ Individual participants have also used their own income and savings to fund the activities. It is likely that this has also been the case in Finland. There are also indications that money accumulated through legal business activities has been transferred to armed groups or people connected to them. There have been several cases in Europe connected to the conflict in Syria and Iraq, in which charities have been misused to promote the activities of armed jihadist groups. Charities are also known to have been established on false grounds, the purpose of which has, from the outset, been to collect resources for jihadist groups and/or provide individuals wanting to join their ranks with a credible cover story so that resources can be collected and people can travel to the conflict zones.²⁵⁹

The funds collected by criminal means have especially been referred to as war booty in the communications of ISIS actors and actors sympathetic to ISIS.²⁶⁰ The use of similar means of funding has also been reported in Finland, for example in the trial connected to the Syrian conflict.²⁶¹ One of the persons connected with the trial (who was later killed in Syria) subsequently justified his criminal activities in Finland by characterising them as the collection of war booty.²⁶²

4.3.1.4 Incitement and threats

The Internet has also provided individuals embracing the jihadist world view with a broad range of possibilities for action. Activities mediated online have included incitement and threats, both of which have also been used in Finland. Incitement refers to attempts to encourage other persons to carry out violent attacks, while the making of a threat refers to an individual or community being intimidated by threatening them with violence.

The Internet has been the main platform for incitement and threats. For example, a foreign fighter using the name Abu Hurairah al-Finlandi, who had travelled to the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq from Finland, threatened Finnish politicians in the name

²⁵⁸ See, for example, Magnus Ranstorp, 'Microfinancing the Caliphate: How the Islamic State is Unlocking the Assets of European Recruits', *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 5 (2016).

²⁵⁹ There are many similarities between the Northern Relief aid organisation established in Finland and the aid activities carried out to create cover stories for individuals that ultimately joined jihadist groups. The organisation was established by persons that later travelled to Syria. It is not fully clear whether Northern Relief was set up for such cover activities. Not enough evidence of terrorist offences was found in the trial on the activities of individuals travelling to Syria. Esitutkintapöytäkirja 2400/R/234/14.

²⁶⁰ Basra, Neumann & Brunner, 'Criminal Past, Terrorist Futures', p. 43.

²⁶¹ Esitutkintapöytäkirja 2400/R/234/14.

²⁶² Antti Halonen, 'Kuolleen jihadistin äiti oikeudessa: Poika osti pikavipeillä kiikareita, teltoja ja auton - 'Hänet oli ihan lopullisesti aivopesty'', *Ilta-lehti* 11 December 2017.

of ISIS. These threats became public when the politicians that had received the threats spoke about the messages in their blogs and in social media.²⁶³ Another person that had travelled to the conflict zone has threatened Shia Muslims living in Finland.²⁶⁴ Such activities have also taken place among people living in Finland. For example, in October 2017, Abdullah Rintala, a Finnish convert sympathetic to ISIS, received a sentence in the Helsinki District Court for ethnic agitation against Shias and for distributing depictions of violence.²⁶⁵

In recent years, the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation has investigated several other cases of threats of violence having been posted online. The best-known example of these is the threat against the Tempeliaukio Church in Helsinki in June 2017. The police carried out an operation near the church that attracted considerable attention and that was said to have been prompted by suspected preparation of a terror attack against the church. Large concrete blocks preventing vehicles from driving to the entrance were also placed in front of the church. The operation was triggered by a tip received by the police, the reported nature of which was such that it could not be ignored. Upon further investigation, threat was able to be 'ruled out', which can be interpreted to mean that there was no concrete threat of an attack behind the tip.²⁶⁶

4.3.2 Violent activism

Violent activism refers to all activities aimed at promoting jihadism by violent means. Traditionally, most jihadist violence has taken place in conflict zones.²⁶⁷ A small proportion of the violence does, however, take place outside conflict zones (including Western countries). The focus of this sub-section is on the two forms of violent activism particularly relevant to the West: the phenomenon of foreign fighters and the

²⁶³ Sara Rigatelli, 'Perussuomalaisten nettiuhkaaja on todennäköisesti porilainen Isis-taistelija', *Yle* 9 January 2015; 'Porilaismiestä epäillään poliitikkojen uhkaamisesta terrorilla', *Turun Sanomat* 17.3.2015; 'KRP tutkii: Poliitikkoja on uhkailtu väkivallalla', *Demokraatti* 17 March 2015.

²⁶⁴ 'Suomalainen mahdollinen naisjihadisti uhkailee shiiaislamimeja Facebookissa', *Yle* 19 June 2014.

²⁶⁵ Ossi Mansikka, 'Isisiä tukenut suomalainen 45 päivän ehdolliseen vankeuteen - houkutteli terroritekoihin ja solvasi shioja', *Helsingin Sanomat* 6 October 2017.

²⁶⁶ Anu-Elina Ervasti et al., 'Krp: Tempeliaukion kirkon suuroperaatio johtui terrori-iskuun varautumisesta - poliisin mukaan välitöntä uhkaa ei ole', *Helsingin Sanomat* 19 June 2017; Kimmo Oksanen, 'Tempeliaukion kirkolle rakennetaan pysyvät esteet terrori-iskun varalle - Kirkkoherra: 'Ovesta voi ajaa suoraan sisään ja raamit kaulassa alttarille asti', *Helsingin Sanomat* 17 August 2017.

²⁶⁷ See, for example, Seth G. Jones et al., *The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat: Current and Future Challenges from the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and Other Groups, A Report from the CSIS Transnational Threats Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2018). https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181221_EvolvingTerroristThreat.pdf

violent activities taking place outside the conflict zones. The latter also includes travelling to foreign countries to receive training in the use of weapons, if the aim is to carry out terrorist attacks outside conflict zones.

4.3.2.1 The foreign fighter phenomenon, ISIS, and the conflict in Syria and Iraq

In the case of Finland, travelling to conflict zones as foreign fighters has been by far the most important form of violent jihadist activism in the 2010s. The phenomenon of foreign fighters is not unique to jihadism as it is significantly more extensive and older. Foreign fighters have joined conflicts of different ethnic and religious origins around the world. It is commonly believed that foreign fighting has become more common since the 19th century, as a result of such factors as technological advances.²⁶⁸ Since the 1980s, Sunni Muslims have, however, been overrepresented in the phenomenon, largely as a result of the flow of foreign fighters to Afghanistan.²⁶⁹

Individuals have been encouraged to travel to conflict zones as foreign fighters by the common narrative put forward by many jihadist movements. According to this narrative, the Islamic religious community is under serious attack, innocent Muslims are suffering in conflict zones, and the personal duty of each Muslim is to help and defend their fellow believers in the fight against the enemy.²⁷⁰ This narrative has helped to attract foreign fighters to the ranks of jihadist groups in different conflict zones, from West Africa to Southeast Asia over the past 40 years. Overrepresentation of Sunni Muslims in the phenomenon has become increasingly pronounced in the 2010s, as the conflict in Syria and Iraq has given rise to one of the largest and most extensive mobilisations of foreign fighters in history.²⁷¹

Foreign fighters are individuals that travel abroad to take part in a conflict in a country in which they are not citizens. Having said that, mercenaries or individuals participating in public or secret military operations are not usually considered to be foreign fighters even though they meet this general description.²⁷²

It would, however, be misleading to think that all individuals travelling from Western countries to Syria and Iraq to join armed groups would have ended up as fighters and that combat would be their only form of action. It is also clear that not all men joining

²⁶⁸ Paronen & Teirilä, *Vihatkoon kunhan pelkäävät*, p. 51.

²⁶⁹ Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters', pp. 53–94.

²⁷⁰ Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters', pp. 73–74.

²⁷¹ Thomas Hegghammer, 'Syria's Foreign Fighters', *Foreign Policy* 9 December 2013.

²⁷² Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters', p. 58.

jihadist groups operating in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq are necessarily forced to (or even allowed to) take part in fighting.

