UNDERSTANDING
THE RISING CULT
OF THE SUICIDE BOMBER
Editor
Iain Overton

Researchers
Aman Bezreh
Chris Hitchcock
Jacob Berntson
Jen Wilton
Jennifer Dathan
Khalil Dewan
Leyla Slama
Michael Hart
Shaza Alsalmi
Sophie Akram
Tim Hulse

Design
Tutaev Design
# CONTENTS

1 Introduction 1  
1.1 Definition of SIED 2  
1.2 Notes on methodology 2  

2 A brief history of SIED 4  

3 Types of SIEDs 12  

4 SIEDs as a strategic weapon 14  
4.1 Collective or individual act? 14  
4.2 Strategic Drivers of suicide bombing 14  
4.2.1 Strategic uses 15  
4.2.2 Psychological effect 15  
4.2.3 A global problem 15  
4.2.4 Jihadist networks and the spread of suicide bombing 16  
4.2.5 Personnel costs 17  
4.2.6 Effect on support base 17  
4.2.7 Propaganda value 17  

5 Suicide bombings and martyrdom on Islam 19  
5.1 The Sunni perspective on ‘martyrdom operations’ 20  
5.1.1 Salafi-Jihadism 21  
5.1.2 Martyrdom and suicide bombings in Salafi-Jihadism 21  
5.1.3 Creating the cult of martyrdom 22  
5.2 Spinning suicide: a look at IS media operations 23  
5.3 Does the cult work? The wills of suicide bombers 25  
5.3.1 Religious fulfilment 26  
5.3.2 Retaliation and punishment 26  
5.3.3 Call to arms and establishment and expansion of an Islamic state 27  

6 SIEDs in the context of international law 28  

7 Drivers of SIEDs 30  
7.1 Social drivers of suicide bombing 30  
7.1.1 Communal support and traditions of resistance 30  
7.1.2 Personal connections 33  
7.1.3 Consequences of conflict 33  
7.1.4 The gender politics of suicide bombing 34  
7.1.5 Indoctrination and de-radicalisation 35  
7.1.6 Coerced bombers 35  
7.2 Economic drivers of suicide bombing 36  
7.2.1 Individual economic factors 37
# Economic drivers of conflict

The chapter on economic drivers of conflict discusses various factors that contribute to conflict, including economic instability, poverty, and inequality. It highlights the role of economic factors in shaping conflict dynamics and the importance of addressing these issues for sustainable peace.

# Psychological drivers of suicide bombing

This chapter examines the psychological aspects that drive individuals to commit suicide bombings. It covers topics such as the common misconceptions about suicide bombers, the psychology of suicide bombers, and the role of trauma and stress in radicalization.

## Are suicide bombers suicidal?

The section explores the question of whether suicide bombers are inherently suicidal, providing insights into the psychological profiles of suicide bombers.

## Honour, humiliation and redemption

This part discusses the role of honor, humiliation, and redemption in the decision to become a suicide bomber, highlighting the psychological mechanisms that drive these individuals.

## Vengeance

The discussion on vengeance examines how the desire for vengeance can motivate individuals to engage in suicide bombings, often as a means to avenge perceived wrongs or to strike back at enemies.

# Stemming the tide: Combatting suicide bombing

This chapter focuses on strategies and approaches to combat suicide bombing, including policy interventions, community engagement, and psychological support programs.

## Current threat zones

The chapter on current threat zones provides an in-depth look at various regions and countries where suicide bombings are prevalent. It covers topics such as Iraq, Syria, Af-Pak region, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Tunisia, and Europe, detailing the specific challenges and strategies in each area.

### Iraq

- Suicide bombings in Iraq between 2011-2015
- Iraqi suicide bombings: a new and old phenomenon
- Bombers and tactics
- The Battle of Mosul: suicide bombings as a defensive strategy

### Syria

- SIED attacks in Syria 2011-2015
- History of SIEDs in Syria
- Bombers and tactics

### Af-Pak region

- Strategy
- Recruitment

### Nigeria

- Strategy
- Recruitment

### Saudi Arabia

- Wahhabism, violence, and Saudi suicide bombings
- Exporting suicide bombers?

### Yemen

- SIED attacks in Yemen 2011-2015
- Yemeni suicide bombings in history
- Perpetrators and recruitment

### Tunisia

- Salafi-Jihadism in Tunisia
- Tunisian suicide bombers

### Europe

- Identity Politics and Diaspora Community
- Foreign policies
- Socio-economic deprivation and challenges
- Opportunity Factors for Radicalisation
- Community Responses and Refusal

# Recruitment: The case of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

The chapter on recruitment provides a detailed examination of how the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) recruits individuals to commit suicide bombings, including the methodologies used and the psychological profiles of their recruits.

## The 121 suicide bombers

This section delves into the specifics of the 121 suicide bombers identified by ISIS, analyzing their profiles, motivations, and roles within the group.

## Child suicide bombers

The discussion on child suicide bombers examines the phenomenon of children being used as suicide bombers, exploring the factors that drive this behavior and the impacts on society.

# Looking ahead: Suicide bombings in 2017

The final chapter looks forward to the future of suicide bombings, considering trends and potential developments, and offering insights into how to address emerging threats.
11 Preventative Measures

12 Conclusions

13 Appendix: Individual case studies

13.1 Analysis of ISIL recruitment files
  13.1.1 Registration and exit forms
  13.1.2 Methodology
  13.1.3 Analysis

13.2 Suicide bombers from Europe
  13.2.1 Overview of the March 2016 Brussels attacks bombers
    Ibrahim El-Bakraoui (Brussels Attacks, March 2016)
    Najim Laachraoui (Brussels Attacks, March 2016)
    Khalid El-Bakraoui (Brussels Attacks, March 2016)
  13.2.2 Overview of the November 2015 Paris attacks suicide bombers
    Bilal Hadfi (Paris Attacks, November, 2015)
    Brahim Abdeslam (Paris Attacks, November 2015)
  13.2.3 Other suicide attacks carried out by Europeans
    Abu Musab al-Almani (Baghdad Attack, April 2015)
    Kevin Chassin (May 2015)

13.3 Syrian and Iraqi Suicide Bombers
  13.3.1 Syrian suicide bombers
  13.3.2 Iraqi suicide bombers

13.4 Transcripts of the wills of Syrian and Iraqi Suicide Bombers

13.5 Yemeni suicide bombers
  Abu Hatim (AQAP)
  Abu Rawi As-Sway’ari (AQAP)
  Abu Hanifa al-Hollandi (IS)

13.6 Tunisian suicide bombers
  13.6.1 Case studies
  13.6.2 Case study 1: Houssam Abdelli
  13.6.3 Case study 2: Sabr el-Ayari
  13.6.4 Case study 3: Sousse
  13.6.5 Case study 4: Ezzarha
  13.6.6 Tunisia: final observations
The sharp rise in the number of suicide bombings over the last few years is incontestable. 1982 – the year of the Hezbollah attack on the Tyre headquarters of the Israeli army – is often cited as the beginning of the ‘modern age’ of suicide bombings, but the relatively limited activities of the 80s and 90s cannot compare with the current scope of the problem. Before 2000, no year saw more than 22 suicide attacks worldwide. In 2015, there were at least 600.1

Over the last five years of AOAV’s Explosive Weapons Monitoring Project (EWMP), which records data on explosive weapon usage worldwide according to English-language news sources, suicide bombings have consistently caused high levels of civilian harm.2

In total, 1,191 incidents were recorded across the 2011-2015 period, resulting in 31,589 civilian deaths and injuries. This is an average of 27 civilians killed or injured per incident.

Of the ten worst incidents recorded by AOAV over the five-year period, five were suicide bombings – a figure only matched by airstrikes.

Deaths and injuries from suicide bombings, 2011-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Armed actors</th>
<th>Civilians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the same period, AOAV also recorded a worrisome overall trend of rising civilian deaths and injuries from suicide bombings, as well as ever-greater numbers of countries affected.

In 2015, for example, suicide bombings were recorded in 21 countries – the highest number ever recorded by AOAV or by other datasets.

Indeed, both 2015 and 2016 saw a considerable uptick in the overall lethality of suicide bombings. This was in spite of similar incident numbers to previous years.

Suicide strikes in 2015 resulted in an average of 36 civilian deaths and injuries per incident, markedly higher than the five-year average of 28. In 2016 that figure has risen to 38. This rise can largely be attributed to an intensification of high-profile suicide bombings launched by Boko Haram and IS, but also by other armed groups involved in conflicts in Syria and Yemen, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula (AQAP).

In spite of the clear differences in scale and objectives between the 1980s and the post-9/11 world, this is largely not reflected in modern scholarship. Most studies on suicide bombings – even those emerging after the 11 September 2001 attacks and the Iraqi insurgency of the mid-2000s – focus on the relatively small-scale nationalist campaigns of the 80s and 90s. This is probably largely because of the comparatively large amounts of available data on these campaigns (such as the relatively comprehensive information on Palestinian suicide bombings, for example).

Much of this scholarship into the drivers of suicide attacks has also focused at the individual level, ambitiously, searching for the magical last piece of the puzzle that will explain ‘what makes a suicide bomber’.

The overwhelming majority suicide bombers in recent years are, with a few exceptions, internationalist Islamists of a Salafi-Jihadist persuasion (or, more accurately, those who carry out bombings on behalf of such organisations).

This should not be taken to mean that suicide bombing is a problem somehow ‘stemming from Islam’, unique to Islamists, or even particularly characteristic of Islamist political movements as a whole. What it does mean, is that these groups – rather than nationalist movements – should be the centre of current research, as well as...
policy and military discussions on reducing the current impact of suicide bombing.

Another concern regarding recent scholarship is that most has focused on finding a single underlying cause for all uses of suicide bombing worldwide. Suicide bombing is a tactic that can be used in many different ways and for many different strategic objectives. It obviously emerges under specific conditions – but this does not mean its use will be limited to those conditions. The suicide bombing that killed Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 shares no more with a huge market truck bombing in 2015 Baghdad than the means of activation method.

This report sets out to address the main factors that contribute significantly in creating the cult of suicide bombers in armed Salafi-Jihadi groups. Our research found that suicide bombers of Salafi-Jihadi groups blow themselves up for a combination of reasons.

Firstly, the concept of martyrdom propagated by Salafi-Jihadi groups seems to appeal to many who have personal and individual desires pertaining to elevation of status. Such desires are often rooted in a sense of inferiority, whether it is socio-economic or social, and is often caused by (perceived or real) discrimination. The act is often justified as a defence of Islam, which gives the bomber both a sense of fulfilling a purpose and hero status among their peers. Religion often serves as the binding force, and usually becomes a factor towards the end of an individual’s radicalisation process. These more ‘ideological’ motivations are, in general, most predominantly found in foreign fighter suicide bombers.

Secondly, some bombers are merely motivated by the logic of the battlefield or by personal experience. For example, many Syrian suicide bombers have spent time as political prisoners or witnessed deaths caused by airstrikes, which may give them enough grievances to exert revenge. Suicide bombings might also be motivated by more pragmatic reasons, for example as a means to protect one’s home community.

Thirdly, the deterioration of conflict in Syria and Iraq, as well as the sectarian climate that has been developed as a result of these conflicts, has polarised the Muslim population and has undoubtedly eradicated some of the neutral positions in each conflict. This has paved the ground for more suicide attacks in the short run but also for jihadi sympathy in the long run. Fourthly, it is impossible to draw conclusions of why someone becomes a suicide bomber that are relevant and accurate for each case. Although the above mentioned sentiments can be nurtured in a collective environment and framed in the collective practice of religion, every bomber bases their decision on a range of personal experiences. Some of those experiences are, as will become apparent in this report, shared, but ultimately there can be no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem that the cult of the suicide bomber represents.

1.1 Definition of SIED
The Weapons Technical Intelligence (WTI) Improvised Explosive Device (IED) Lexicon defines an IED as a ‘A device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic or incendiary chemicals and designed to destroy, incapacitate, harass or distract. It may incorporate military stores, but is normally devised from non-military components. Refers to a type of IED incident that involves a complete functioning device.’

An SIED (Suicide Improvised Explosive Device) is defined as ‘an IED initiated by the attacker at a time of their choosing in which they intentionally kill themselves as part of the attack, or possibly to deny capture.’

1.2 Notes on methodology
The data in this report is based on AOAV’s Explosive Weapons Monitor Project (EWMP), and examines suicide bombings between 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2015. Analysis of suicide bombings in this report will therefore be based on events that occurred and were recorded by the EWMP within this timeframe, with the exception of Chapter 10. However, in order to provide a comprehensive view of the networks behind IED attacks, the report has not limited itself to this timeframe whilst discussing the general workings suicide bomber phenomenon. Therefore, certain SIED attacks that occurred outside of this timeframe will be mentioned, although the vast majority of data examined in the report concerns the period between 2011 and 2015.

In Chapter 10, which discusses potential future suicide bombing trends, AOAV has opted to examine data from 2016 in order to provide the most updated risk assessment possible. Although this means moving away from the main timeframe, AOAV sees it as necessary in order to contribute to make the most informed contribution possible to the debate on SIED prevention.
A full methodology on the EWMP can be found on AOAV’s website. However, some notes should be made in regards to its use in this report.