As ISIS tried to build its own utopian society and needed a broad range of different skills profiles (from administration to healthcare and from coding to education). Many of those who travelled to the region have probably ended up in such tasks (with some of them simultaneously taking part in fighting) before the extensive collapse of the caliphate in 2016 and 2017. It is likely, however, that as the area controlled by ISIS has contracted, many of those previously working in other tasks have participated or have been forced to participate in the armed activities of the organisation. Individuals joining jihadist groups have only had limited influence on their own situation and conditions. Persons taking part in non-violent support activities in conflict zones provide armed jihadist groups with significant logistical support and these groups would not be able to carry out their armed activities without this support, at least not on the same scale. Consequently, such persons have also been called foreign fighters, even though the term 'fighter' might be misleading when understood in a literal sense.²⁷³

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has also attracted an exceptionally large number of women. For many years, women travelling to the region were referred to as migrants, partially because they were prohibited from taking part in violent activities before the collapse of the ISIS caliphate. As the area controlled by ISIS shrunk into insignificance with the loss of Mosul and Raqqa, female activists have also taken part in the fighting, though it is impossible to estimate their total number.²⁷⁴ Even before these events, however, their participation in jihadist activities was rarely limited to travelling to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, many women travelling from Western countries are known to have attempted to support jihadist activities in numerous ways. Raising the next generation of fighters has been considered the most important of these tasks by jihadist groups. However, the women themselves have often been motivated by a willingness to promote the phenomenon and the activities of the armed groups connected to them, for example, by taking part in online communications and in radicalisation and recruitment activities in social media.²⁷⁵

Travel from Finland to Syria and Iraq

Finnish authorities have identified more than 80 individuals that have travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. In reality, the figure is probably higher owing to the

²⁷³ Linus Gustafsson & Magnus Ranstorp, *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: An analysis of open-source intelligence and statistical data* (Swedish Defence University, 2017), p. 21.

²⁷⁴ See, for example, Hoyle, Bradford & Frenett, *Becoming Mulan*.

²⁷⁵ See, for example, Saltman & Smith, *'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part'*.

assumption that there are also cases about which the authorities do not have knowledge.²⁷⁶ More than 40 people that left for the region as foreign fighters have been identified in this study. It is not fully clear how SUPO, for example, defines the total number of people that have left for the region and what kinds of actors are included in the total number. In its annual report of 2015, SUPO disclosed that approximately 75% of such people identified by then (more than 50 persons) had attempted to take part in jihadist fighting.²⁷⁷ The situation overview on violent extremism in Finland (1/2017) published by the Ministry of the Interior also states that most of the foreign fighters had joined ISIS.²⁷⁸

In the context of this study, it was revealed that fighters from Finland have not only fought in the ranks of ISIS but also in the ranks of Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar and Jabhat al-Nusra, as well as in the ranks of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formed on the basis of the Jabhat al-Nusra).

Travelling from Finland to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq was at its height between 2012 and 2016, after which fewer people have left for the area. Any travelling to the conflict zones after that has mostly taken place without the authorities noticing it, as the official estimates of the number of people leaving for the area have remained more or less unchanged since early 2017.²⁷⁹

In addition to the individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq many people are also known to have considered leaving for the area but, for various reasons, have ultimately decided not to go. Security authorities and non-governmental organisations have made several interventions aimed at encouraging those planning to leave to give up their plans. A small number of underage people on their way to the area are also known to have been stopped at the airport. The best-known of the individuals giving up their travel plans is a man who uses the name Abdullah al-Finlandi, who is a young Finnish man who had converted to Islam. According to his own account of the events, he was preparing to travel to the conflict zone in summer 2013, with the intention of

²⁷⁶ Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018*, p. 24.

²⁷⁷ Suojelupoliisi, 'Suojelupoliisin toimintaympäristö vuosina 2015–2016'.

²⁷⁸ It nevertheless remains unclear whether the total number (about 80) refers to all individuals that have left for the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq or only to the persons meeting the criteria for 'terrorist foreign fighter'. Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2017*, p. 19.

²⁷⁹ For example, according to the situation overview on violent extremism in Finland (1/2017) published by the Ministry of the Interior, nearly 80 people have left for the area (p. 19).

joining Jabhat al-Nusra, but gave up his plans after talking to the representatives of SUPO.²⁸⁰

Several similar cases became apparent during the study, but for reasons pertaining to the protection of privacy, they cannot be discussed here in more detail. Many of these individuals have been motivated by an interest in jihadism, which has not involved any concrete action or advanced plans. In a small number of cases, the individuals wanted to follow a family member or a close friend that had already travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.

Who are the people that have travelled from Finland to Syria and Iraq? They constitute a largely diverse group. Their backgrounds and motives were examined in a 2016 study focusing on the phenomenon.²⁸¹ According to the situation overview on violent extremism in Finland (2/2015) published by the Ministry of the Interior, there were people from 19 different ethnic groups among the 70 individuals that had left Finland for the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq by the year 2015. A total of 62% of these were Finnish citizens.

Somalis, Kurds, and mainstream Finns were some of the groups most strongly represented among the more than 40 people identified in our research. If we take into consideration the fact that the total number of converts in Finland is small, converts among the mainstream population have been particularly overrepresented. In the case of the Somalis travelling to Syria and Iraq, there are no indications that the foreign fighter flow would be connected to the support activities for Al-Shabaab in the earlier years. One of the persons charged with offences in the Al-Shabaab trial is, however, an exception in this respect. He travelled to Syria via Turkey with his Finnish convert wife and children sometime after spring 2015, in the middle of the appeals process arising from the Al-Shabaab related trial.²⁸² At the same time, however, most of the others of Somali background seem to be individuals that became interested in jihadism during the conflict in Syria and Iraq and later took part in it. There is a clear link between Rawti Shax and the cases of Kurds leaving for the area and identified by the research group.

²⁸⁰ 'The Bullied Finnish Teenager Who Became an ISIS Social Media Kingpin - And then Got Out', *Newsweek* 5 June 2015. Before that, he had actively disseminated jihadist material online (see the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*).

²⁸¹ The influx of people from Finland to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq has been extensively discussed in another study and there is no reason to repeat the key findings of the report in this connection. See Juntunen, Creutz-Sundblom & Juha Saarinen, *Suomesta Syyrian ja Irakin konfliktikentälle suuntautuva liikkuvuus*.

²⁸² Sara Rigatelli, 'Somalimiehen hätkähdyttävä tarina: Vapautui Suomessa terrorismituomiosta, oli jo Isisissä', *Yle* 4 March 2017.

According to SUPO, the people leaving for the area are aged 18–50 and individuals in the age category 21–25 are the largest group. Women comprise more than 20% of the people known by the authorities to have left for the area.²⁸³ Even though the caliphate created by ISIS has been a particular attraction to Western women, a small number of Finnish women already went there before its declaration in summer 2014. The first of such cases known to the researchers stem from the period between winter 2012 and spring 2013. During the study, it emerged that most of the approximately 20 women travelling to the region were of Somali background or converts belonging to the mainstream population. A large proportion of these have travelled to the conflict region with their husbands, although some have also made the trip alone. In fact, it would be wrong to see women merely as passive co-travellers, as many of them may have played a key role in the decision to leave, irrespective of whether they have travelled alone or with a male companion. It also emerged that, in one case, female members of two families played key roles when the adult male offspring of the families decided to leave for the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. Further examination of this dimension of the phenomenon will, however, be the task of future research.

About 30 children from Finland have also ended up in the region, either with their mothers (or both parents) or as the result of being kidnapped by their fathers. Some of these children have reached adulthood in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. Many of the male children that have travelled to the region and spent long periods there may also have received armed training and taken part in fighting. What the children that have moved to the areas controlled by ISIS have even more likely been subjected to is indoctrination.²⁸⁴ It is estimated that the women that have travelled from Finland to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq may have given birth to up to a dozen children.²⁸⁵

The people leaving for the conflict areas mainly come from the large cities in Southern and Western Finland, which is not surprising because most of Finland's Muslims (and most of the individuals connected to the phenomenon) also live in these cities. A handful of people have also travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq from small localities. During the study, it emerged that people leaving for the area from smaller municipalities have been in contact with networks in larger cities. If an individual has not had access to such concrete peer-to-peer networks, this has been compensated for by seeking contact with networks of like-minded people.

²⁸³ Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018*, p. 27.

²⁸⁴ See, for example, Mika Koskinen, 'SUPO: Suomesta viety lapsia Isisin oppiin - 'Tarkoituksena kasvattaa uutta jihadistien sukupolvea'', *Ilta-Sanomat* 21 November 2015.

²⁸⁵ Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018*, p. 27.