The EWMP collects data on global explosive violence from English language sources. Sources are collected through an amalgamation of alerts set up for certain words pertaining to explosive violence being used in news stories. Examples of such words include ‘explosion’, ‘rocket’, and ‘IED’. Only attacks that have rendered casualties (killed and/or injured) are taken into account. Incidents are classified according to what type of launch method was used. For this report, the part of the EWMP analysed is therefore the one that has been classified as ‘Launch method: IED’ and ‘Activation method: suicide attack’. Furthermore, the EWMP records the location, time, target and perpetrator (if known) of IED attacks.

Responsibility for attacks in this report is distributed according to two variables. Firstly, if a group claims responsibility for the attack, and secondly, if a group is clearly named as the perpetrator in the source. As groups have carried different names throughout the timeframe examined, the total number of attacks attributed to these various names has been merged.

For example, that means that the Islamic State in Iraq’s (ISI) attacks have been merged with the Islamic State’s (IS) attacks to create a total quantity. It should be noted that since many attacks are never attributed to a specific perpetrator, this inevitably means that numbers of a certain perpetrator’s attacks may in some cases be higher than what is reflected in this report.

Groups will also carry one name throughout this report, regardless if they have been known by another name during the timeframe examined. For example, this means that Islamic State (IS) will be called IS throughout the report, despite carrying other names between 2011 and 2016. Reciprocally, the group currently known as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham will be called Jabhat al-Nusra since the group carried this name during the period that the IED data used in this report was collected.
2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SIEDs

Although suicide bombings have never been as prominent of a phenomenon as they are today, it is important that we trace where they came from and how they have developed throughout history. This section offers a brief overview of the growth of the suicide bomber as a weapon of war - from sporadic early attempts at the end of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, to the development of the situation that we see today, where daily headlines of suicide bombings are seen around the world.

Certainly suicide bombings are a tactic of immense harm. They have been used in over 40 different countries and territories over the last 30 years, killing at least fifty thousand people. And they are, today, the weapon of choice for some of the most feared terrorist organisations.

Generally speaking, before 1980, this overview contests that suicide attacks were generally carried out under military orders and were motivated by a form of acute nationalism or political ideology. Between 1980 and 2001, suicide attacks were driven by a response to perceived or real iniquities carried out by forces occupying the attackers’ homeland. Since 9/11, however, most suicide attacks have been carried out for reasons largely framed under the banner of Salafist-Jihadism.

SUICIDE ATTACKS AND SUICIDE BOMBINGS

First, it is important to draw the distinction between suicide attacks and suicide bombings. For as long as there has been war, there have been men who, in the thick of fighting, have thrown themselves with ferocious intent into the line of battle. They have done so all too often, with the absolute knowledge that their actions would result in their own death.

One of the first recorded instances when an individual caused the deaths of others through their own ‘self-sacrifice’ comes in the biblical tale of Samson:

“Samson said to the servant who held his hand, “Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them.” Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching... Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.”

Even since this moment of self-sacrifice, history has witnessed a steady stream of moments where an individual has given their life in battle for what is seen to be ‘the greater good’. In 11th century India, for instance, to combat the greater numbers of the Chola dynasty empire’s army, suicide squads were raised by the Indian Chera rulers. And in the 19th century, Muslim Acehnese from the Aceh Sultanate of what is now Indonesia performed suicide attacks known as Parang-sabil against Dutch invaders during the Aceh War.

Of course, such ‘suicide attacks’ usually result in the combatant’s or terrorist’s death. But high risk attacks or reckless charges in battle still carry the possibility – however remote – that the person leading the charge might survive.

Not so suicide bombings. These are situations where the odds of survival are not near to zero but are explicitly zero: where “the perpetrator’s ensured death is a precondition for the success of his mission”⁶. They are situations where the perpetrator functions as a sophisticated guidance system for the weapon, capable of approaching a target and detonating at the most devastating moment.

It is also worth noting that there are also “proxy bombings” which may be designed to look like suicide bombing. This paper’s position is that where “proxies” are forced to carry a bomb under threat (such as having their children killed), or where they may be unaware that they (the proxy) will be killed (because of, for instance, the fact that they have Down’s syndrome), this is not a suicide bombing, but a form of homicide by coercion.

Drawing the line between a coerced suicide and an intentional suicide is occasionally difficult. People with low IQs, or people who have been powerfully brainwashed...
by their peers, might choose to undertake a suicide attack and do so in the absence of hard coercion or a certifiable mental impairment. In Afghanistan, child suicide bombers are even sometimes given an amulet containing Koranic verses and told that it will protect them. Such events are hard to incorporate into a general overview of suicide bombings and so are best dealt with on a one-off basis, and not part of an overall critique of this tactic.

THE FIRST BOMBING
On 13 March 1881, Ignaty Grinevitsky watched as his accomplice threw a small bomb at the convoy of Tsar Alexander II outside the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. Safely enclosed in a carriage made from bulletproof material as a gift from Napoleon III, the Tsar stepped out, dazed but unhurt.

Grinevitsky saw his chance.

The young man, a member of The People’s Will left-wing terrorist group, rushed towards his target, dropping a second bomb at the Tsar’s feet, killing them both. The night before the attack Grinevitsky had written: ‘I shall not live one day, one hour in the bright season of our triumphs, but I believe that with my death I shall do all that it is my duty to do.’ And with that deadly sense of duty, Grinevitsky was to make his mark on history: the first recorded suicide bomber.

A contemporary description of the device is worth noting:

‘The infernal machine used by Elnikoff was about 7 1/2, inches in height. Metal tubes (bb) filled with chlorate of potash, and enclosing glass tubes (cc) filled with sulphuric acid (commonly called oil of vitriol), intersect the cylinder. Around the glass tubes are rings of iron (dd) closely attached as weights. The construction is such that, no matter how the bomb falls, one of the glass tubes is sure to break. The chlorate of potash in that case, combining with the sulphuric acid, ignites at once, and the flames communicate over the fuse (ff) with the piston (c), filled with fulminate of silver. The concussion thus caused explodes the dynamite or “black jelly” (a) with which the cylinder is closely packed.’

More importantly, it was to do its deadly work with efficiency – delivered at such close quarters, this ‘infernal machine’ took the life of its target as well as its maker, and in such a way became the first of so many suicide bombs in the decades that followed.

RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR (1904-1905)
Grinevitsky’s work as a targeted assassin might have secured his name in history, but one of the first recorded use of suicide attacks in warfare comes in the book ‘Dynamite Stories’ by Hudson Maxim, the brother to the more-famous Hiram Maxim, inventor of the machine gun. In the book Hudson describes in the Russo-Japanese war the sighting – by the Russians – of waves of Japanese suicide bombers advancing on the Russian lines, loaded with yet more ‘infernal machines’.

The tactic, similar to when poison gas was used in World War I, was to deeply confuse the enemy, sending murmurs of terror through the ranks. (Incidentally, the Russian army were to also face Japanese suicide bombers in the Second World War – as depicted in the 2011 South Korean film My Way.)

CHINESE DARE-TO-DIE BATTALIONS
The militarized suicide bomber was, it appears, to accord with early 20th century East Asian warfare mentalities. There have been numerous records of Chinese ‘Dare to Die’ battalions being fitted with suicide vests when attacking the Japanese in the Second Sino-Japanese war. Among others, this tactic was used during the Battle of Shanghai, where a Chinese suicide bomber reportedly stopped a Japanese tank column by exploding himself beneath the lead tank.
The militaristic Japanese culture at the time forbade any form of surrender, and the leap from this sense of death with honour, to volunteering as a human bomb was not – at least on face value – such a large one.

The Tokkotai were first deployed at the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944. A plane struck the St Lo aircraft carrier, triggering a fire that eventually sunk the ship. Their use peaked at the Battle of Okinawa in April and June, 1945, where 30 Allied ships were sunk or put out of action. In total, around 3,860 suicide attacks were carried out by the Japanese before the end of the war.

Their impact in addressing the balance of naval power in the Pacific, however, should not be over-estimated. It was expensive and often the planes lacked the penetrative force to sink a ship – only around 50 ships were sunk by Tokkotai. But the attacks did have a real and lasting psychological impact on the Allied sailors. Admiral Halsey, commander of the US Third Fleet declared that it was ‘the only weapon I feared in war’. The attacks also sent a message of fanaticism and intimidation to Japan’s enemies.

It was not just the Japanese who were implicated in suicide attacks. There are reports, too, of Paluans from the Philippines being recruited to take part in naval missions that were termed ‘suicide squads’.

Unlike modern suicide bombings, the Tokkotai attacks were directed exclusively at military targets. That said, the themes in the Japanese tactics of a military imbalance, indoctrination, and psychological intimidation can be seen years later – and are today seen in suicide bombings by non-state groups. It is, in this way, hard not to see the dark foreshadows of September 11th, 2001 in the tactics of the Tokkotai.

During the Cold war period, though, there were developments that would be important influences in the emergence of suicide terror at the end of the 20th century. After the Second World War, the US and UK encouraged and strengthened radical Islamic movements in the Middle East to contain the spread of the Soviet Union and to suppress nationalist movements hostile to the West. It was also during the 1970s that Saudi Arabia began to spend billions of dollars to promote Wahhabism, an ultra-conservative reading of Islam, around the world. Today groups propagating an ideology known as Salafi-Jihadism, in part inspired by Wahhabism, are among some of the most prolific users of suicide attacks.
THE SHIFT IN IDEOLOGIES

In this way, the cold war period was to see the beginning of a development of Islamic ideological extremism that was, over time, to flower into the suicide attacks that have been seen so prolifically in the 21st century.

The 1960s, for instance, saw the emergence of radical Sunni ideologues like Sayyid Qutb, and other protégés, in the Egyptian prison system. Not all of these ideologues were Salafists, but what they had in common was the adherence to a newly formed rhetoric of intolerance. It was, in a way, an exclusive ‘takfirism’ that promoted the excommunication of other Muslims who they felt were not up to scratch.

From such beginnings, jihadist ideologies became increasingly ‘Salafized’ – there began to emerge from intolerance a more potent language of political violence, particularly coming out of Saudi Arabia. Over time this Salafist-Jihadi interpretation of Islam began to harden. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989) and the First Gulf War (1990-1991), for instance, saw non-Muslims ending up in Muslim lands. In Saudi Arabia, in particular, the deployment of American troops there saw a political counter-response in what has been termed ‘The Awakening’.

This Awakening saw a distinct shift – from religious intolerance to political response to direct violent action. The notion of the suicide bomber to serve political ends began to materialize, a notion that saw its most pronounced Salafist representation in the attack on the twin towers on 9/11, where 15 of the terrorists involved were Saudis.

What came next is something that is still evolving – and occurred in response to the US’ intervention in the Middle East. The Allied intervention in Iraq produced profound shifts in the formation, approach, language and identity of jihadist groups there, and saw the suicide bomber becoming an almost ‘normalized’ form of warfare.

SYRIA’S ROLE

Parallel to this evolution of Sunni thought, there was also an evolution of permissible ideological suicidal violence in the Shia world.

In the 1980s, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad made an alliance with the new revolutionary force of Ayatollah Khomeini’s Iran. This happened at a time when Shi’ism was mobilising the tradition of self-sacrifice and devotion through pain (as most evidenced in their penitent rituals of blood letting) into a military and political weapon.

Khomeini was the leading force of this – he told his followers they could kill themselves so as to save the revolution provided that, in doing so, they killed as many enemies around them as possible. This position by Khomeini was completely new in the Shia world, primarily because the Koran explicitly prohibited suicide. Traditionally, one became a martyr on the battlefield because God chose the time and place of one’s death. Khomeini changed this.

He did so by going referencing one of the central rituals of Shia Islam. Every year, Shi’ites march in a procession mourning the sacrifice of one of their most influential figures, Husayn. As they do, they whip themselves, symbolically re-enacting Husayn’s suffering at the Battle of Karbala. Bloody excesses of this sort are prohibited in contemporary Iran, but, during the Iran-Iraq War, Khomeini appropriated the essence of the ritual as a symbolic act and politicized it. He took the inward-directed fervour and channelled it toward the external enemy. He transformed the passive lamentation into a very active, public protest.

Khomeini took it even further. He went on to say the ultimate act of penitence was not just to whip yourself, but to kill yourself... ...providing it was for the greater good of the revolution. ‘The natural world,” he explained in October 1980, ‘is the lowest element, the scum of creation. What is decisive is the beyond: The divine world, that is eternal.’ The origins of modern Istishhadi (martyrdom) attacks, then, appear to lie among the Shia in Iran during the Iran–Iraq War of 1980–1988.

Perhaps the first ‘martyr’ was Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh, a 13-year-old boy who is said to be the first Muslim to have participated in such an attack in contemporary history. He strapped rocket-propelled grenades to his chest and blew himself up under an Iraqi tank in November 1980. Ayatollah Khomeini declared Fahmideh a national hero and an inspiration for further volunteers for martyrdom.

This human sacrifice was commemorated in giant cemeteries across the country.
Fountains flowing with blood red-water glorified this new kind of martyrdom. And it was this new idea – of an unstoppable human weapon – that President Assad took from Khomeini.

**LEBANON**

It was during the 1980s that the idea of suicide bombing began to spread across the Middle East, and most notably it spread to Israel, in particular the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. The largest ‘martyrdom’ bombings during that occupation happened on 23 October 1983, when a truck was driven into a US Marine base in Lebanon, containing some 2,000 pounds of explosives. The bomber killed himself, along with 241 military personnel. Seconds later, another bomber struck the operations building of French paratroopers and killed 58 more.

These bombings shocked the world, and blame fell on Shiite militant groups supported by Iran and, more importantly, by Syria. These groups eventually formed to become the militant group Hezbollah. They went on to be responsible for a series of around 20 suicide attacks directed at the Israeli and Lebanese armies in the 1980s.

Car bombs in Lebanon were already a regular occurrence but suicide attacks added a new dimension to the threat. They required a broad range of security measures and their novelty captured widespread media attention. Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, a spiritual guide of Hezbollah, described under what circumstances suicide bombers were to be deployed:

“We believe that suicide operations should only be carried out if they can bring about a political change in proportion to the passions that incite a person to make his body an explosive bomb.”

These attacks were, then, not seen to be – on the part of the users - pointless acts of brutality but were carefully considered, and were believed to have a profound political impact. In some ways this thinking was borne out by reality. The bombing of the military bases successfully undermined US public support for continued involvement in the Lebanese war, and the Multinational Force withdrew from Lebanon. Similar suicide attacks on Israeli military bases persuaded the Israelis to move out of populated areas.

At this stage, for the most part, suicide bombings were directed at military targets, although civilians were sometimes part of the collateral damage. But the highly organised campaign in Lebanon was a breakthrough moment in the history of suicide bombings. The strategic successes helped to popularise the tactic and raise the profile of Hezbollah. They were the first Islamic group to carry out suicide attacks and the group would go on to play an important role in exporting their knowledge to Palestinian militant groups.

In this way, with Syria’s support, suicide bombings became the only weapon that defeated the Americans and forced them to leave the Middle East. It was a force that, once unleashed, was going to spread with terrible power.

**THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

It was also a force that, ten years later, was to jump, like a virus, from Shia to Sunni Islam.

In December 1992, Palestinian militant group Hamas kidnapped an Israeli border guard and stabbed him to death. The Israeli response was overwhelming. They arrested 415 members of Hamas, put them on buses and took them to the top of a mountain in southern Lebanon. They left them there - and refused to allow any humanitarian aid through. But the Israelis had dumped the Hamas militants in an area controlled by Hezbollah. Hamas spent six months there, and during that time, they learnt from Hezbollah how powerful suicide bombing could be. Hezbollah told them how they had used it to force the Israelis out of Beirut and back to the border.

The first sign that the idea of suicidal martyrdom had spread to Hamas was when a group of the deportees marched in protest towards the Israeli border, dressed as martyrs, even as the Israelis shelled them. But this mentality soon became more than just theatre.

Hamas began a wave of suicide attacks in Israel, sending bombers deep into the heart of Israeli cities to blow themselves up and to kill as many around them as possible. In doing so, Hamas were going much further than Hezbollah ever had. They were targeting civilians, something Hezbollah had never done.

Over time, at least 742 civilians were killed and 4,899 were wounded by suicide bombings in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, according to data from the University of Chicago. In Lebanon a further 88 civilians were killed by suicide bombings and 160 were wounded.

Hamas’ first attacks occurred in April 1994, when eight people were killed in a car bomb attack on a bus in Afula.

An upsurge in Palestinian suicide bombings followed in the next three years decade with 103 bombings. The increase corresponds with the second intifada following the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations. As violence intensified, the military wing of Fatah, the Al-Aqsa Brigades, also began to deploy suicide bombers.

These tactics shocked the Sunni world. This was something completely alien to its history. Not only did the Qur’an forbid suicide, but Sunni Islam did not have any rituals of self-sacrifice. The most senior religious leader in Saudi Arabia insisted it was wrong.

But a mainstream theologian from Egypt called Sheikh Qaradawi helped justify the Sunni use of self-sacrifice. He issued a fatwa that legitimised the attacks. It was acceptable, he said, to kill civilians:

‘Because, in Israel, everyone - including women - serve as reservists. So, really, they are all part of the enemy army. It’s not suicide. It is martyrdom in the name of God. Islamic theologians and jurisprudence have debated this issue. Israeli women are not like women in our society, because Israeli women are militarised. Secondly, I consider this type of martyrdom operation as an indication of justice of Allah, our Almighty. Allah is just. Through his infinite wisdom, he has given the weak what the strong do not possess. And that is their ability to turn their bodies into bombs like the Palestinians do.’

Attacks against Israeli civilians were justified by claiming that two things. First, that they were non-believers who were an extension of the Israeli occupation, and therefore legitimate targets who did not qualify as civilians. Second, that Israel had killed many innocent Palestinian civilians and this was therefore a justified act of revenge.

Mahmoud Ahmed Marmash, a twenty-one-year old suicide bomber who blew himself up near Tel Aviv in May 2001 explained such a decision on a video before his mission: ‘I want to avenge the blood of the Palestinians, especially the blood of the women, of the elderly, and of the children, and in particular the blood of the baby girl Iman Heijo, whose death shook me to the core…. I devote my humble deed to the Islamic believers who admire the martyrs and who work for them.’

His argument captures the mixture of religious and personal motivations that seem to fuel suicide bombings. On the one hand his death was part of a wider religious Jihad, on the other it is motivated by a very personal desire for revenge.

For the first time, then, suicide bombings began to be used as a means of transmitting fear throughout a whole population, not just the rank and file. These attacks were no longer unorthodox tactics in a guerrilla war against a state military, but a horribly effective means of terrorising civilians.

Hamas kept sending the bombers into Israel. The horror overwhelmed Israeli society and it completely destroyed the ability of politics to solve the Palestinian crisis. Instead, in the Israeli election of 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu took power. He turned against the peace process, which was exactly what Hamas wanted. And from then on, the two sides became locked together in ever more horrific cycles of violence.

Popular support for suicide bombings in the Occupied Palestinian Territories remains high. A 2013, Pew survey of global attitudes found that 62% of those questioned in the Palestinian Territories believed that suicide bombing can often, or sometimes, be justified. In Pakistan, though, that figure is just 3%.

Such figures are important for those who seek to reduce the spread of suicide attacks. Groups carrying out suicide bombings are hoping to win public support; if the bombings do not resonate in a positive way then their cause will fail. However, it should also be pointed out that much of the support for suicide bombings in Palestine most likely originates from the wide public support for the causes that groups like Hamas might stand for, and should perhaps not be regarded as an unequivocal sanctioning of the method. Nevertheless, as long as support for bombings remains, there may well be a resurgence of the tactic among Palestinian militant groups in the future.

SRI LANKA

Not all groups that have deployed suicide bombers have a national-religious ideology. In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a secular guerrilla movement, began using suicide bombings in the late 1980s as part of their campaign to create a separate state for Tamil people in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka.
The group was led by Velupillai Prabhakaran. He developed a cult of personality around himself and played a pivotal role in the recruitment of suicide bombers known as the Black Tigers. LTTE members training at Hezbollah terrorist camps were convinced by the successes of the Beirut bombings in 1983. To join the Black Tigers, LTTE members had to write application letters to Prabhakaran who would decide whether they were worthy. There were so many applications that a lottery for martyrs was created.

The first suicide bombing in Sri Lanka had strong similarities with the Beirut bombings four years previously. On 5 July 1987 an explosives-laden truck was driven into a Sri Lankan Army Barracks, killing 55 soldiers. The perpetrator of the attack was commemorated with a statue in the Tamil occupied town of Jaffna. Even in this secular campaign there existed a kind of almost sacralised martyrdom for those prepared to give their lives.

The Black Tigers were the world leaders in suicide terrorism from 1980 to 2003. Time Magazine describe the LTTE as ‘the most successful terrorist organization in the world.’ Of the 137 suicide bombings carried out by the LTTE, two were high profile assassinations: the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, and the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Five further Sri Lankan cabinet members were assassinated by suicide bombings. The Black Tigers also invented the suicide belt, something which would go on to be used regularly in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**THE BLACK WIDOWS**

Female suicide bombers have also been used in a wide range of conflicts. The University of Chicago recorded 125 attacks involving female suicide bombers between 1981 and 2010 – just over 5% of those they recorded. Among the most famous group of female suicide bombers are those referred to as the ‘Black Widows’ by the Russian media. Fighting for independence in Chechnya, they were often women who had lost husbands and brothers to the conflict.

Attacks carried out by women have a range of tactical advantages. Firstly, they attract significant media interest, sending a message that the cause has spread beyond a radical male youth. Secondly, the bombers attract less suspicion than their male counterparts and are able to access areas which men cannot. Female suicide bombers are still used today for these reasons, particularly by Nigerian jihadi group Boko Haram.

**AL-QAEDA AND SUICIDE TERROR**

Al-Qaeda was formed in Pakistan in 1988 with the stated mission of implementing Sharia law and ridding the world of non-Muslim influences. They carried out their first suicide bombing in 1995 at a US military base in Saudi Arabia, killing five people. In 1998, the al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden issued a fatwa which declared all American citizens legitimate targets. On 7 August that year, they launched twin suicide attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 223.

Then came 9/11. Al-Qaeda became infamous, almost overnight, around the world after hijacked airliners were used in attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11 2001. Nearly three thousand people were killed in the most deadly suicide bombings ever carried out.

The attacks led to complete overhauls in US domestic security and foreign policy and involvement by the US in lengthy military intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq and beyond. The US’s response, in turn, was to severely damage US standing in the some parts of the Muslim world. As such, bombing campaigns against the US and its allies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan have some of their roots in the rubble of the twin towers.

Over the following years attacks by al-Qaeda and their offshoots spread throughout the world, including the bombings in London in 2005 and in Bali in 2002. Disturbingly, al-Qaeda quickly developed a reputation for sophisticated attacks designed to inflict the largest number of civilian casualties.

**IRAQ**

The most deadly country for suicide bombings over the last decade is Iraq by some distance. A Lancet study found that at least 1,003 suicide bombings caused civilian casualties in Iraq between 2004 and 2010. Around 12,000 civilians were killed in this time period. There were around 60 times more civilians killed than soldiers. Civilians were not merely ‘collateral damage’ but were being deliberately targeted.

Many of the attacks were part of sectarian violence. In particular, Shiite Muslims have been repeatedly targeted by Sunni insurgents dissatisfied at the political regime following the Anglo-American occupation.

Suicide attacks began in Iraq in 2003. The targets included Shiite mosques, the UN headquarters, and the Red Cross.
headquarters. Further upsurges in the violence occurred following events like the killing of Abu Masab Al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor organisation to IS) and increases in US troops. Many of those carrying out bombings were from outside of Iraq, with Saudi Arabia contributing the highest number of fighters.

In the second Iraq War, Syrian agents set up a pipeline that began to feed thousands of militants across the border and into the heart of the insurgency. And it grew. Within a year, almost all of the foreign fighters from across the world were coming through Syria... and they brought suicide bombing with them. The Americans estimated that 90% of the suicide bombers in Iraq were foreign fighters. But it began to run out of control. Most of the jihadists had joined the group al-Qaeda in Iraq that then turned to killing Shi’ites in an attempt to create a civil war. And the force that had been birthed in Shia Islam, suicide bombing, now returned and started to kill them.

Suicide attacks in Iraq have continued despite the withdrawal of US troops and attempts to make civilians more secure seem to be failing. Efforts by the government included the establishment of hundreds of checkpoints.

The rise of the Islamic State (IS) – an al-Qaeda offshoot – in Iraq is largely behind this continuation of suicide attacks in Iraq. This has meant that Iraq has retained its unenviable position as being the country most impacted by suicide bombing. Between 2011 and 2015, AOAV recorded just under 350 suicide attacks in Iraq that resulted in the death and injury of over 12,000 people. Of these, over 75% were civilians. Most were committed by IS.

Another 3,000 people have been killed and injured by suicide bombers in Iraq in 2016 alone, as IS strategically use them as part of their offensive and counter offensive efforts.

AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Two forms of violence dominated the Taliban insurgency against the Western presence in Afghanistan. One was the use of victim activated IEDs to target troops and the other was the use of suicide bombings in populated areas to undermine any sense of security. Suicide bombings played no role against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s; it only began to be used as a tactic in 2004, perhaps inspired by the success that such bombings were having in Iraq.

Many of the attacks in Afghanistan were carried out by children; those as young as nine have been intercepted on suicide bomb missions. Often trained at Pakistani madrassas, such minors are particularly vulnerable to indoctrination. “These kids might disappear at 12 and come back at 15 fully militarised and conscious of their own bodies as weapons.”

Pakistan is also highly impacted by suicide bombers, where government forces and minority groups are the targets. Shia communities in particular are targeted and Human Rights Watch have criticised the Pakistani government’s failure to protect them.

GLOBALLY

In 2015, 9,109 civilians were reported killed or injured in suicide attacks around the world - lives shattered in 248 incidents in mosques and markets, checkpoints and restaurants. It was a year where 21 countries saw men and women blow themselves up in a rising tide of violence that seems to be spreading by the day.

In this way, suicide attacks are getting steadily worse. In 2011, when AOAV started monitoring explosive violence, 5,107 civilians were reported killed or injured by suicide bombers. In 2015, that was up 78%.

Admittedly, it was not the worst year for suicide attacks on record – 2007 was. That year, according to the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism, some 20,400 people were killed or injured in suicide attacks. But in 2007 the vast majority of these were in Iraq and Afghanistan and suicide bombs were recorded in just 12 countries.