Some of the people travelling to the conflict zone from Finland have only lived in Finland for relatively short periods, which means that they are not particularly relevant to the phenomenon from the Finnish perspective. One example of such an individual is the Turkish student studying in Jyväskylä who had become radicalised before coming to Finland. According to news reports, during his stay as an exchange student in this country, he tried (probably unsuccessfully) to disseminate his ideology and recruit Muslims to ISIS in such places as the local mosque. He returned to Turkey in late 2014 and travelled to Syria in early 2015.²⁸⁶

Having said that, some of the people leaving for the conflict areas that have only lived in Finland for short periods may be linked to persons or networks in this country that are relevant to the phenomenon. The man from Bangladesh who has appeared in social media under the noms de guerre Abu Musa al-Bengali and Muhammad al-Muhajir is probably one such person. He moved to Finland in order to pursue studies in this country and probably only lived here for about two years (in Kokkola and in the Helsinki region) before travelling to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq at the end of June 2014.²⁸⁷ His Finnish wife, a convert, left for the region about six months later, in early 2015.²⁸⁸

According to news reports, a second Bangladeshi using the nom de guerre Abu Ismail al-Bengali, who had worked in the same company as Abu Musa, also had a role in jihadist circles in Northern Finland before travelling to Syria sometime between 2013 and 2014. He probably travelled to Syria for the first time in July 2014.²⁸⁹ He was last seen in Finland in January 2015, which suggests that he had made at least one trip between Syria and Finland.²⁹⁰

The role of social networks

What has prompted people to leave for Syria and Iraq? The process and motives leading to people departing to the conflict zones have been determined for such a small number of people that we have decided that these issues are beyond the scope

²⁸⁶ 'Journey to ISIS: From Astrophysics to Shell-Shocked Islamist Fighter', *Newsweek* 13 May 2015.

²⁸⁷ Sara Rigatelli, 'Isisin vuodetulla jäsenlistalla on ainakin viisi suomalaistaistelijaa', *Yle* 23 March 2016.

²⁸⁸ Sara Rigatelli, 'Suomi taas esillä Isisin propagandassa - Yhtenä syynä suomalaistaustaiset Isis-johtajat', *Yle* 10 March 2017. Umm Musa al-Finlandiyyah, Abu Musa's wife, has appeared in the Rumiyyah magazine of ISIS. For more details, see the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*.

²⁸⁹ Sara Rigatelli, 'Isisin vuodetulla jäsenlistalla on ainakin viisi suomalaistaistelijaa', *Yle* 23 March 2016.

²⁹⁰ 'Latest Bangladeshi IS Fighter killed in Iraq is Taz Rahman', *Dhaka Tribune* 12 May 2017.

of this report. However, we can say more about the social contacts relevant to this topic that were maintained by these people when still in Finland.

When examining the known social contacts of the more than 40 people leaving for the conflict areas that were identified in this study, the same phenomenon can be observed as that which occurred in other European countries: many of the people leaving for the conflict zones have friends or family members that have also travelled to these areas in Syria and Iraq (see Appendix 2). Previous studies have demonstrated that social contacts play an important role in prompting people to join social movements or groups carrying out violent attacks. This would also seem to be the case here.

One reason for friendships and family reasons having been particularly important in Finland seems to be that our country has lacked visible and charismatic activists, radical communities or public spaces open to jihadist activism that could have served as meeting places for people interested in and participating in the phenomenon. For example, several members of a group of friends (most of whom have been converts) frequenting the Roihuvuori mosque were among the people leaving for the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. There have also been married couples, siblings, and cousins among the people leaving for these areas. Within these social networks, there have been clear indications of peer-to-peer recruitment, facilitation, and radicalisation, as well as dissemination of the ideology, even though most of these activities have probably taken place via closed platforms inaccessible to researchers.

Friendships and family relationships are particularly important in the case of individuals travelling to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq from large cities (see Figure 1). At the same time, it seems that the individuals living outside the largest population centres have been more likely to find the peer-to-peer networks on the Internet. The most important example of the latter group is the young convert known under the nom de guerre Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi (also known in Finland as Isis-Jon).²⁹¹ He attracted questionable publicity in the international press in spring 2015 when complaining about how difficult it is to find a wife in Syria.²⁹² The young convert, who had been socially reserved and had suffered from life-management problems when in Finland, found friends from Norway and Latvia on the Internet. According to

²⁹¹ Sara Rigatelli, 'Isis-soturi Jonin taustat: Yksinäinen nettieläjä, joka vihasi armeijaa ja haki yliopistoon', *Yle* 25 February 2015; Sara Rigatelli, 'Isis-soturi Joni Ylelle: En ole päässyt vielä tappamaan', *Yle* 25 February 2015.

²⁹² Abu Hamza as-Somali, another ISIS fighter from Finland, also appears in a picture accompanying a news story in the British Daily Mail newspaper. Tom Wyke, 'The ISIS Lonely Hearts Club: British Fighter 'Hungry Hamza' and his undateable friends moan about being unable to find a jihadi bride in Syria', *Daily Mail* 10 April 2015.

Norwegian press reports, all three travelled to Syria. Abu Ibrahim and his Latvian friend had met in Helsinki before the departure.²⁹³

The Internet has also played a role in the communications of those already in Syria and Iraq with contacts in Finland. It is, however, practically impossible to piece together all the communications connected to the departure processes. Nevertheless, many of those that have travelled to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters are known to have also encouraged others to leave by acting as sources of inspiration and role models, and even as recruiters or facilitators. These persons have disseminated jihadist material and occasionally also explained its content in Finnish. Social media services, such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have allowed mobilisation through social bonds. The individuals that have travelled to the region first relay information and inspire others to leave, allowing their close associates to also join the same armed groups.

Rawti Shax is the only organisation known to have played a role in the flow of foreign fighters from Finland to Syria and Iraq. Many of the publicly known details about Rawti Shax stem from an investigation jointly carried out by a special unit of the Italian police and the intelligence authorities of a number of other countries in the early 2010s, and it is difficult to verify or assess them on the basis of other sources.

Based on the investigation records of the Italian police, recruiting fighters to Iraq has been one of the key objectives of the organisation. At least four persons that have lived in Finland are mentioned in these records. Three of them had travelled to Syria and Iraq. It has also been reported in two other cases that persons close to the network have taken their children to Iraq without the consent of the other parent. It is believed that one of the persons that have travelled to Syria and Iraq used to be the leader of the Finnish Rawti Shax organisation. He had travelled to Syria and Iraq as a fighter in March 2014 and had been killed there in December of the same year. He was one of the Finns whose forms were among the leaked documents completed as part of the ISIS arrival interviews.²⁹⁴ Two other persons that have lived in Finland but have since left to fight in Iraq were also named in the investigation. One of them died

²⁹³ 'Hellig overbevist: De frafalne - Del 1: Hvem er Abu Mohammed al-Norwiji?', *Adresseavisen* 16 June 2017.

²⁹⁴ Jukka Huusko et al., 'Neljäällä suuren jihadistiringin jäsenenä yhteys Suomeen – taustalla Norjassa asuva saarnaaja', *Helsingin Sanomat* 12 November 2015; Sara Rigatelli, 'Isisin vuodetulla jäsenlistalla on ainakin viisi suomalaistaistelijaa', *Yle* 23 March 2016.

in conflict and the second decided to travel to Italy when he was not allowed to return to Finland.²⁹⁵

Activities in Syria and Iraq

What have the individuals travelling from Finland been doing in Syria and Iraq? Determining this has been difficult, even for the authorities. The assumption is that most of them have joined ISIS. However, this does not say very much about what they have been doing. As stated above, not all individuals joining armed groups have taken part in fighting, as they have been engaged in a broad range of different tasks, depending on their own skills and the needs of the groups. Moreover, even though many of those leaving Finland between 2013 and 2015 have claimed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq, very few of them have openly described their combat experience or other activities in the region in interviews, social media or discussion forums.

In its own communications, SUPO has emphasised that some foreign fighters coming from Finland have risen to important positions, especially in ISIS.²⁹⁶ Based on open sources, it is difficult to say what this exactly means. At the time, ISIS still had many areas of activities in which individuals that had joined the group could have risen to important positions. Not every important position was alike, however; especially considering their potential impact for the development of jihadist activism in Finland. In the international research and public debate, none of the ISIS members coming from Finland have been described as having an important position. Thus, it remains unclear what SUPO actually means with this statement.

According to official reports, a large proportion of those travelling from Finland to the region have sought to take part in violent activities in the ranks of the jihadist groups and some of them are also known to have done so. The individual known under the nom de guerre Abu Salamah al-Finlandi, one of first persons to travel to the region from Finland, was killed in an operation of the Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar group in Aleppo in summer 2013.²⁹⁷ He was known to at least some of those who had travelled to Syria and who were charged in the trial in winter 2017–2018. The case ended with the acquittal of the defendants of terrorist offences.²⁹⁸ In addition, at least Abu Mansour al-Somali, Abu Anas al-Finlandi, and Abu Shu'ayb as-Somali have also died

²⁹⁵ Jukka Huusko et al., 'Neljällä suuren jihadistiringin jäsenellä yhteys Suomeen – taustalla Norjassa asuva saarnaaja', *Helsingin Sanomat* 12 November 2015; Sara Rigatelli, 'Yksi terrorismipi-dätetyistä oli karkotettu Suomesta, asui Turussa', *Yle* 12 November 2015.