By contrast, in 2015 places previously untouched by suicide attacks were hit. Chad was targeted for the first time (459 civilians killed or wounded), as was Cameroon (431). And Nigeria’s civilian death and injury rate (which, at 2,062, was the highest from suicide bombings) was 14 times that of 2011.

Last year also showed another trend: that of the suicide vest as terrorists’ explosive weapon of choice. In 2015, according to AOAV’s data, suicide attacks were behind 56% of the 16,180 civilian deaths or injuries from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) worldwide – including car bombs and roadside bombs. In 2011, it was just 38% (5,107 of 13,336).
SIEDs can be deployed by a series of different means, and can be classified as Vehicle-Borne, Air-Born, Water-Borne, Animal-Borne, Person-Borne IEDs, and among these, Proxy-Borne.

**SUICIDE VEHICLE-BORNE IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (SUICIDE VBIEDS)**
Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED) are IEDs which are delivered by, or concealed in, a ground-based vehicle. These can range from compact vehicles to large trucks, and carry the potential of being able to conceal up to several tons of explosives without attracting suspicions. From all suicide missions recorded in English language media by AOAV between 2011 and mid-2016, over 40% of them used suicide VBIED’s as their method of employment. As a result of these attacks, 8,462 people were killed and around 18,000 injured.

This is, perhaps, of little surprise. Suicide VBIEDs can be extremely deadly. On 3 July 2016, the death toll exceeded the 300 victims when an IS suicide bomber detonated a truck in a crowded area in Baghdad. The blast started a substantial fire in the main street, substantially increasing the death toll and damaging surrounding buildings.

**SUICIDE WATER-BORNE IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (SUICIDE WBIEDS)**
Suicide WBIEDs are those SIEDs which are delivered by or concealed in a water-based vehicle, such as a boat, a ship or a submarine. This method of employment has not been frequently used in suicide missions in recent times, but has been used on a few occasions.

WBIEDs can be traced back to World War II, when the Imperial Japanese Navy developed its Kaiten manned torpedoes and Shinyo suicide boats programmes. The Kaiten program consisted of submarine-launched torpedoes commanded by suicide pilots. The Shinyo-class suicide motorboat was also part of the Japanese efforts to succeed in World War II. These were fast boats, driven by one man and could carry up to 300kg of explosives. Detonation would come over impact or could be activated manually by the driver.

In recent years, three cases of WBEIDs suicide missions have been recorded. In October 2000, the USS Cole destroyer was hit by a suicide boat while being re-fueled in Aden’s harbour in Yemen. In 2001, at least five boats thought to belong to Tamil Tiger rebels carried out a suicide operation against a fuel ship in Sri Lanka, sinking the vessel. And in 2009, the Tamil Tiger rebels launched another suicide WBIED attack - this time against two merchant ships carrying humanitarian aid to the North of Sri Lanka. Three boats were used but only one managed to impact one of the ships, causing considerable damage.

**SUICIDE ANIMAL BORNE IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES**
A Suicide Animal Borne Improvised Explosive Device is an IED delivered to a target by means of an animal. The use of animals in (non-suicidal) warfare is not new, and the Romans used flaming squealing pigs to repel Pyrrhus’ elephants. In World War II, the United States developed a bat-bomb program that, though never put into effect, intended to set on fire 40 miles of Japanese houses with incendiary bombs attached to the bats. A pigeon-guided bomb program was developed by the US Military that was also canceled, but the concept was later used by the early electronic guidance systems.

But the use of animals to help deliver a suicide bomb is much rarer. Some suicide attacks have been conducted with the use of animals. In July 2013, a suicide bomber rode a donkey towards a NATO operation in Afghanistan. Three NATO troops were killed and four Afghan soldiers were wounded. The Taliban took responsibility for the attack.

**PERSON-BORNE IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (PBIED)**
A Person Borne Improvised Explosive Device is an IED worn, carried, or housed by a person, either willingly or unwillingly. Besides the historical examples demonstrated above, in more recent years suicide vests have been designed to allow the bomber to move discretely towards their target, making a real-time decision on the time of detonation to maximize the lethality.

According to an FBI report on suicide vests and belt improvised device tactics in the Middle Eastern, African and European Regions of 2015, the most common explosives used include triacetone triperoxide (TATP), trinitrotoluene (TNT), Semtex, C4, Research
Development Formula X (RDX), and pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN). These vests and belts were usually contained in a fragmentation jacket and include steel balls, nails or others to produce shrapnel. However, the diversity of the types of vests observed in each region means you cannot link a particular type of device to a particular terror group.

PBIEDs are the most frequent type of suicide attacks. To avoid detection, some groups have gone as far as to develop Body Cavity Bombs (BCB); some may even consider surgically implanted explosive devices. The latter has not been confirmed as ever having been used, however, they have created massive media speculation and a number of reports have been written on the implications that such devices would have on airport security systems.

There might be some validity to this concern. In 2009, Abdullah al-Asiri, the younger brother of al-Qaeda’s chief bomb maker Ibrahim al-Asiri, evaded two sets of airport security and the Palace security by concealing a bomb in his rectum. The target was Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef, head of Saudi Arabia’s counter terrorism operations. The prince was only to suffer minor injuries. The body of the bomber absorbed most of the impact, making it an assassination failure but a security-defeat success.

A senior fellow at the FBI Academy was to later release a book called “Body Cavity Bombers, The New Martyrs”. It suggested a series of surgically implanted bomb scenarios: vaginal, gastro-intestinal, subcutaneous, and even breast implants. A post-analysis research study, mentioned in the book, states that most current security systems at airports would be evaded by BCB and those which would not, would carry a high level of inconvenience or even health risks for normal passengers.

**COMPLEX ATTACKS**

A complex attack is an attack conducted by an enemy that employs at least two distinct classes of weapon systems (i.e. indirect fire and direct fire, IED and surface to air fire) against one or more targets.

The type of complex attack most predominantly used by the groups examined in this report is during so-called inghimasi operations. An inghimasi operation essentially indicates a suicide mission. The word inghimasi comes from the Arabic word ghamassa, which means to submerge or to plunge oneself into something. IS usually uses this as an offensive tactic during raids.

Inghimasi fighters will charge their enemies using small firearms, whilst trying to penetrate enemy lines before ‘plunging’ into their enemies and detonating suicide vests. As this is occurring, IS usually fires rockets and mortars behind enemy lines, in an attempt to create as much confusion and chaos as possible – a tactic that demonstrates the method’s complexity.

The tactic is surprisingly effective. This is demonstrated by events such as the death of an American soldier, who was killed north of Mosul in May 2016. The infantryman was between 2-3 miles behind the front line when he was killed by an IS fighter.
4. SIEDs AS A STRATEGIC WEAPON

4.1 Collective or individual act?
The vast majority of suicide bombings are orchestrated by a terrorist group with a specific agenda as part of a wider conflict. They are typically not isolated events but take place in the context of what Robert Pape calls a ‘campaign’ of several suicide bombings, or as part of a broader campaign of armed violence against states or other organisations.

In these sorts of suicide bombings, the actual perpetrator (the bomber) often plays relatively little role in the planning, preparation or execution of the operation. They deliver and detonate the explosive, but typically have little part in target acquisition and rely on experts to outfit them with bombs and deliver them to the location.

However, there are also suicide bombings – often taking place far from zones of active conflict – which are a much more individual enterprise. Sometimes these attacks are carried out (or attempted) for ostensibly extremist means or under the banner of a particular group without any actual evidence of that group’s involvement. A good example of this was the foiled 7/7 anniversary plot.19

Sometimes they are simply individual acts, as in the Columbine massacre (whose perpetrators originally planned to blow themselves up using explosives rather than opening fire with small arms).20 These incidents are referred to as ‘lone wolf’ attacks. These incidents do not typically represent a tactical use of suicide bombing as part of a campaign, and from a policy and analytical point of view it is better to approach them separately.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that most are carried out by those part of a larger group, be it religious, nationalist or separatist. However, what motivates these individuals to take part in these groups’ activities remains an important question.

4.2 Strategic Drivers of suicide bombing
The popular approach to suicide bombings typically conceives of them as fundamentally ideological in nature – that their use is the outcome of a ‘death cult’ mentality. Of course, there certainly is an ideological element to suicide bombing. However, the notion of a ‘death cult’ is largely manufactured to justify a tactic that has proven incredibly useful in conflicts of many different kinds.

In financial terms, suicide bombings are cheap to carry out.21 A suicide bombing will only set an organisation back the cost of constructing a relatively standard IED, which can be made from various easily-acquired materials or from repurposed conventional weaponry.22 One ‘average’ figure, which is often cited, is $150.23 This figure seems to be originally sourced from Nasra Hassan’s 2001 New Yorker article on Palestinian suicide bombers.24 In the same article, she notes that at least in Palestine, the most expensive part of any operation is transport to the target. This suggests that in other contexts the operational costs may be much lower.25 If funds are provided to the family of the deceased, like Hezbollah appears to have done, this would increase the costs, but this is no longer particularly commonplace.

In terms of potential casualties, suicide bombings have a far higher average casualty rate. Data from 2011 to 2015 recorded by AOAV’s Explosive Weapons Monitoring Programme shows that suicide bombings caused more than three times as many average deaths and injuries than other IED attacks.26

When disaggregated to distinguish between populated and non-populated areas,27 this trend held equally true.
Suicide attacks on populated areas caused an average of three times the number of deaths and injuries as a non-suicide IED attack.\(^{28}\) This much greater immediate impact of suicide attacks can probably be explained largely by the human element involved in targeting. Suicide bombers are capable of timing and positioning the point of explosion to maximise death, injury and destruction whilst having the cover of blending in to a crowd. For this reason, Mohammed Hafez describes suicide bombers as ‘perhaps the smartest bombs ever invented’.\(^{29}\) A suicide bombing also removes the need for an effective extraction plan to ensure the survival of the operative, reducing operational costs and risks.

### 4.2.1 STRATEGIC USES

The most infamous use of suicide bombers is for large-scale attacks that often target civilians. These attacks can serve a range of strategic purposes, including creating a sense of insecurity for specific groups (‘terrorism’ in its truest sense); coercing governments into granting concessions; drawing attention to a cause; or demonstrating a group’s strength (in response to military defeats for example, as with IS and Boko Haram). These are the main traditional uses of suicide bombing, and a great deal of scholarship has already focused on this kind of suicide mission.

Suicide bombers have also been used for other kinds of missions, including assaults on hard targets and assassination missions against political figures. Increasingly, IS and al-Qaeda linked groups make use of suicide bombings as part of conventional military assaults. IS has made a number of significant innovations in its suicide bombing tactics, including deploying heavily-fortified car bombs to penetrate static defences.\(^ {30}\)

### 4.2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT

It has often been argued that suicide bombings have an additional psychological impact far beyond a comparable IED attack. It has been argued that there is something exceptionally repulsive and alarming about an act of violence in which the perpetrator has no concern for their own life. Likewise, suicide attacks are likely to gain more media attention for a given cause, which makes them ideal as weapons of political terror.\(^ {31}\) Those attacks that inflict the most deaths and injuries, as suicide attacks can be more certain of doing, also increase the likelihood of extensive media coverage.

The fear and terror that the results of these operations cause among the enemies of God is not hidden to anyone. None of them knows when the arrows of death might take him, and they have become unsure of themselves – will the blows come from the front or the back?

*Security Official for al-Baraka Province, speaking in an interview for an-Naba’*

These secondary effects are clearly much more difficult to quantify than the operational advantages of a suicide bombing. Research has shown that, in Israel for example, there may be a correlation between mass media depictions of political violence, including suicide bombings, and the anxiety felt by the population due to this increased awareness.\(^ {32}\) However, Brian Fishman’s study of the effect of Iraqi suicide attacks on popular support for the invasion and occupation of Iraq found no clear correlation between the two.\(^ {33}\) He also found a distinct downward trend in mentions of suicide bombings in American editorials, suggesting that such operations were becoming normalised and losing their newsworthiness.\(^ {34}\)

Nonetheless, research by AOAV has shown that suicide bombings consistently gain more news coverage than other kinds of explosive violence, even if their absolute shock value has receded.\(^ {35}\)

### 4.2.3 A GLOBAL PROBLEM

With the destabilisation of Iraq and Syria and the spread of suicide bombing to new regions, deaths and incident numbers are now back at 2007 levels. Perhaps more worrying, in 2007 the phenomenon was largely confined to Iraq. This allowed the US troop surge along with other policies like the aforementioned Sunni ‘awakening’ (ṣaḥwa), to put a significant dent in the harm done by suicide bombings.\(^ {36}\) Whilst even IS have proven unable to inflict the kind of damage that was normal at the height of the mid-2000s Iraqi insurgency in Iraq itself,
suicide attacks are now much more widespread and are affecting more countries.\textsuperscript{37} And there is currently no reason to assume that the numbers will not continue rising, both in specific regions and worldwide.

Suicide bombings have been the subject of horror, disgust and profound mystification, both within the research community and in the population as a whole. The potential threat of a killer willing to sacrifice their own life is a potent symbol of terror. But even if we were to disregard the psychological impact of terror by this form of violence, suicide bombings are still alarming for two reasons: they cause far more damage than any comparable weapon, and civilians are disproportionately the victims.

According to AOAV's data from 2011-2015, the average suicide bombing kills 34 people. Of these, 26 will be civilians. In 2016 alone, there was 38 civilians casualties per attack. To compare, the figures for non-suicide IEDs – which in all respects other than the activation method are similar to suicide bombs – show that the average IED kills 13 people, ten of which are civilians. Suicide bombing thus more than doubles the expected casualty rate.\textsuperscript{38}

It is clear from these figures that suicide bombing represents a disproportionate threat to civilian populations worldwide, especially since it is often used in ways which violate the principle of discrimination and often is used deliberately against civilians. It would not be hyperbolic to describe it as a global problem.

4.2.4 JIHADIST NETWORKS AND THE SPREAD OF SUICIDE BOMBING

As we have previously noted, suicide bombings can serve as a much cheaper – albeit somewhat restricted – replacement for air power, as well as being an incredibly efficient means of causing huge civilian casualties. This itself is a compelling explanation for the choice to start making use of suicide bombers.

Nonetheless, many insurgent groups have chosen not to adopt, or failed to adopt, the use of suicide bombings. And as we have previously noted, the common element to almost all of the groups that now carry out bombings is their ideological stance – Salafi-Jihadism.

Whilst Salafi-Jihadism certainly provides a strong ideological framework to justify and encourage suicide bombing, ideas are only part of the story. Why do some groups adopt and some not? What factors are likely to discourage the adoption of suicide bombing?

Probably the most important factor in adoption or non-adoption is the connection with international jihadist networks.

Whilst the actual number of Salafi-Jihadists worldwide is quite small, adopting this ideology gives groups access to a worldwide network perhaps analogous to that provided by Communism during the Cold War – although the Salafi-Jihadi network has no one state backer like the USSR. In the 2000s, it was al-Qaeda that formed the centre of this network, acquiring local affiliates through a system that has been compared to franchising. Since 2014, a significant rival has emerged in the form of the IS and its 'provinces' (wilāyāt).

Joining these networks – forming bonds with other organisations – allows the pooling of resources, and significantly increases an organisation's lifespan.\textsuperscript{39} In some cases – as with Chechnya – it may unlock a source of skilled foreign fighters\textsuperscript{40} or potential bombers, as well as other forms of international support and legitimacy in the eyes of other jihadis. In the case of becoming an official IS ‘province’ (making bay’a, the oath of allegiance), it gives groups access to the considerable media resources of that organisation – A’māq (‘Depths’), the IS news agency, publishes news from all parts of the so-called IS.

Adopting the language of martyrdom and techniques shared by other Salafi-Jihadi groups around the world is, of course, part and parcel of a group’s alignment with international jihadi networks. Using suicide bombings is certainly one way of cementing a group’s symbolic relationship with the broader relationship.

At the same time, access to these jihadi networks makes groups much more able and likely to adopt suicide bombing. Analysis by Michael Horowitz has found a clear link between both institutional age and access to external expertise in the decision to adopt suicide bombing as a tactic.\textsuperscript{41}

Horowitz shows that younger organisations – like young companies – find it much easier to adopt new innovations in their way of doing things; suicide bombing is one such innovation. He also suggests that innovations generally diffuse through specific organisational contacts – in this case, groups training alongside each
other. An organisation which is both new and has access to international expertise is much more likely to adopt suicide bombing.

The adoption of suicide bombing, in the vast majority of cases, can be traced through inter-group connections back to Hezbollah, although it is perhaps difficult to imagine now (even Hezbollah and al-Qaeda operatives once trained alongside one another). Likewise, IS emerged from an al-Qaeda affiliate organisation in Iraq and Boko Haram has historically had intimate connections to AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb). The Taliban famously provided sanctuary and assistance to al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan, and were apparently trained by Iraqi jihadists in the use of IEDs and suicide bombings – after which the number of bombings rose dramatically.

As groups become more closely affiliated with international networks, even long-established groups with certain ways of doing things may launch more suicide bombings. The Filipino Abu Sayyaf group recently declared their allegiance to IS – and shortly thereafter a Moroccan bomb-maker and trainer in suicide bombings was killed fighting alongside them in Basilan.

4.2.5 PERSONNEL COSTS
The counterpoint to the low financial costs of launching a suicide bombing is the cost in trained personnel. Suicide bombings, by definition, involve the loss of one or more operatives in the course of any operation. Any operative represents a significant investment of resources in recruitment and training. Suicide bombers are no exception, typically undergoing ideological and operational training prior to their mission.

However, groups have found many ways to minimise the personnel cost of launching suicide missions. Hezbollah, for example, moved away from using experienced operatives in suicide missions. There is even anecdotal evidence of Hezbollah attempting to prevent the (ultimately successful) attempt of a skilled, senior military operative called Salah Ghandour from launching his own suicide mission in 1995. Groups like Boko Haram seem to largely rely on coerced hostages rather than their core membership to carry out suicide bombings.

4.2.6 EFFECT ON SUPPORT BASE
Most organisations rely to a significant degree on a constituency of loyal supporters for finances, recruits and general resources. It is very important for a group’s survival and continued operational capacity that this constituency continues to support them. It is obvious that using suicide bombing may have a serious negative effect on a group’s domestic image. Depending on the nature of the conflict and the targets of suicide bombing, the group may be perceived as ultra-violent or as guilty of murdering huge numbers of civilians, as well as countering moral or ideological views against suicide, which are culturally quite widespread.

In cases where its use will have a serious impact on a group’s domestic image, it is likely that decision-makers will think twice about adopting suicide bombing as a tactic. However, it must be noted that in many cases pre-existing moral ideas about suicide can be overcome through rational argument, as with the cult of the martyr. There are also certain international constituencies in the jihadi world who hold very little aversion to, and may even welcome, ultra-violence and the nihilistic message that it spreads.

There is some evidence that al-Qaeda has recognised some of the risks of suicide bombing to its image. Ayman al-Zawahiri has released a recommendation that they should be restricted in their use and should avoid killing Muslims.

Suicide bombing has manifestly failed to turn the tide decisively in favour of insurgent groups in almost every conflict it has been used in. In the Israel-Palestine context, for example, Brym and Araj pointed out that the use of suicide bombing often incurs huge costs in the form of assassination of leaders, imprisonment of members, freezing of assets and international branding as ‘terrorists’, which can have legal implications for foreign funding for example. The same holds true of alignment with al-Qaeda or IS in the age of the War on Terror.

Benjamin Acosta has noted that though suicide bombings are likely to negatively impact a group’s chances of strategic success, they do increase a group’s long-term survivability.

4.2.7 PROPAGANDA VALUE
Alongside the straightforward operational impact, suicide bombings may also have some specific positive propaganda effect for an organisation, stimulating recruitment, increasing support and, in some instances, improving their public image. This argument was famously made by Mia Bloom for Palestinian suicide bombers.
However, the groups which have made use of suicide bombing have either been largely separated from the general public (the Russian Nihilists, al-Qaeda) or enjoy broad public support for their cause unrelated to their use of suicide bombings (Hezbollah, Palestinian groups).\textsuperscript{53}

Regardless, there is certainly an incentive now with the on-going power struggle between al-Qaeda and IS for both groups to engage in one-upmanship. There was much speculation, for example, that the IS-perpetrated Paris attacks of late 2015 came in response to the al-Qaeda-linked Charlie Hebdo attack of January.\textsuperscript{54} It is possible, in light of this, that the use of suicide bombing acts as a form of proof that one organisation’s followers are more loyal to the cause than another.
The Qur’an, the holy Muslim book, has over 120 verses on military jihad or armed struggle, and on those who die while fighting in such a struggle. It sets out the reasons for when Muslims are required to join military jihad, and regulates how it should be conducted. The Qur’an considers jihad as a religiously mandated struggle, that Muslims must undertake either collectively or individually, to defend Islam or Muslim communities at risk, or those under attack by non-Muslim adversaries.

It should be noted that jihad simply means ‘struggle’, and that the defence the Qur’an demands does not necessarily have a military meaning. Often, the inner struggle, aimed at spiritual improvement, is seen as more important than the ‘outer’ struggle, which may refer to action against other communities. The outer struggle is often the one referenced by jihadi groups, who frame their attacks on other faith communities as a defence, or a struggle, for Islam. The word jihad shall for the most part throughout this report for simplicity refer to its military sense.

However, the Qur’an does not necessarily call for military action to be taken. Two specific verses show that the Qur’an does not call on Muslims to fight non-believers (non-Muslims) merely on the basis of their beliefs. Fighting is only called upon if the non-believers have initiated aggression and actively persecuted Muslims. Other verses call on believers (Muslims) to fight their adversary, but again only if the adversary has initiated the fighting against the believers. In other words, Muslims are encouraged to fight, but only in self-defence.

What many jihadi groups do with these calls is that they occasionally manipulate the meaning of ‘aggression’, giving it a rather wide definition. Nevertheless, when violence is being carried out against Muslims, although not necessarily motivated by sectarianism, Qur’anic verses like those mentioned above are often invoked by jihadis.

Furthermore, the Qur’an calls for fighting to stop as soon as the enemy asks for peace, as Muslims are then encouraged to also work towards peace. Believers are also asked to immediately cease fighting as soon as their enemies put down their arms.

As with many religious texts, however, there remains much debate and contradictory interpretation. Jurists have, for instance, argued that the following verse appears to be contradicting at least 124 other verses that favours a less aggressive approach towards non-believers:

“…fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem [of war]; But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise zakat, then open the way for them: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

Some have disagreed on the interpretation of this verse. Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah has noted the inconsistency of the verse with many other verses relating to the conduct of war and therefore concluded that the verse in question was a consequent to a specific context.

The Qur’an promises special rewards for those who die while fighting in a military jihad: martyrdom (shahada). The Qur’an states that those who take part in military jihad and are killed in the process, and consequently die fighting God’s cause, will be granted a special status in paradise and thus become a martyr (shaheed).

Jihadi groups may thus, through some manipulation of texts and wilful disregard for the majority of the Qur’an, present their actions as religiously sanctioned.

However, a more significant theological problem arises on the issue of suicide. Almost all Islamic authorities consider the deliberate killing of one-self to be prohibited (ḥarām), a prohibition which has a well-established textual basis. Most religious authorities consider suicide bombing to be – self-evidently – a form of suicide: “As for the suicide bomber who launches an operation with explosives, ensuring his own death by placing explosives on himself or the like, then he comes under what the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said:…”

“He who kills himself with something in the worldly life, will be tortured with it on judgement day.” There does not seem to be a Qur’anic verse that explicitly sanctions ‘martyrdom’ operations.
The Qur’an is not the only authoritative source in Islam. In addition to relying on the Qur’an, Islamic clerics rely on the **hadith**, a term referring to various narratives either quoting Prophet Muhammad on a wide-range of life issues, or describing his actions and habits. Hadith is secondary to the Qur’an and is used by top clerics in developing **fiqh** (Islamic jurisprudence).

While there are no doubts over the authenticity of the Qur’an, some clerics – even from the same sects and schools of thought – interpret certain verses differently. The **hadith**, however, is not as reliable: scholars agree that forgery of **hadith** took place on a massive scale, particularly following the deaths of those able to personally attest to the words and deeds of the Prophet.64 Corruption of the **hadith** literature was also a result of the procedure of transmitting according to the sense (meaning) rather than verbatim, as well as the result of political conflicts and sectarian prejudices.65 Such corruption explains, to some degree, why Islamic jurists disagree over aspects relating to military jihad – they disagree over the credibility of the sources and its interpretation.

A point which has been consistently raised, and disputed, is the exact role religion plays in suicide bombing. In popular culture, suicide bombing is by now inextricably associated with radical forms of Islamism. Much academic work has attempted to demonstrate – usually through dubious applications of probability – that there is no ideological angle to what is fundamentally a strategic choice. This inability of many political scientists to see that a phenomenon can have both strategic and ideological elements at the same time has proven something of a barrier to an effective analysis of suicide bombing.

Of course, a number of non-Islamist groups – including ones with aggressively secularist ideologies – have made use of suicide bombing. At the same time, most Islamist political movements – even those engaged in armed struggle – have made little or no use of suicide bombing.

Nonetheless, a majority of the groups currently using suicide bombing base their attacks in a violent interpretation of Islam. Suicide attacks are therefore a new concept of ‘martyrdom’ that challenges Islam’s prohibition of the intentional killing of oneself.

### 5.1 The Sunni perspective on ‘martyrdom operations’

Although there are Shia groups that carry out suicide bombings, with Shia clerics arguably creating the modern concept of martyrdom and groups like Hezbollah pioneering the practice, the groups examined in this report exclusively Sunni Muslim. In fact, Salafist-Jihadism is an inherently Sunni strand of Islam, and all of the major jihadi organisations, including IS, Boko Haram, the Taliban, Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Shabaab, and al-Qaeda are despite distinct ideological differences Sunni organisations. Therefore, the report shall only discuss the Sunni perspective on suicide bombings.