²⁹⁶ For example, SUPO, *Yearbook 2017*, p. 10.

²⁹⁷ Heikki Kauhanen, 'Suomalainen kaatui Syyriassa – uusia lähtijöitä kymmenittäin', *Turun Sanomat* 1 August 2013.

²⁹⁸ Esitutkintapöytäkirja 2400/R/234/14; Kaisu Jansson, 'Käräjäoikeus hylkäsi kaikki syytteet suomalaismiesten terrorismirikoksista - tuomiot tuli talousrikoksista', *Yle* 24 January 2018.

while fighting in the ranks of ISIS. According to media reports, Abu Mansour was killed while on sentry duty and Abu Anas in the fighting against the troops of the Free Syrian Army. According to his father, Abu Shu'ayb may have been killed in an air strike carried out by the anti-ISIS coalition.²⁹⁹ Two individuals from Finland with connections to the Rawti Shax organisation and Abu Ismail al-Bengali, who was of Bangladeshi background, are also reported to have been killed while fighting in the ranks of ISIS.³⁰⁰ In addition, Aby Hurayrah al-Finlandi was killed after carrying out a suicide attack for ISIS in Iraq in autumn 2015.³⁰¹ According to the reports disseminated in social media in summer 2018, an individual of Somali background that had left Finland and joined the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group (previously known as Jabhat al-Nusra), was assassinated by ISIS in Syria.

It is estimated that approximately twenty people from Finland have died in the region, even though it is almost impossible to verify the reports of these deaths. As a result of the problems concerning the availability of information, the actual figure may indeed be higher. The deaths of the men killed in fighting and subsequently praised by the jihadist groups in their communications have been extensively reported, whereas there is considerably less information available on the deaths of women and children.

Some of those that have left for the conflict areas have probably used the vocational skills acquired in Finland to the benefit of ISIS. Individuals that have travelled to the conflict zones from Finland have worked in such professions as physiotherapists and ambulance drivers.³⁰² Quite a few of them have also worked as recruiters and facilitators and been involved in online communications. Abu Mansour, who has already been referred to above and who travelled to Syria in December 2012, invited his cousin Abu Shu'ayb and his wife (Umm Shu'ayb) to Syria, and the couple travelled to the country in early 2013.³⁰³ According to the criminal investigation records, Abu Salamah al-Finlandi served as the facilitator for the group of friends frequenting the Roihuvuori mosque that then left for Syria. However, he died before all members of the group had reached Syria, which probably prompted them to change their plans. Except for Abu Anas (who died in Syria), it is not known with any degree of certainty whether this group has been involved in violent activism in the region. It is likely that

²⁹⁹ Anu Nousiainen, 'Espoosta pyhään sotaan - islamistinuoret kertovat', *HS Kuukausiliite* 20 October 2014; Harun Maruf Hassan & Barkhad Kariye, 'Somali Jihadist Killed in Syria', VOA 14 January 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/amp/somali-jihadist-killed-in-syria/4207419.html>.

³⁰⁰ 'Latest Bangladeshi Is fighter killed in Iraq is Taz Rahman', *Dhaka Tribune* 12 May 2017.

³⁰¹ Sara Rigatelli, 'Isis väittää suomalaisen tehneen itsemurhaiskun Irakissa', *Yle* 13 September 2015.

³⁰² Yaroslav Trofimov, "In Islamic State Stronghold of Raqqa, Foreign Fighters Dominate", *Wall Street Journal* 4.2.2015; "Latest Bangladeshi Is fighter killed in Iraq is Taz Rahman", *Dhaka Tribune* 12.5.2017.

³⁰³ Anu Nousiainen, 'Espoosta pyhään sotaan - islamistinuoret kertovat', *HS Kuukausiliite* 20 October 2014.

Abu Salamah also served as a role model and inspiration for his younger brother and the brother's wife who probably travelled to the conflict zones Syria and Iraq with their children in 2015. The brother of Abu Salamah is likely to have also died in the ranks of ISIS.

Women leaving for the area are known to have been quite active on the Internet. The widow of Abu Salamah (and later also the widow of Abu Mansour), a young Finnish female convert, disseminated material produced by ISIS on a Finnish discussion forum intended for Muslims. At the same time, the former wife of a person who had travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq from Roihuvuori, actively disseminated material sympathetic towards ISIS on the (now closed) @UmmIrhah Twitter account, praising the atrocities of the group. Two Finnish women, Umm Khaled (the convert wife of the main defendant in the Al-Shabaab trial) and Umm Musa (convert wife of a Bangladeshi fighter that had travelled to the conflict zone from Finland) have also appeared in official English-language ISIS publications. Umm Shu'ayb, the wife of Abu Shu'ayb, also achieved notoriety in Finland by threatening Shia Muslims living in Finland via her Facebook account.³⁰⁴

4.3.2.2 Attacks in Western countries and travel to training camps

When jihadism-related international terrorism is addressed in the public debate, it usually involves attacks carried outside the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq and especially against targets in Western countries or Western targets in other parts of world. The nature and evolution of the attacks taking place in Europe, their geographic distribution and links to wider jihadist networks and armed groups were discussed in the third chapter. One important reason for the high level of concern in Western Europe regarding the flow of people to Syria and Iraq and especially to the ranks of ISIS pertains to the intertwined framework of jihadism, the phenomenon of foreign fighters, and international terrorism (carrying out attacks outside the conflict zones). A small proportion of the foreign fighters from European countries have taken part in terrorist attacks in Europe after returning from Syria and Iraq.³⁰⁵

To date, the stabbing in Turku in August 2017 has been the only incident in Finland that can be considered a jihadist attack. Two people were killed, and several others injured in the attack. This is also the only known case of an individual staying in Finland or a long-time resident of Finland carrying out a violent jihadist attack in a Western country. To the best of our knowledge, there have not been any serious plans to carry out jihadist attacks in Finland; at least not to the extent that there would have been grounds for pressing charges. After more detailed investigations, the

³⁰⁴ For more details, see the report *Jihadist online communication and Finland*.

³⁰⁵ Hegghammer, 'Should I Stay or Should I Go'.

suspected attack plans have turned out to merely be threats by nature, and these have been already described above. The best-known example is the case involving the Tempeliaukio Church in Helsinki referred to above.

The stabbing in Turku on 18 August 2017 was carried out by Abderrahman Bouanane, who is of Moroccan heritage and had registered as an asylum seeker in Finland two years earlier. His uncompromising religious interpretations and threatening behaviour arouse so much concern among people close to him in early 2017 that they reported their concerns to the authorities. However, for a variety of reasons, these reports did not lead to any action. In spring and summer 2017, Bouanane discussed religious matters with his friends on several occasions. His radicalisation seems to have intensified during Ramadan (around June 2017) when he probably met an Uzbek individual sympathetic towards ISIS in a mosque in Turku. Bouanane carried out the attack after short consideration and without careful planning. Before carrying out his attack, Bouanane recorded two video messages and uploaded them to at least three Telegram discussion groups.³⁰⁶

Bouanane carried out the attack alone and he is likely to have also planned it alone. It seems that jihadist material available online played a role when he adopted a jihadist world view and made plans to commit a violent act. It remains unclear, however, to what extent the process involved bilateral online or face-to-face interaction. It is almost certain that the person with Uzbek background met by Bouanane had influenced his thoughts and plans in some way. A warrant has been issued for the arrest of this person and he was still at large at the time report was written. Moreover, based on the available material, it is not possible to determine this person's links to jihadist networks or activists in Finland or elsewhere.

The act carried out by Bouanane was a typical jihadist attack of its time. It took place at a time when indiscriminate attacks against civilians using edged weapons had also become more common in other countries.³⁰⁷ It is, however, unusual that the perpetrator was not killed. This may be one reason why ISIS has not yet taken responsibility for the attack in its own communications.

Assuming that Bouanane's act is not, in some fundamental manner, connected to more extensive networks through his Uzbek acquaintance, the attack was a fairly typical 'inspired' jihadist attack, as described in the classification given in the third chapter. This means that familiarisation with the material and ideology of such an

³⁰⁶ Safety Investigation Authority, *Stabbings in Turku 18 August 2017* (P2017-1). https://www.turvallisuustutkinta.fi/en/index/tutkintaselostukset/poikkeukselliset_tapaukset/puukotukset_turussa_18.8.2017.html

³⁰⁷ Petter Nesser & Anne Stenersen, 'Jihadi terrorism in Europe: The IS-effect', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016).

organisation as ISIS or Al-Qaeda significantly contributed to the decision to carry out the act and the method of carrying it out, while at the same time the attack itself was carried out without the perpetrator having links to such groups or the jihadist activists or networks connected to them. Neither is Bouanane the only person with the status of an asylum seeker to have carried out attacks, even though only a small proportion of all jihadist attacks have been carried out by asylum seekers.³⁰⁸

The carrying out of the attacks is sometimes connected to travel to conflict zones. Not all individuals involved in the planning and carrying out of the attacks have, however, received systematic training for the acts; whereas individuals that have spent time at training camps have taken part in many of the attacks carried out in recent years. For example, some of the perpetrators of the attack in London in July 2005 had spent time at an Al-Qaeda camp. There are indications that individuals living in Finland made trips to such camps during the first decade of the 2000s, but little is known about the extent of this phenomenon and how it relates to the subsequent attacks outside Finland.

³⁰⁸ For example, according to a study published in summer 2018, asylum seekers and refugees were only involved in 16% of all attacks in Europe between 2014 and 2018. See Robin Simcox, *The Asylum-Terror Nexus: How Europe Should Respond*, The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder no. 3314 (2018), <https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/BG3314.pdf>.

5 Conclusions: current state and future of jihadist activism in Finland

In this report, we have examined the history of jihadism, the key developments of jihadist activism on the global and European stage and reviewed the jihadist scene in Finland. This chapter sums up the key observations relevant to Finland made in the previous chapters and assesses the similarities and differences between developments in Finland and elsewhere in Western Europe. In this sense, we will also examine such issues as why jihadists became more active in Finland at the onset of the conflict in Syria and Iraq and especially why the scale of the influx of individuals from Finland to the conflict zones has been so large relative to the size of the Muslim population in our country. We also discuss the developments and phenomena witnessed elsewhere in Europe that have not yet been observed in Finland.

At the end of the chapter, we look towards the future and discuss how jihadist activities are expected to develop in the next few years in Finland and in Western Europe as a whole. We also make some recommendations regarding the areas requiring further research in order for us to become more familiar with the phenomenon and to ensure that policy measures are more solidly based on scientific knowledge.

5.1 Key findings

The previous chapter examined the ways in which jihadist activities have developed in Finland. The main lines of these developments can be summed up as follows:

- The number of individuals involved in the activities has grown significantly in the 2010s. Jihadist activism is still modest in scale in Finland when compared to many other Western European countries, but the change is highly significant when contrasted with the history of the phenomenon in Finland.
- Even though networking and organisation among people interested in jihadist ideology and activities has increased in recent years, jihadist activism in Finland remains relatively fragmented and disorganised. There are still no organisations in Finland publicly supporting jihadist activism. It also seems that there are few capable key activists in this country willing to organise the activities and inspire others. At the same time, however, it should be remembered that many of these people are very security-conscious and try to keep their activities secret.

- The conflict in Syria and Iraq has been the single most important factor contributing to the growth of jihadist activism in Finland. The conflict has prompted more individuals to travel from Finland to the region than any previous conflict involving jihadist groups. Whereas in the past, jihadist activists in Finland were occupied by a wide variety of conflicts and issues, the conflict in Syria and Iraq has served as a unifying cause for activists and supporters coming from different backgrounds.
- The influx of asylum seekers to Finland in 2015 and 2016 undoubtedly increased the number of persons having links to jihadist activities. Based on public sources, it is difficult to make any detailed estimates of how and to what extent this has impacted the situation in Finland.
- Jihadist activism in Finland continues to support non-violent activities (such as recruitment and fundraising). A significant increase in travel to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq has been the most notable change in the operating practices.
- The first jihadist attack in Finland took place in 2017. The perpetrator was an asylum seeker, but he probably did not have any links to jihadist networks in Finland. To the best of our knowledge, there have not been any other serious attempts or plans to carry out attacks.
- In a potentially significant change, current and former residents of Finland now maintain closer links with jihadist groups operating in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. This may make it easier to channel more extensive support from Finland to conflicts under way in other parts of the world.
- While men still constitute the majority of jihadist activists, there are also indications in Finland that women are becoming increasingly interested in jihadism and are more active in jihadist circles. The fact that an increasing proportion of the individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq are women is the clearest manifestation of this trend.
- The opportunities provided by social media have also changed Finland's status in relation to the global jihadist movement. It has become increasingly easy to obtain jihadist material and to establish personal relationships with people in other countries. This has become more difficult after jihadist communications started moving to closed channels around 2015 but is not yet impossible.

- Physical social contacts (friends and family members) are probably still the most common avenues for participating in jihadist activities, but social media has also opened other routes, especially for people that do not have any suitable peer groups in their vicinity.
- It seems that the most active growth phase connected to the conflict in Syria and Iraq was over in early 2019. However, the activism accompanying the conflict has left a permanent mark on jihadist activism in Finland.
- The conflict in Syria and Iraq has made jihadist actors more aware of Finland and Finland is more visible than before in the content that they produce. When travelling to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, foreign fighters take information about their own societies with them. This makes it easier to put together more targeted communication for audiences in their home countries and to establish new connections between foreign jihadist actors and activists living in Finland. This will probably have an increasingly strong impact on the phenomenon in Finland in the future.
- At the same time, however, it should also be remembered that there are still substantial gaps in our knowledge of jihadist activities in Finland. This does not only apply to publicly available information, as the backgrounds of the individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq and the factors motivating them are probably not fully known to the authorities either. It is of vital importance that a more comprehensive and nuanced overview of the situation is developed and maintained in order to support the work of the authorities and the efforts to prevent and counter the phenomenon.

5.2 Jihadist activism in Finland in the light of broader trends in Europe

As described in the third chapter, jihadist activism has grown stronger in the 2010s across Western Europe. Accordingly, the developments in Finland have followed the general trends. Furthermore, the changes taking place in Finland can also be seen as a continuation of a process in which jihadist activism has recently become more common in countries that have previously played a peripheral role in the phenomenon. The Nordic countries constitute such a region. Jihadist activism started gaining ground in Sweden and Denmark earlier than elsewhere in the Nordic region and activism in these two countries has been of a more serious nature than in Finland or Norway – both in terms of its scope and nature.

As in Finland, the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the activities of ISIS, together with all their direct and indirect consequences, have been the most important reason for jihadist activism also becoming more common elsewhere in Europe. As stated in the third chapter, we are witnessing by far the largest and most extensive mobilisation of foreign fighters in the history of jihadist activism in Europe. A substantially higher number of individuals have left many other Western European countries for Syria and Iraq than from Finland, where the total number of such people is at the EU average.³⁰⁹ At the same time, however, if the number of people leaving for the region is examined in relation to the country's population, the Finnish contingent is considerably large. The numbers are particularly high in relation to Finland's Muslim population. Relative to the size of the Muslim community, more people have left for Syria and Iraq from Finland than from any other Western country.

The number of people travelling to the region from Finland can also be considered exceptional in the sense that jihadist activism has been very modest in every measure in this country over the past two decades and, according to current knowledge, there have been few such networks and organisations in Finland that have been able to recruit people willing to leave for Syria and Iraq and facilitate the process of joining armed groups (especially at the start of the conflict). At the same time, however, it should also be noted that a substantial number of people have left all Western European countries for Syria and Iraq without relying on existing networks. Many of those travelling to the region are individuals without any previous (or long-time) involvement in jihadist activism.

³⁰⁹ Bibi van Ginkel & Eva Entenmann (ed.), 'The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies', *ICCT Research Paper* (2016), https://www.nctv.nl/binaries/icct-report-foreign-fighters-phenomenon-full-version-including-annexes_tcm31-30169.pdf.

In addition to the phenomenon of foreign fighters, the past ten years of jihadist activism in Europe have also been characterised by an increase in jihadist attacks and foiled attack plots. However, after peaking between 2015 and 2017, the number of attacks has, at least temporarily, decreased. The stabbing in Turku was part of this trend. The way in which the attack was carried out was also typical of the period. Even though there have not been any other attacks and major attack plans have not been foiled, the estimates presented by SUPO indicate that, on the basis of the agency's observations, the possibility of an attack in Finland is no longer considered as far-fetched as it was before the start of the Syrian conflict in 2012.

It has also been noted in research and public debate that the European-based jihadist networks have become increasingly transnational. Such organisations as Rawti Shax and Sharia4 are examples of these actors. The new networks and international contacts established as a result of the travel to Syria and Iraq are one major reason for this. There have also been signs of such internationalisation in Finland.

In many ways, then, developments in Finland reflect the development of jihadist activism in Europe in general. In fact, the changes taking place in Finland reflect the general European trends more strongly than in the past, and that in itself can be considered a significant development. There are, however, also features in the Finnish situation that make it stand out in comparison to other European countries without, however, making Finland a special or exceptional case.