In fact, the foundations of the Sunni concept of martyrdom lie within Shia Islam. Fathi al-Shaqaqi, a former Muslim Brotherhood member, wrote in his book about Ayatollah Khomeini66 on the significance of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 as a model for changing a corrupt order and establishing an Islamic order in its place67 and explored Shia theology, said to be a vital inspirational factor behind the revolution, for rulings that encouraged rebellion against tyranny since he could not find such injunctions in Sunni theology.68 Two years later, in 1981, he founded **Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami fi Falasteen**, known internationally as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which carried out its first suicide bombing in 1993.69

The attack in the West Bank was followed by a wave of suicide bombings in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel carried out by the Islamic Jihad and **Harakat al-Moqawama al-Islamiya**, better known as Hamas. While suicide attacks in Lebanon were targeting the Israeli military, those in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel chose both military and civilian targets.

Fathi al-Shaqaqi justified suicide and the killing of Israeli civilians by describing the suicide bomber as being “doomed to death” by the powers of colonialism and imperialism, so instead he chooses “the most beautiful death” by committing an attack in defence of his homeland.70

Qatar-based cleric Yousef al-Qaradawi, who is considered the guide on religious matters for the Muslim Brotherhood, sanctioned suicide attacks in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel. In a well-known fatwa in March 2002, al-Qardawi said women too could carry out suicide bombings without having to take permission from her husband to achieve the interest of the nation;71
5.1.1 SALAFI-JIHADISM

Following the US-led invasion of Iraq, the overwhelming majority of suicide attacks have been blamed on Salafi-Jihadi groups. Most of the groups currently making broad use of suicide bombing belong to this very specific, yet very diverse, ideological trend of Islamism. No new nationalist group has adopted suicide bombing in more than a decade; but suicide bombings carried out by newly formed Salafi-Jihadi groups has happened rather often in recent years.

Salafi-Jihadism has become the established term in English language analysis for a broad church of particularly radical Islamist ideologies associated in particular with groups stemming from al-Qaeda. Different Salafi-Jihadi thinkers and organisations differ considerably on many issues, both theologically and practically. However, they are united by a strong focus on the importance of military struggle (jihād), combined with an often uncompromising and literalist reading of scripture and religious law (the sharī'a). Salafi-Jihadism is most prominent in areas where Islamist groups are engaged in armed struggle against a government.

The terminological confusion surrounding groups meeting these characteristics – and other Islamist political movements – is often impenetrable and a detailed exploration of the history and ideological stances of different individuals is beyond the scope of this report.

In short, ‘Salafist’ (salafī in Arabic) refers to religiously strict reform movements characterised by imitation of the salaf, the first, pious generation of Muslims contemporary with the Prophet. Salafists are both engaged in political activity and politically unengaged. Those unengaged are so in part because of the prominence of the ultraconservative but often politically quietist Wahhabist strand of Salafism sponsored by Saudi Arabia, which in its institutional form has generally avoided engagement with – or challenge to – the Saudi political order.

However, Salafist and Wahhabist legal positions are regularly adopted by militant groups of various kinds who adopt a more revolutionary outlook, seeking to establish ‘Islamic’ political orders, either locally or globally. The Islamic State (IS), for example, regularly disseminates books on jurisprudence by Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792) – whose ideas form the basis of official Saudi state ideology.

Ideologues of this kind generally stress the concept of both defensive and offensive war as a religious obligation and a key part of being a good Muslim. Traditionally, jihad was typically treated as a duty of the whole community (fard kifaya) which it is sufficient for some members of the community to engage in as much as is necessary, usually for defensive purposes. Many jihadist thinkers, however, consider it to be an individual religious duty (fard ‘ayn) – elevating it to an importance similar to praying or going on pilgrimage.

For many Salafi-Jihadis, international jihad mirrors the experience of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet Muhammad was forced from his native Mecca by his pagan countrymen into exile (or hijra, ‘migration’) in Medina. There, he and his fellow migrants (muhājirūn), having abandoned their families and property for the cause of Islam, built an ideal Islamic community with the help of the native Medinan Anṣār (‘supporters’). Finally, after building themselves into a strong religious community in exile, the early Muslims returned to Mecca and defeated the pagans.

The replication of this process – exile, spiritual purification and a return to military victory – is a key element in Salafi-Jihadist imagery. IS makes use of traditional Arab poetry, very classical and literary language and even medieval geographical terms, as well as referring to their local supporters as Anṣār and foreign fighters as Muhājirūn.

5.1.2 MARTYRDOM AND SUICIDE BOMBINGS IN SALAFI-JIHADISM

Unsurprisingly, Salafi-Jihadi thought places bravery in warfare in a very central ideological position. The willingness to fight and die in the service of God (fī sabīlillāh) is valorised. Death in battle is considered as martyrdom, and those who die in this manner as martyrs.

Although this may seem like the perfect ideological grounding for the use of suicide bombings, Salafi-Jihadists still face a significant barrier in the generalised Islamic prohibition on suicide. Some non-Muslim analysts have attempted to challenge the existence of this prohibition, but in doing so they generally miss the point, ignoring both the views of real Muslims and the huge body of legal opinions on this subject.

As has been demonstrated above, there is virtually no Islamic authority or text that sanctions suicide bombings. However, ideological constraints can often be rationalised away, as Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenza...
point out in their discussion of factors discouraging the adoption of suicide bombing. For Salafi-Jihadist thinkers, the suicide bomber is the equivalent of the medieval knight who throws himself valiantly into the enemy’s lines, knowing he is very unlikely to survive (known as al-inghimās fi ‘ṣ-saff, ‘plunging into the line’); an example of martial valour, not of killing yourself. The term ‘suicide bombing’ is replaced with the euphemism ‘martyrdom operation’ (Arabic ‘amaliyya istishhādiyya), and a suicide bomber is known as an istishhādi (martyr).

This rationalisation is certainly not uncontroversial. The prolific writer Abdurrahman Mahdi – a leading conservative figure – has laid out a long list of decisive and arguably Salafist arguments for the impermissibility of suicide bombing. And even if they do not criticise it explicitly, many groups that might be described as Salafi-Jihadist have not (yet) made use of it.

Regardless of the debate within the Salafi-Jihadist movement, the two major umbrella organisations within the jihadi world – IS and al-Qaeda – not only embrace suicide bombing but have made it increasingly characteristic of their tactics and an integral part of their language. They not only rationalise overlooking the religious prohibition on suicide (and other related religious prohibitions to do with killing innocents), but they also transform suicide bombing into a religious act – providing an ideological basis for a cult of martyrdom.

5.1.3 CREATING THE CULT OF MARTYRDOM

An important part of encouraging people to both fight for and – more pertinently – blow themselves up for an organisation’s political goals, is to convince people that this is a noble action to participate in. This has, quite understandably, been a central concern of the propaganda departments of organisations seeking to recruit bombers since the Hezbollah era.

The techniques used to create the ‘cult of the martyr’ show considerable similarities between groups, particularly those with Islamist tendencies which mobilise Islamic imagery and language. This category includes not only Salafi-Jihadists groups but also more traditional groups belonging to the older ‘nationalist’ grouping, like Hezbollah and Palestinian resistance organisations.

The spiritual benefits of martyrdom – rewards in heaven and the remission of sins, among others – are constantly stressed in propaganda materials. These rewards are often erroneously associated by Western commentators with suicide bombing alone. These are, in fact, in the typical reading the rewards of anyone who dies whilst fighting for God. There is no reason to think, of course, that this narrower understanding is not shared (and even cynically encouraged) by recruiters to inspire the suicide bomber.

In nationalist groups, who depended largely on a base of local support, families were often richly compensated in the event that their child volunteered for a suicide bombing. Organisations like Hezbollah put significant amounts of resources into the glorification of suicide bombers, making their names and martyrdom videos public alongside eulogies lauding the selfless sacrifices of the bomber. In these cases personal glory and material gain – if not for the individual but for their family – were obvious additional incentives.

As far as we know, IS does not provide particular financial incentives for bombers. Nor, curiously, does it dedicate much time or resources to promulgating eulogies or martyrdom videos. This is not to say that martyrdom videos have not been produced – some have been published by IS, and many more may have been filmed but not yet broadcast.
But generally speaking the most an IS bomber can hope for is a brief news bulletin about the attack and perhaps a picture. When this information is published, real names are almost never given – instead, a *nom de guerre* is used consisting of a *kunya* (taking the form *abū* ‘father of’ and a typically meaningless name) and a *nisba* (referring to a country or sometimes a region). In the absence of further information, all that we can usually work out from this is a nationality.

Over a month of monitoring IS' own reports of suicide bombings and *inghimāsī* operations – in which as many as 82 different suicide bombings were reported – only 51 were named (not by real name, of course). Only 42 had photographs of them published, and only one biography was disseminated.

Judging from this, and contrary to previous opinion, it appears that renown is not important for many bombers. Nonetheless, IS does dedicate a lot of effort towards glorifying the idea of the suicide bombing – if not individual bombers. In August 2015, for example, IS' propaganda department released a short pamphlet entitled “Happiness in Achieving Martyrdom”. The pamphlet collects together various religious evidence for the benefits of becoming a martyr to, according to the pamphlet, motivate “true believers to choose for themselves the best end and the best death.”

Likewise, the department responsible for producing *nashīds* (propaganda songs) regularly puts out songs glorifying martyrdom. One representative *nashīd* goes as follows:

*O Bou Bakr, o Baghdadi*
*Terror of the enemy*
*Heaven's houris are calling me*
*Sign me up as an istishhādī*

---

5.2 Spinning suicide: a look at IS media operations

When looking at the role of traditional and social media on suicide bombing campaigns, disaggregating their effect from the wider use of these mediums can be very difficult. Media operations are employed for a number of reasons: to legitimise the existence and actions of organisations; to build a political base; for training purposes; to recruit operatives; to raise funds; to network with like-minded groups; and, to enable militant-to-peer production. Today, effective media operations serve just as important a purpose as theological endeavours in terms of creating the cult of the suicide bomber.

The importance of these mediums as a driver for suicide bombing is still hotly debated. In the late-2000s, studies suggested that the overwhelming majority of individuals in the Middle East and North Africa were radicalised and recruited via interpersonal physical connections such as friends, family member or religious institutions. At this point the Internet was not widely available in many areas where these foreign fighters were recruited. However, this should not be taken to mean that traditional and social media played no role in their radicalisation.

Further, internet permeation in the Middle East and North Africa has almost doubled in the last five years. Internet usage stands between average and above average in comparison to the rest of the world. Furthermore, uptake of social media applications like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube has swept across the region. The power to connect hundreds of millions of people through the use of smart phones and other internet-capable devices enables the spread of virtual messages and images through online networks.
In the last five to ten years IS, both in its current form and as al-Qaeda in Iraq, has proved successful in delivering its message to greater numbers of people than any jihadi organisation before it. On average, the organisation is thought to release 38 new items per day, including full-length documentaries, photo essays, audio clips and pamphlets, in a range of languages. Most of this content is independently produced by IS members and supporters. However, the group also runs a series of decentralised media offices. These are staffed by camera operators and editors producing local content in each of its wilayats (‘provinces’).

Despite its notoriety, the ultra-violence for which the group is famous, represents only a fraction of its media output. More common are portrayals of public works projects, civil society events and economic development. For example, Dabiq issue 9 includes a glossy four-page spread on healthcare in the caliphate. Yet, in terms of view count, military operations remain its most popular content with consumers. A large part of this media success is due to improved production values and gripping storytelling.

The group’s media wing, al-Furqan, has proved very creative in its use of modern filmmaking techniques. It now spends far more time filming individual operations, using multiple cameras to record scenes from different angles. It has attached GoPro cameras to AK-47s and sniper rifles to give viewers a video game like first-person view on the action. It has even started using drones to record a birds-eye view of larger operations.

IS’ most successful media product to date has been the Salil as-Sawarim (The Clanging of Swords Series). Released in four parts, the series charts a dramatic transformation in the quality and content of jihadi propaganda. Earlier parts include fairly typical extracts from religious lectures combined with unevenly filmed guerrilla-style combat scenes. Later parts shift to a narrative form, following specific operations in some detail. The final part of the series in 2014 proved incredibly successful, racking up millions of views on video-sharing platforms in a short span of time. It also created vast ripples of excitement amongst IS followers online and others vulnerable to its message.

Effective storytelling has proved integral to IS’ attempts to radicalise its audiences but the use of social media also represents a key part. After 9/11, messaging boards became the preferred social networking tool for jihadists but their ability for mass engagement was limited. Newer social media websites have proved far more effective.

IS has maximised its reach by using multiple platforms – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, Telegram, Surespot, JustPaste.it, Quitter, Friendica and Diaspora. However, Twitter remains the favourite for jihadi organisations. On these platforms, low barriers for entry allow individuals to start making connections with hardened terrorists with relative ease. The Taliban, al-Shabaab, the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham and countless members of each of these organisations have all operated Twitter accounts. Many have racked up tens of thousands of followers and allowed groups, followers and members to brag about victories, harass their enemies and rally supporters from their respective regions and globally.

Of all of these groups, the followers of IS have been most effective in their use of Twitter. By repeatedly using specific tactics such as mass re-tweeting, linked hashtags and tailor made apps, the mujtahidun, as IS refers to them, can massively boost the organisation’s reach and exposure online. During the offensive on Mosul in 2014, mujtahidun succeeded in generating 40,000 tweets in a single day. Partially as a result of these techniques, IS has been able to garner a massive following on Twitter. A research study by J. M. Berger estimated that at least 45,000 pro-IS accounts were online between September and November of 2014.