Jihadist activism in Finland is still small in scale and, according to current knowledge, relatively disorganised. Even though jihadist activism is also in many respects disorganised elsewhere in Europe, more organised networks and organisations have also been established in many countries in the first decade of the 2000s and the 2010s. It seems that there are no local branches of international or European-wide jihadist networks in Finland (except for Rawti Shax). There has also been relatively little radicalisation and recruitment activities in Finnish prisons.³¹⁰ In fact, it is difficult to pinpoint any organised cooperation or meeting places essential to the phenomenon. Before going any further, it should also be noted that it is partially misleading to examine jihadist activism merely on a national level, as the activities and networking associated with it are highly transnational and not limited to any specific country.

Furthermore, there have not been any serious attempts to establish Sharia4-type organisations in Finland; in other words, organisations that are non-violent, but which openly support the jihadist world view. As described in the third chapter, such

³¹⁰ Neumann et al., *The Crime-Terror Nexus in Finland and the Baltics*.

organisations have been key to the development of the phenomenon in other countries and to the mobility of foreign fighters.

5.3 Factors behind developments in Finland

What are the factors that have helped to make Finnish jihadist activism into what it is today? In many respects, the same explanations hold for developments in Finland as in other European countries, especially when it comes to the multidimensional effects of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. However, there are three key questions in the Finnish context that need further explaining: Why has jihadist activism started to develop later in Finland than in most other Western European countries? How can it be explained that in relative terms so many individuals have travelled from Finland to Syria and Iraq? Why does jihadist activism in Finland continue to be relatively disorganised and fragmented? Possible answers to these questions are discussed below, although it should be noted that a more detailed analysis would require additional research.

The country's remote location and foreign policy have been typical explanations put forward for the small scale of jihadist activism in Finland before the 2010s. These factors have undoubtedly played a role. Even though the West as a whole is often presented as an enemy, jihadist activism has primarily targeted those Western countries that have a colonial history in the Middle East or South Asia and/or those that have taken part in armed conflicts in these regions (such as the United Kingdom, France, and the United States). Moreover, the influential role of these countries in world politics is enough to make them familiar to jihadist movements.

It should be noted, however, that drawing straight lines between a country's foreign policy and jihadist activism is unwise, as jihadists have also been relatively active in such countries as Sweden and Switzerland. Moreover, the war in Iraq, which broke out in 2003, increased interest in jihadism and provided a stronger inspiration for activists linked to the phenomenon in Germany and France (which opposed the war) than in the United States (which started the war). The notorious cartoon controversy has been the key factor drawing the jihadists' attention to Denmark. The case of Denmark provides a good example of how a country can unexpectedly become a symbol and a focus of attention for much larger issues.

The second common explanation for the low level of jihadist activities in Finland is that the Finnish Muslim community is small and most of its members are moderate. This is true and is undoubtedly one reason why there is so little jihadist activism in our country. Most Muslims living in Finland are and have always been religiously and politically moderate. Muslims living in Finland are also a highly fragmented

community, linguistically, ethnically, religiously and politically. This makes it difficult to talk about a monolithic 'Muslim community'. The diversity and fragmented nature of the Muslim population has made any attempts at organising these communities difficult. This has also manifested in jihadist activities. There has been some interest in Finland in supporting armed groups operating in other countries, but the number of people interested in individual groups or conflicts was extremely small before the start of the Syrian conflict. One probable cause for this is that there have been only a handful of people with family roots in these conflict regions.

The low level of jihadist activism or the lack of organisation cannot be exhaustively explained with such general factors, however. This is shown by the fact that there has been a considerable increase in jihadist activism in recent years even though our Muslim community remains small and fragmented and Finland's geographic location remains unchanged. As regards any change in the profile of Finland's foreign policy in the eyes of jihadist activists, a substantial proportion of the individuals leaving for Syria and Iraq had travelled to the region before Finland decided to take part in the international anti-ISIS coalition and military operation.

One general observation about jihadist activism in Europe is that individuals actively creating networks and preparing plans (so-called entrepreneurs) have contributed significantly to its growth and development. It is difficult to name any persons in Finland that would have adopted such a role (at least in a visible or successful manner) and have the ability to motivate a large group of people to cooperate for long periods of time. Such activities are known to have taken place in this country to some extent. Such entrepreneurs may try to operate in Finland in a manner that does not attract attention and thus does not become public knowledge. However, it seems that the objectives of entrepreneurs have been limited to specific ethnic groups or have failed to materialise (with a few exceptions).

Most of the entrepreneurs in other European countries have been individuals possessing combat experience or that have been sentenced for terrorist offences. Even though not all such persons have any intention of adopting such a role, many of the individuals that are known to have contributed to the growth of the phenomenon come from such backgrounds. According to SUPO, one quarter of all individuals on the list of counterterrorism targets have experience of participating in a terrorist organisation or have attended terrorist training. Thus, there may be people in Finland with backgrounds giving them the credibility required to function as an entrepreneur. It remains unclear, however, whether they have the necessary skills or willingness for such tasks.

Finnish jihadists have occasionally received assistance for the organisation and recruitment of activists from abroad. A number of individuals whose visits elsewhere

may have been connected to attempts to reinvigorate and structure jihadist activism in that location have made also visits to Finland. The most prominent of these figures is Anjem Choudary. However, such high-profile visits to Finland seem to have been relatively rare and produced few results. Finland still seems to be a relatively uninteresting country for international jihadist entrepreneurs.

An additional explanation for the low level of visible activism may also be that Finland has been considered a suitable place for carrying out support activities for armed groups without attracting too much attention. This would not be compatible with the visible and open propagation of the jihadist world view and recruitment, as that would attract the attention of the authorities. Finland has undoubtedly provided a relatively free operating environment for jihadist activism, with one reason being that the authorities have possessed limited resources and powers to monitor the activities and legal action has rarely been taken to restrict them. For example, in contrast to many other countries in which the organisation has operated, little action has been taken against Rawti Shax in Finland. In fact, Awat Hamasalih, the second in command of the organisation, would probably not have moved to Finland if he had considered this country a particularly difficult operating environment. In fact, soon after he had been deported from Finland, a legal case against him was opened in the United Kingdom and he is currently serving a prison sentence.

How, then, can it be explained that so many individuals living in Finland have travelled to Syria and Iraq? There is no simple answer to this question. The reasons discussed in the third chapter that have prompted the mobilisation in Europe as a whole have unquestionably also played a role in Finland. At the same time, an earlier report discussing the flow of people to the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq³¹¹ examined the factors connected to the broader evolution of the religiousness of young Muslims and the views of the people that have left, as well as those of their friends and families, concerning the matters motivating them to go (such as a sense of duty and a willingness to help Muslims that are suffering). These factors have also served as an inspiration for people in other countries leaving for the region and, therefore, do not fully explain the unexpectedly large mobilisation in Finland.

When seeking explanations, we should remember that the number of people that have travelled to Syria and Iraq is actually very small. When the number of people going to the region is examined in relation to the population of their country of origin, social factors are often suggested as explanations to the phenomenon. While factors such as the socio-economic status of Muslims, perceived discrimination, and public opinion may well play a role on a case-by-case basis, it should also be remembered

³¹¹ Juntunen, Creutz-Sundblom & Saarinen, *Suomesta Syyrian ja Irakin konfliktikentälle suuntautuva liikkuvuus*.

that we are seeking an explanation to a decision made by a relatively small number of people.

As described above, social networks have played an important role in the mobilisation of jihadist activists. This also means that the decision of a single group of friends not to travel from Finland to Syria could have substantially changed the number of people leaving for the region. At the same time, the departure of a group of friends may ultimately have been prompted by the enthusiasm of a single member who has then started a campaign to persuade others to join them.

With this reservation, we can, however, provide a number of potential explanations for the unexpectedly large mobilisation from Finland to Syria and Iraq. It seems that during this mobilisation, jihadist activism in Finland has started to follow trends in Europe more closely. To some extent, this change may be connected to the fact that Finland has an increasing number of young Muslims adults or Muslims that are on the verge of adulthood who were born and raised in this country but whose parents come from another country. Only a fraction of these individuals is interested in jihadist activism at any level but those who are interested are more often oriented towards 'global Jihad' than their parents. Their social networks are also more extensive. This may have increased the appeal of conflicts such as those in Syria and Iraq and jihadist organisations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS and provided a basis for the formation of such multi-ethnic networks that the departure for the conflict region has entailed.

Moreover, advances in social media have undoubtedly changed the situation in Finland and in other peripheries of the European jihadist milieu. During the early stages of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, there was an exceptional period when jihadist content was available online in extraordinary amounts and it was easy to communicate openly with individuals outside Finland that were interested in jihadist activities (including the fighters that had travelled to Syria and Iraq). This opened up new opportunities for interaction, especially in those places in which more established networks did not yet exist.