It is difficult to empirically determine the effect that traditional and social media have had on support for suicide bombing campaigns independent of general support for the organisations themselves. The Centre on Religion and Geopolitics’ recent report analysing a cross section of 114 propaganda sources demonstrates the extent to which particular ideological themes are employed, and to a lesser degree how they are used to justify particular strategies and actions like suicide bombing. Conducted between 2013 and 2015, the study focused on IS, Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It found that the ideological values that formed the basis for these groups’ justifications for their actions are present in 80% of the propaganda sources with Islamic creedal values deployed in 62% of sources, honour and solidarity with Muslims in 68% and explicit references to the end of days in 42%.
Most importantly, when describing honour and solidarity with the ummah, the value of martyrdom was repeatedly relied on, appearing explicitly in 32% of the sources and implicitly in 68%.63 The central placement of honour, both on an individual and communal level, in these sources was often linked with how members of these groups were expected to conduct themselves as mujahideen. The sources suggest martyrdom was considered the ultimate expression of honourable conduct. For example, part of a statement by the now deceased IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani discussing martyrdom reads, “IS has known the path of honour, the path of our Prophet”. This connection between honourable conduct and martyrdom was also referenced in an AQAP Inspire article: “When Muslims return to their religion, they live in peace, security, honour and glory. And this will not be achieved except by those missiles: sacrifice, generosity, endeavour and jihad”.

Interestingly, IS referenced honour in 48% of the sources selected, almost 20% more than Jabhat al-Nusra or AQAP. This would appear to be in keeping with IS’ greater use of suicide bombing as part of its operations.64

AOAV research on IS’ Dabiq magazine suggests a more straightforward glorification of suicide bombing and bombers. Produced by al-Hayat Media Centre, the magazine is released in multiple languages with a focus on attracting foreign fighters. Since September 2015, the magazine has included a section on selected military operations divided by provinces and country.

The research shows that even for an organisation engaged in traditional military operations, IS still places a large premium on suicide bombing and celebrates its bombers above most other fighters. Of the 137 operations mentioned, 86 were traditional attacks – assaults, large-scale offensives and ambushes – 32 were suicide bombings and 19 were complex attacks. Interestingly, IS fighters and commanders are never individually described or named in any of Dabiq’s operation review sections. In contrast, 98 suicide bombers are individually mentioned with 47 identified by name. The actions of these istishhadi are also almost always described. Their attacks were typically lionised, often referencing the destruction caused, and in a tone that implies the bravery and devoutness of the bomber. After each suicide bombing is described it is always followed by pleas for Allah to accept the bomber amongst the shuhada.

The use of social networking apps like Twitter has also allowed for a partial transformation in the way that recruitment can take place. However, disaggregating recruitment of suicide bombers from other types of foreign fighters at this early stage in an individual’s radicalisation process is difficult.

Traditionally, jihadi recruiters did most of their work face-to-face, travelling between different cities to gather potential recruits. In Syria, a new dynamic has emerged. Utilising social media, fighters can now recruit new members without leaving the front lines. This is process that Shaarik Zafar, of the US National Counterterrorism Center, calls peer-to-peer recruiting.65 For self-starting jihadis, Twitter allows a means of connecting with actual fighters to get advice on how to join the jihad. Equally, for recruiters the following function on the website allowed them to identify and contact potential targets. This has in no way replaced the old brick-and-mortar system of recruitment but it does allow for a greater number of an organisation’s members to take part in the relationship building necessary for recruitment, without undermining the groups other operational capabilities. Evidence of these recruiting networks could be found in the cases of Douglas McAuthur McCain, an IS fighter killed in 2014, who created multiple Twitter accounts that followed and were followed by said networks, and Nicholas Teausant, arrested in 2014 for attempting to join IS.

5.3 Does the cult work? The wills of suicide bombers

Information on Arab suicide bombers is very limited and can primarily be gathered from wills that some of them film before they carry out their attacks, as well as from propaganda material made by the armed group to which they belong. AOAV has analysed 20 video-recorded wills of suicide bombers. 12 of these committed their attacks in Syria, seven in Iraq, one in Yemen, and one in Libya.

When explaining why they had decided to carry out a suicide bombing, the three most commonly found reasons among the 20 suicide bombers were religious fulfilment, a desire to exert revenge or punish enemies for past armed aggression or because their religious beliefs, as well as a call for jihadi mobilisation.

It is very important to recognise that video-recorded wills are in no way an entirely reliable source in terms of understanding individual motivations behind suicide bombings. Given the obvious similarity in many of these wills, it is natural to suspect that they do not fully reflect the reasons and motivations for each individual’s attack.
These messages almost always include slogan-like statements praising God; condemning disbelievers; assertions that the bomber is blessed to be able to die for Islam; that the bomber is committing this act to end the humiliation of Muslims; and, that this attack will eventually lead to the redress of relatively abstract grievances of the umma. Rather, it would not be overstated to assume that such messages are primarily meant to perpetuate the cult of the suicide bomber. In other words, wills may explain the reasons behind the act itself, but probably does not fully explain the decision to go through with it.

That being said, we should not disregard such messages completely. What these wills do provide an insight to is the rhetoric used to create the cult of the suicide bomber, whether that rhetoric is individually shaped or sanctioned by jihadi groups. Therefore, they deserve our attention. Furthermore, given the explicit religious references and justifications for the attacks, this highlights how groups sacralise their mass violence and elevate suicide bombers to hero status.

The findings, briefly presented below and presented in full in the appendix, show that such wills very much perpetuate the cult of the suicide bomber through attaching the act of martyrdom to grandiose statements of defending Islam, avenging historical injustices, and righteousness.

### 5.3.1 RELIGIOUS FULFILMENT

The most common reasons mentioned by suicide bombers in their filmed wills concern religious fulfilment, which was expressed by 18 of the 20 suicide bombers. Two specific reasons were frequently mentioned: rewards in heaven and proximity to God, as well as bringing victory to God and establishing the Islamic sharia.

#### Afterlife rewards: closer to God and paradise

Out of the 18 suicide bombers who mentioned religious fulfilment as a reason for carrying out their attacks, 11 spoke about being rewarded in paradise and being closer to God as a desired result of their operation. The sentences and words suicide bombers used on the rewards in the afterlife were told in a matter-of-fact manner without any apparent doubt that they could be wrong or had any uncertainties of what would happen after their death.

Some cited the specific rewards they expected in heaven, such as Omar al-Jazrawi, a Jund al-Aqsa-affiliated bomber who carried out his attack in Hama, Syria in August 2015. Al-Jazrawi cited suicide bombing as “the path to the houriyyas” (vigin women believed to become the companions of the martyr in paradise). An IS suicide bomber, Abu Talha al-Tunisi, who carried out his attack in Benghazi, Libya in March 2015, recited a verse of Qur’an that refers to martyrs as being alive with Allah. Similarly, others saw suicide bombing as the best way to meet God himself.

However, out of the 11 suicide bombers who spoke about the afterlife rewards, only one suicide bomber considered that as the sole motivation for his decision to carry out a suicide attack. Abu Omar al-Shami, who carried out his attack for IS in the Iraqi city of Ramadi in July 2016 said in his will: “This deed is only for Allah. It does not have any goal for reputation or for nationalism. My deed is only for the Glorified and Exalted so that he would say to me, ‘I approve of you.’"

#### Bring victory to God and establishing sharia

Out of the 18 suicide bombers who mentioned religious fulfilment as a motivation to carry out the attacks, eight said they wanted to bring victory to God and to establish sharia. The language used by suicide bombers in their video-recorded wills stuck to a few slogans. They included: ‘I only fight to bring victory for this religion. If I sit back, who will bring victory to Islam?’

### 5.3.2 RETALIATION AND PUNISHMENT

14 out of the 20 suicide bombers analysed for this report mentioned revenge and/or punishment in their wills. These were desired for two different reasons. One was to pay back for the crimes committed by enemies against fellow Sunni Muslims. The other was meant to punish the enemy for their religious beliefs, likely a result of the militarisation of religious identity that jihadi groups employ. Whilst the language used by suicide bombers when speaking about religious fulfilment were quite similar, the way suicide bombers expressed their desire for revenge varied noticeably.

#### Revenge against the Syrian regime

Eight bombers said they wanted to avenge the alleged crimes committed by their enemy. In turn, seven claimed to avenge the crimes committed in Syria by President
Bashar al-Assad’s government. For example, Abu Mus’ab al-Jazrawi said in his will: “How many children have died and women widowed while the traitors and world leaders are watching and listening and have not done a thing.” Similar sentiments were expressed by others, who referred to the Syrian regime and its allies as traitors and tyrants.

Punishment for the enemy’s religious beliefs
12 of the 14 used a range of derogatory terms to describe their enemies’ religious beliefs, even whilst targeting the Syrian regime. Bashar al-Assad is an Alawite, an offshoot of Shia Islam, and although his supporters include people from all of Syria’s sects, his regime has throughout the war come to be seen by jihadi groups as Shia apostates hostile to Sunni Islam. In jihadi vernacular, the term rawafidh, meaning ‘rejectionist’ and a derogatory word for Shia, is often used to describe the Syrian regime and army. The bombers thus saw the target as an enemy not only for representing the regime, but also because of their enemies’ religious beliefs. Many expressed hatred for Syrian soldiers or regime-loyalists because of their religion. Some compared them to animals and many used other derogatory terms.

For example, Abu Dujanah al-Shami, a Jabhat al-Nusra-affiliated bomber who carried out his attack in al-Mallah in Aleppo in July 2016, said in his will: “My message to the rawafidh in the al-Mallah area, hear what will please you: by Allah, we have prepared explosive cars for you to destroy your thrones. By Allah, we will rub your noses in the soil and rip you to pieces.”

Revenge on Sunnis perceived as traitors or apostates
Only one suicide bomber of those analysed carried out an attack against fellow Sunni Muslims. According to a documentary produced by IS, The Seekers of Life, Abu al-Farouq al-Shami targeted fellow Sunni Muslims in armed groups labelled by IS as Sahawat al-Radda in Syria to liken them to the Sunni tribal alliance, Sahwa, that evicted al-Qaeda from the Anbar province in Iraq in 2007.

In the documentary, Abu al-Farouq, who was disabled, said:

“We have brothers who are thirsty for your blood and they are in same situation as me; they are disabled but eager to meet you, enemies of Allah, with explosive cars.”

The words the suicide bomber used, enemy of Allah, usually refers to “infidels” and is most predominantly used against Shia Muslims, Christians, and Jews, which highlights the hostility of IS against other Sunni Islamist groups in Syria.

5.3.3 CALL TO ARMS AND ESTABLISHMENT AND EXPANSION OF AN ISLAMIC STATE
15 bombers spoke about military and recruitment reasons, which included a call on others to join the jihad and carry out suicide attacks and a call on various Islamic groups to unite. IS suicide bombers mentioned the expansion of IS as one of their reasons.

Calls to arms
13 out of the 15 suicide bombers used their wills to prompt recruitment of others for suicide attacks. They used several methods of persuasion, often using religious reasoning backed up by Qur’anic verses and hadiths on jihad. They told of deserts in the afterlife for admonishing those who had not joined jihad, and promoted suicide attacks to be the only effective way to achieve justice. Abu Foz al-Ansari, a Jabhat al-Nusra suicide bomber who carried out his attack in al-Yarmouk in Syria in August 2013, said in his will:

“To the sons of the nations who are absent from jihad and from bringing victory to the religion, fear Allah and help your sisters who are being raped. Fear Allah for the blood that is spilled day and night in the land al-Sham. Did you forget what Allah the Almighty has said: ‘If you do not go forth He shall punish you with a painful punishment and will replace you with another people.’”

Many others also used this form of coercive and scare-mongering form of creating solidarity with fellow Sunni Muslims.

Calling on jihadis to unite
Five bombers urged jihadis from various groups to unite in their war against their common enemy. Abu al-Rawi al-Sairi, an IS suicide bomber who carried out his suicide attack in Yemen in December 2015, encouraged jihadis from different groups in Syria to unite and fight their common enemy, most likely referring to the Assad regime and its allies. He called for an end to infighting, which he saw as useful to their enemies. Several other wills expressed similar sentiments.
Perhaps surprisingly, carrying out suicide attacks in certain circumstances is not illegal per se. They can, and have been, used legitimately as weapons attacking military targets. The Japanese kamikaze pilots who turned their planes into flying bombs to target American military ships were using legitimate means to attack legitimate targets under international humanitarian law (IHL). However, the ways in which suicide attacks are perpetrated today are usually entirely contrary to the rules and regulations of IHL and human rights law.

It should be noted that IHL governs the conduct of hostilities, and though whether the fact that a conflict is international or non-international in nature changes the exact responsibilities of the parties involved, some common protections exist, as will be shown below. Human rights law, on the other hand, applies universally, regardless of whether a country is experiencing armed conflict.

As this report demonstrates, suicide bombings predominantly target civilians or civilian objects. Even when they do target military targets, such as army patrols, civilians are often disproportionally those who feel the biggest impacts of the blast. Furthermore, non-state armed actors are increasingly using children and the mentally impaired as suicide bombers, something that is entirely contrary to international humanitarian law and human rights law.