In the interviews with representatives of Muslim communities conducted for this study, many of the interviewees also voiced concern over the religious education of young Muslims. This concern was expressed by young people and the generation of their parents. Many of the interviewees believed that if young people were more familiar with their religion and would consider themselves more closely integrated into their religious communities in Finland, they would probably not view the jihadist ideology as attractive and as 'true Islam'. The interviews also relayed the impression of a generational gap in the sense that while young people wanted to have an opportunity

to discuss religious issues in a more critical manner, the young people felt that the older generation was not prepared to engage in such a discussion.

The extent to which the interest in jihadist activism depend on existing religious orientation and its nature has not been exhaustively studied. There is no doubt that growing interest in religion has often gone hand in hand with the decision to travel to conflict zones as foreign fighters or with the participation in other forms of jihadist activism.³¹² There have also been indications of this in Finland. There have, however also been indications that many of those travelling to Syria and Iraq have not familiarised themselves with any interpretation of Islam. In sum, it is still difficult to say anything about causal relationships in Finland or at the European level.

5.4 Future prospects of jihadist activism in Europe and Finland

Even though the flow of foreign fighters to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq more or less stopped during 2016 and there has been a considerable decline in attack plans during 2018, there are few reasons to expect a permanent decline of jihadist activism in Europe. Thomas Hegghammer has summed up the reasons for the pessimism widely shared by researchers in relation to four trends.³¹³ These trends and what they mean for Finland are reviewed below.

The first trend mentioned by Hegghammer concerns the potential recruitment base of jihadist movements. Even though the socio-economic background of the individuals involved in jihadist activism in Europe has varied, a substantial proportion of them have been economically underperforming young Muslims. Hegghammer refers to studies according to which persons involved in jihadist activities in Europe have been below average with respect to their educational levels and employment status. An unusually large proportion of these people also have criminal backgrounds. More research is required to determine to what extent such matters have influenced decisions to leave (i.e. is there any causal relationship?).³¹⁴ Regardless, in Hegghammer's view, there are few reasons to expect that, considering the current social situation, the number of such young people in Europe would be on the decline.

³¹² Dawson & Amarasignam, 'Talking to Foreign Fighters'.

³¹³ Thomas Hegghammer, 'The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016).

³¹⁴ For a good summary of the currently held views, see Thomas Hegghammer, 'Revisiting the poverty-terrorism link in European jihadism: Society for Terrorism Research annual conference, Leiden, 8 November 2016', http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_poverty.pdf.

There is no comprehensive information on the socio-economic backgrounds, education or income of the individuals engaged in jihadist activities in Finland. According to current knowledge, people such as those travelling to Syria and Iraq come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, but in the case of the majority, they do not seem to be particularly high. It can be assumed that people described by Hegghammer will be found in Finland in the future. Some of the individuals that have emigrated to Finland occupy a substantially weaker socio-economic position than the mainstream population. People with foreign backgrounds who were born in Finland (the second generation of immigrants) are still children and young people, as most people with immigrant background have arrived in Finland since the 1990s. According to the available information, some of these people also face difficulties at school, in further education, and in finding employment.³¹⁵ At the same time, when the development of jihadist activities is assessed in the light of such structural factors, it should be remembered that engagement in jihadist activism is rare in all socio-economic groups.

Another group of people that are considered relevant by researchers from the perspective of recruitment to jihadist activism are the participants in countercultural salafist communities. There have been disagreements over the relationship of these communities with jihadism, but some researchers (e.g. Peter Neumann and Fernando Reinares) are of the view that they are closely linked to jihadism as a phenomenon in Europe.³¹⁶ Salafist communities have grown and become more numerous across Western Europe and they are now more firmly rooted in their wider social environments than at the start of the decade. It is difficult to assess the situation in Finland, as no research on salafism in Finland has been carried out. There have also been a small number of communities in Finland that can perhaps be characterised as countercultural and salafist. The Roihuvuori mosque (which moved to Malmi in 2016), which has been linked to the phenomenon in the media, may be the Finnish community closest to what researchers have meant in this context.

The second trend highlighted by Hegghammer is that the number of such individuals in Western Europe that have traditionally played a key role in the establishment of networks and in the preparation of plans is now substantially higher than in the past and will also increase in the future. As has already been noted, persons that have fought in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq and have been sentenced for terrorist

³¹⁵ For example, Pasi Saukkonen, *Ulkomaalaistaustaisten kotoutuminen Helsingissä vuonna 2016. Työllisyys, tulos ja asuminen*. Tutkimuskatsauksia 2018:3 (Helsingin kaupunki, 2018), https://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/18_12_18_Tutkimuskatsauksia_3_Saukkonen.pdf.

³¹⁶ Neumann, *Radicalized: New Jihadists*, pp. 112-115; Fernando Reinares, 'Jihadist mobilisation, undemocratic Salafism and terrorist threat in EU', Royal Institute Elcano Expert Comment 13/2017, 10 March 2017.

crimes have accounted for a large number of such persons. Many individuals sentenced for terrorist crimes in Europe have been released or will be released in the coming years and they include people that have fought in Syria and Iraq. According to one estimate, more than 1,000 people connected to the phenomenon and sentenced for terrorist crimes in Europe will be released by spring 2020.³¹⁷

Even though only a small number of those people who left for Syria and Iraq have returned to Europe, the number of returnees is high when compared to previous conflicts.³¹⁸ Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that more individuals connected to jihadism would return from the region. Individuals who have participated in or supported the activities of ISIS and are now imprisoned in Syria and Iraq were a source of particular concern in Europe in early 2019. There is no certainty regarding their ultimate fate and their total numbers are now higher than the number of people returning to Europe between 2012 and 2018. It is also estimated that there are more than 1,000 children of European citizens that were born in the region or travelled there with their parents.

Based on the research on foreign fighter returnees from previous conflicts, it can be expected that not all of them will be interested in continuing jihadist activities when they return. The number of people that have already returned from Syria and Iraq and that may return from these countries in the future is so large that the security situation of individual countries may be significantly affected even if only a small proportion of these people are actively engaged in jihadist activism.

The number of people with a typical entrepreneur background may also be boosted by the influx of asylum seekers from the region to Europe. In fact, there may be individuals among the asylum seekers that will become interested in the phenomenon after arriving to Europe or who already have links with jihadist actors. However, it should be remembered in this connection that asylum seekers have not traditionally played a particularly significant role in the carrying out of jihadist attacks in Europe.

There are reasons to believe that there may be more entrepreneurs in Finland in the future even though there are currently no signs of such development (in the form referred to by Hegghammer). A number of individuals have already returned from Syria to Finland. There is little information available on the returnees but during the writing of this report, we have got the impression that they have not been particularly active. This observation would apply particularly to individuals that had returned to

³¹⁷ 'Terrorists set for release across the EU without proper monitoring', *The National* 6 March 2019.

³¹⁸ Of the numbers of those returning from Syria and Iraq, see Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees* (2017), <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf>.

Finland before October 2014. It is not clear whether people that had travelled to or lived in the area controlled by ISIS or participated in the activities of the group have returned to Finland after that point. There are, however, indications that a number of such persons have returned to Finland, but there is no certainty in this regard or in relation to whether they have participated in jihadist activities after their return.

More people may yet return from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq to Finland. For example, SUPO has stated that there are persons in Syria and Iraq willing to return to Finland.³¹⁹ It remains unclear whether these people are still engaged in the activities of jihadist groups, whether they are staying at refugee camps or in prison or elsewhere in the region. 'Sanna', who attracted a great deal of publicity in March 2019, is one such person. She left Baghouz in Syria, the last village of the shrinking ISIS caliphate, for the camp established by the SDF near the village, to which many of ISIS supporters and those engaged in its activities had fled the fighting. Sanna and her 13-year-old daughter, who had travelled to the conflict zone with her parents, have expressed their willingness to return to Finland.³²⁰

In the future, there should be more attention to entrepreneurs who may be particularly influential to the development of the Finnish situation, both in the framework of counterterrorism activities and the prevention of violent extremism. Such persons may have a greater impact on the situation than general factors that are often a key consideration in the prevention of violent extremism.

Experience has also proven that it is far from easy to interfere with the activities of the entrepreneurs. It may be difficult to bring charges against them because they are not necessarily guilty of crimes, at least not in the manner that would be easy to prove. Furthermore, taking action against them is also difficult when the individual is a citizen of another country, and especially if the individual has arrived in Finland as an asylum seeker or a refugee. Unless the individual concerned is a citizen of another European country, deportation may have to be ruled out because of the human rights situation of the target country or the legislation on the status of refugees or asylum seekers.

Thirdly, Hegghammer points out that jihadist activism in Europe has traditionally strongly reflected the developments in conflicts under way in countries with Muslim majorities (especially in the Middle East). Even though the conflict in Syria and Iraq is no longer as crucial to the phenomenon as between 2012 and 2014, it does not show any signs of reaching a permanent resolution. This is also the case with many other

³¹⁹ Petja Pelli, 'Isisin leiristä löytyi suomalaisella aksentilla puhuva Sanna, joka haluaa takaisin Suomeen', *Helsingin Sanomat* 6 March 2019.

³²⁰ For 'Sanna's' interview, see 'ISIS territory is clearing out. But where will the people go?', *CNN* 6 March 2019; 'Sumaya's' interview, see 'Malnourished children leave IS territory in Syria', *Sky News* 5 March 2019.

conflicts in countries with Muslim majorities (such as Nigeria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia). At the same time, however, conflicts that have aroused emotions in jihadist circles and Muslim communities in general have not led to any significant increase in jihadist activities. These conflicts include the campaign against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, which has features of a genocide, and the persecution of Muslims in China and the Central African Republic. These observations are relevant to Finland, other European countries, and the West in general.

The fourth reason Hegghammer cites as a basis for a relatively pessimistic view of the future has to do with the opportunities provided by the Internet to communicate with specific audiences in Europe and in the West in general. Even though the countermeasures taken by the security authorities and service providers have significantly reduced the volume of open jihadist online communications, today's communications technology still offers influencing and networking opportunities that did not exist 15 years ago. This has already been seen in Finland and it will probably also remain the case in the future. However, radicalisation taking place exclusively through the web is still rare.

Even though the peak years of jihadist activism in Europe seem to be behind us for now, social conditions in Europe are still more conducive to jihadist activities than they were before the conflict in Syria and Iraq. In the future, the phenomenon is likely to develop more slowly unless there are new forms of impetus similar to the pull of ISIS and Syria.

In the future, it can be expected that the situation in Finland will more closely reflect European-wide trends. There has been a significant increase in the number of individuals connected to the phenomenon over the past ten years. At the same time, the activism prompted by the conflict in Syria and Iraq took place in a situation where there were few jihadist networks that had been established in the preceding years. It is unclear how long the effects of this activism will last. Even though there is no return to the past, it is still too early to say to what extent the effects of the activism created by the conflict and ISIS and the networks arising as a result will be long-lasting.

5.5 Need for further research

As stated in the introduction, this is the first study attempting to provide an overview of jihadist activities in Finland. There is little publicly available information on the topic and supplementing it with new research takes time. This is because studying a marginal and stigmatised phenomenon that shuns publicity is very challenging. The phenomenon involves dimensions about which little detailed information is available and sometimes not even the authorities monitoring the phenomenon are much wiser.

At the same time, this study has shown that even though open source-based research on jihadist activism is a challenging task, it is nevertheless achievable, provided that enough time and resources are available. For example, numerous opportunities to carry out interviews for this study had to be refused due to the short duration of the project. Many tips remained unused and large amounts of less accessible data had to be ignored.

It should be evident by now that having a truly knowledge-based discussion on the phenomenon requires additional research to be carried out. The same applies to policy development and political decision-making.

More research is needed on following topics:

- The background of those involved in jihadist activism in Finland and what has prompted them to become activists
- Foreign fighting and the travelling to training camps of jihadist groups before the conflict in Syria and Iraq
- Background of the individuals that have left for Syria and Iraq and the networks that they have established
- Transnational contacts of jihadist activists living in Finland
- Participation of women in jihadist activism (motives, joining processes, forms of activity, networks, etc.)
- Formation and activities of salafist communities in Finland in the 2000s and 2010s and the way in which they are connected to jihadist activism as a phenomenon
- Support activities of jihadist groups in Finland in the 2000s and 2010s
- Non-violent support activities in connection with the conflict in Syria and Iraq in general, and ISIS in particular, in Finland between 2012 and 2018
- Internal and external recruitment activities targeting asylum seekers who arrived in Finland in 2015 and 2016 and relations with jihadist groups

Appendices

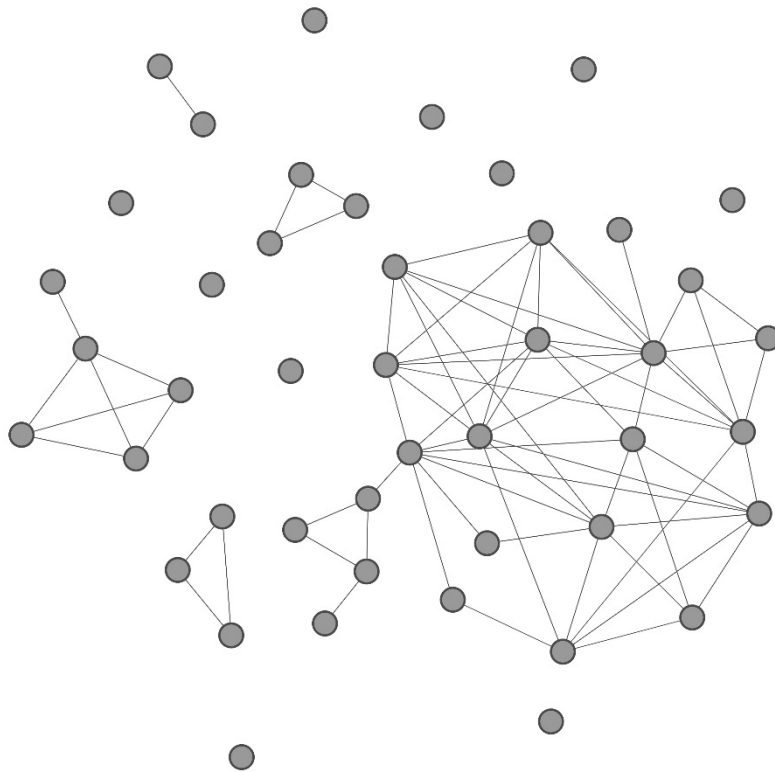
APPENDIX 1: Key features of the interpretations of Jihad doctrines

Interpretation of the religious teachings of Jihad	Historical	Revolutionary	Classical (Az-zam)	Global (AQ)	Global sectarian (ISIS)
Grievance justifying violence	External attack	Un-Islamic government	External attack	External attack	Lack of faith within the community, foreign occupation
Main enemy	Non-Muslim attacker	Muslim ruler	Non-Muslim attacker	USA and its allies	Islam-internal heretics, USA and its allies
Need for religious authority to declare Jihad	Yes	No	Partially	No	No
Personal religious duty of all Muslims to take part in Jihad	No	Yes (locally)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Restrictions on the use of force against civilians	Yes	No	Partially	No*	No

Based on the chart prepared by Thomas Hegghammer. See Haykel, Hegghammer and Lacroix (ed.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, p. 216.

* Even though according to the interpretation of Jihad held by Al-Qaeda, it is justified to use violence against civilians in conflict zones and outside them, the group has attempted to specify the situations in which such violence can be used and the civilians that can be targeted, and to justify the use of violence by referring to the Islamic texts and traditions essential from the perspective of the rules and ethics of warfare.

APPENDIX 2: Social networking of individuals that have travelled to Syria and Iraq



The dots in the chart denote the more than 40 individuals that have travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq and that have been identified in this study. The lines between the dots denote the relationships between the individuals. The details have been collected from social media, interviews, and openly accessible sources, such as the mainstream media.

According to SUPO, more than 80 adults have travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq from Finland and half of them have been identified in this chart. It is not entirely clear whether all the individuals identified in this study are included in SUPO's estimate.

With regard to social bonds and networks, this chart should be considered as a minimum estimate. The chart mainly includes bonds between individuals that are likely to exist on the basis of the available material. Determining the social bonds has been considerably easier for such persons that have had accounts in social media (especially Facebook). There is a total of 17 such persons. However, not all of them have open profiles, which would give access to such details as the list of friends. In such cases, the existence of bonds outside social media has been determined by means of interviews and by collecting information from other open sources.

Some of the bonds shown in the chart may have been unimportant when the individual has become interested in jihadist activities or travelled to the conflict zones. They have nevertheless often played a role, especially when close friendships, family relations or marriages have been involved. The strength of the social bonds has not been assessed in the chart and there is probably considerable variation in this.

It should also be noted that some of the links may only have been established in the conflict zones. People travelling from Finland may also have established networks in the conflict zones and this is known to have also happened in a small number of cases.



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