What international law says about SIEDs
Internationally, no legal rule exists which states that suicide attacks are illegal. Theoretically a suicide attack can meet all the requirements needed for it to remain legal under international humanitarian law. Suicide attacks, for instance, would be considered legal if that use of force distinguished between civilians and combatants, and in so doing targeted only combatants. As such they can, theoretically, be proportionate. However, the vast majority of suicide bombings are neither proportional nor targeted at combatants – and as such they violate numerous international rules.

One of the fundamental principles of IHL is the prohibition of the targeting of civilians, as set out both the Geneva Conventions. Targeting civilians as opposed to military targets is therefore entirely prohibited within IHL. Yet many suicide attacks in recent years have targeted civilians in locations that are undeniably civilian in nature.

Although it is theoretically possible that suicide attackers can target only military personnel or objects, in practice this is rarely the case. Knowingly carrying out indiscriminate attacks can – as such – constitute a war crime, as per the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Suicide attacks often also breach the obligation that attacks need be proportionate, as they cause disproportionate loss to civilian life. Whilst it is difficult to demonstrate on a case by case basis that an attack has failed to meet these fundamental tenets of IHL, the pattern of evidence over recent years suggests that it is rare for a suicide attack to not cause high levels of civilian harm.

Moreover, contrary to the prohibitions set out in Article 3 of the Geneva Convention, suicide bombers often target civilians based on their religion. This has been particularly evident with the rise of IS, which has purposely targeted gatherings of Shia Muslims and other religious groups in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Perfidy, or pretending to be a civilian, in order to kill or wound is also unlawful under IHL, as stated by Article 37 of the Geneva Convention. This clearly applies to suicide bombings, as suicide bombers nearly always pretend to be civilian in order to perpetrate attacks, and in so doing commit perfidy.

Under the principle of command responsibility, those ordering the commission of war crimes or crimes against humanity can also be held criminally responsible for their commission. Suicide bombs, in certain situations, could be held to be both war crimes and crimes against humanity. Where there is a superior-subordinate relationship where superior has ‘effective control’ over the subordinate, those ordering suicide bombers could be held to be individually criminally responsible for their commission.

The challenges of prosecution
Although laws exist prohibiting the methods and means in which suicide attacks are often carried out, there is a challenge that exists in the application of the law. Clearly...
there can be no recourse to justice against the bomber when an attack is successfully carried out. There are examples of those who have failed to carry out a suicide bombing being successfully prosecuted domestically, such as Richard Reid (‘the shoe bomber’) and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (‘the underwear bomber’), but such examples are the exception. And while individuals have been arrested for allegedly masterminding and orchestrating suicide attacks in countries including Israel and Pakistan, no prosecutions have taken place at the international level under the remit of IHL.
7. DRIVERS OF SIEDs

In order to understand individual motivations behind suicide attacks, one needs to look past the religious language with which such attacks are justified. That is not to say that religion is irrelevant in the equation, but that it is usually the component that enters an individuals’ radicalisation process last. In other words, many suicide bombers possess, even without the religious component, many of the characteristics which enable them to commit an act that will take their own life and others. Religion, and the martyrdom it promises, is usually what gives them purpose and finally pushes them towards the decision.

That does in no way mean that a person is born a terrorist or a suicide bomber. Nevertheless, there are several drivers in individuals’ everyday lives which may push them to commit a suicide attack. In most cases, one single reason, grievance, or driver is not enough. Rather, they usually act in confluence. In this section, we have identified three prominent drivers: social, economic and psychological.

7.1 Social drivers of suicide bombing

‘Social’ is a very broad term, and social drivers are in many cases directly linked to economic factors. Nonetheless, there are often community or relationship factors which compel the rise of suicide bombing. These include personal connections to radical environment, communal support for radical ideas, consequences of living through conflict, as well as direct coercion.

7.1.1 COMMUNAL SUPPORT AND TRADITIONS OF RESISTANCE

Communal support obviously plays a key role in both legitimising and sustaining suicide bombing campaigns and convincing individuals to undertake attacks. As discussed above, traditional and social media are one method by which organisations seek this support. However, while this helps to create a cult of martyrdom, it does not alone explain support for suicide bombings. Communal support for suicide bombing is always going to be context specific to the country and campaign in question. Pew Global Attitudes Studies suggest that the belief that suicide bombing is often or sometimes justified has generally diminished in Muslim countries over the last decade.

Equally, concerns about Islamic extremism in Muslim countries rose between 2013 and 2014. Nevertheless, significant minorities of Muslims in these countries do
hold the view that suicide bombing can be justified. In the last decade large numbers of foreign fighters have journeyed to Iraq and Afghanistan to join the jihad, but Syria has witnessed an unprecedented influx of these individuals in recent years. The marketing concept of less-is-more is useful for understanding the importance of this dynamic. The revolution in communications technology means that local support is no longer as important for continued success as it once was. By utilising the Internet effectively companies found that despite declining domestic sales they could still massively increase their consumer base by selling their products globally. The same is true for jihadists. Despite declining support for these organisation and suicide bombing domestically, by effectively spreading their message across the “cyber-uma” they have managed to generate enough communal support to survive and continue their operations.

Obviously, these studies could not be conducted in countries currently experiencing extreme violence like Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan. Given the extent of the suicide bombing campaigns in these areas we can be relatively certain that at least some degree of communal support must exist for the practice.

Terror management is a general theory for explaining why this support exists and fluctuates in these conflict zones. It argues that when communities perceive themselves as at risk, aggressive actions towards out-groups they find threatening become more legitimate. Sustained conflicts only reinforce this. For example, surveys between 1995 and 2006 showed that unlike paramilitary operations Palestinian support for suicide bombing was strongly correlated with perceptions of threat, griev- ances and optimism about the future.

Looking at the regional case studies, each of these areas can be considered in whole or in part a warzone in which communities are justified in feeling under threat. In Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Nigeria there has been mounting violence and a general increase in the number of suicide attacks each year – except 2015 which saw a small reduction in most countries. Conversely, suicide attacks in Afghanistan have been declining since US troops started withdrawing. This changed Taliban tactics and saw them focus on more traditional paramilitary operations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Yemen</th>
<th>Nigeria</th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Yemen</th>
<th>Nigeria</th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>100/1</td>
<td>75.8/22.6</td>
<td>100/0</td>
<td>91/9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>80.6/19.4</td>
<td>73.5/26.5</td>
<td>100/0</td>
<td>88/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>65.3/34.7</td>
<td>71.4/28.6</td>
<td>91.7/8.3</td>
<td>93.2/5.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>81/19</td>
<td>79.8/19.7</td>
<td>96.3/3.7</td>
<td>91.3/7.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>77.6/19</td>
<td>83.3/16.7</td>
<td>65.2/34.8</td>
<td>89.6/10.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of attacks by year by country

Despite large numbers of civilian casualties in the last five years, suicide attacks have also typically been used against security or government targets. These attacks usually targeted army bases, police buildings, military buildings, checkpoints and soldiers on duty. In Iraq, Syria and Yemen, attacks targeting civilians often targeted the Shia population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Yemen</th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>100/1</td>
<td>75.8/22.6</td>
<td>100/0</td>
<td>91/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>80.6/19.4</td>
<td>73.5/26.5</td>
<td>100/0</td>
<td>88/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>65.3/34.7</td>
<td>71.4/28.6</td>
<td>91.7/8.3</td>
<td>93.2/5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>81/19</td>
<td>79.8/19.7</td>
<td>96.3/3.7</td>
<td>91.3/7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>77.6/19</td>
<td>83.3/16.7</td>
<td>65.2/34.8</td>
<td>89.6/10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Target of attacks by percentage: security and government/civilian.
Within this period, suicide bombings in Iraq consistently targeted civilians in greater numbers than in other theatres – again these attacks were generally carried out in areas with a dominant Shia presence. In Sunni areas, attacks were overwhelmingly against security or government targets, whereas Shia areas bore the brunt of attacks against civilians. For example, of the 19 suicide bombings directed against civilians in 2015, 12 took place in Shia areas.\(^{97}\)

In Yemen, the vast majority of suicide bombings have been against security forces and government targets. In this case bombings have targeted both Yemeni military and Houthi rebels – with attacks on civilians primarily directed against Zaydi Shia.\(^{98}\)

AOAVs research on Dabiq further supports the importance of this often sectarian, out-group targeting dynamic, in suicide bombing in recent years. While Sunni civilians were undoubtedly killed in these attacks, of the 32 suicide bombings, 31 are explicitly described as having targeted security forces, the government or Shia civilians. At no time are the deaths of Sunni civilians mentioned, let alone the idea that they were targeted, even though this has clearly occurred as a result of IS attacks. Along with the increased vitriol of the descriptions, istishhadi were also far more likely to be identified by name in cases were Shia civilians or Iraqi Popular Mobilisation fighters were killed.

Traditions of anti-state resistance or, particularly, jihadism and other radical Islamist perspectives in specific areas are another indicator for whether a community will support a suicide bombing campaign. These traditions are often tied to long-standing economic or political grievances, although this is not necessarily the case.

Areas with well-established traditions of radical Islamism and particularly of sending people abroad to fight jihad are often bigger producers of jihadis – unsurprisingly – than other areas. Infrastructure and experience on sending jihadis abroad may already exist, making the process of travelling abroad much more realistic and easier.

Whilst the details vary from area to area, some regions of interest include Derna in Libya, (which now has at least two generations of experience of jihadi resistance and currently hosts an IS offshoot), and Qassim in Saudi Arabia. Both of these areas have been major sources of foreign fighters.\(^{99}\)

Educational attainment is another driver that is often discussed in relation to communal support for suicide bombing. The popular logic is that education reduces this support. While support for suicide bombing is always relatively low, studies conducted in the mid-2000s suggest there are no clear correlations across education levels. In Indonesia, educational attainment made people slightly less supportive of attacks targeting civilians. Those who completed higher education were more supportive of attacks on Westerners than those without primary education. Similarly, those in Jordan and Pakistan with primary education were less likely to support attacks on civilians and more likely to support attacks on Westerners than those without primary education. Surveys in Lebanon, Turkey and Morocco indicated that education had no bearing on support for suicide bombings against civilians.\(^{100}\) On the basis of this study, there is no clear connection between education and support for suicide bombing. Arguably, if educational curriculums and institutions do not promote peaceful conflict resolution then educational attainment is unlikely to have much measurable effect.

Looking at individual suicide bombers, stereotypes of them as ignorant and uneducated again appear to paint an incomplete picture. Exact information on the education levels of suicide bomber in Afghanistan and Nigeria are difficult to come by. However, general accounts suggest that while not particularly high, they are not out of keeping with the education level of the general population in the local areas in which these campaigns occurred. There was also no real correlation between education and suicide bombers in Iraq and Syria.

Corroborated documents leaked to the website Zaman Alwsl, included a list of 122 suicide bombers who crossed into IS controlled territory. These individuals had signed up to, and by this point many have engaged in, suicide bombing for the IS. The document shows that an individual’s education had no clear bearing on their motivation to engage in a suicide attack. 43% of the real and potential istishhadi had a high school level of education, 28.1% had attended college and 26.4 had primary or middle school education.\(^{101}\) These documents are discussed at length in the appendix.

Ultimately, educational attainment is not a particularly useful dynamic for explaining either communal support for, or the individual motivations of suicide bombing and bombers.
In areas where communal support for suicide bombing exists it can also help to motivate individual bombers. Most Salafi-Jihadi propaganda includes continuous, general references to the importance and nobility of martyrdom and martyrs, which likely translates to increased social status. The Centre on Religion and Geopolitics report indicated that the virtue of martyrdom appeared explicitly in 32% and implicitly in 68% of AQAP, IS and Jabhat al-Nusra propaganda. Similarly, AOAV research on Dabiq revealed that the virtue and nobility of martyrdom and martyrs was constantly referenced.

Prior to attacks, Palestinian and Hezbollah suicide attackers historically reported enhanced social status. Arab television networks spread their names, posters and calendars with their faces distributed as ‘martyrs of the month’ and potential suicide bombers were inspired by their martyrdom videos. Recruits would long have been aware of the potential increase in social status from becoming a suicide bomber. Consequently, newfound fame would not normally be a prime motivator but a side benefit for these individuals.

For IS istishhadis, this side benefit is less important as glorification of suicide attackers appears to have diminished in recent years. The Zaman Alwsl documents show that, when emigrating, some foreigners list their intention to become suicide bombers. Given historical precedents and the importance placed on martyrdom they may gain some extra social status from this. However, in Dabiq less than half of the suicide bombers selected are even mentioned by name. Of these named suicide bombers only one had their picture in the magazine. Conversely there are 13 pictures of the devastation cause by their attacks. This suggests that in the IS the attack is much more important than the attacker.

7.1.2 PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

One of the most important common factors in the recruitment of suicide bombers is the existence of strong personal relationships with other members of a radical group.

This feature is not unique to suicide bombers specifically. It is very important in radical groups in general, as well as in conventional state military units. It plays a crucial role in convincing people to risk and sacrifice for the collective and in promoting a sense of solidarity.

Various studies of Saudi jihadis and al-Qaeda recruits in general have found that an overwhelming number of them joined through, or with, relatives or groups of friends. Suleyman Ozener – writing for NATO – has also previously highlighted the importance of friendship groups in PKK suicide bomber recruitment in Turkey. Whilst details of how specific foreign jihadis have made their way to Syria are often scarce, many of the British citizens who have gone to join IS went as groups of friends. In fact, it is notable how many of those for whom we have established identities are described in this way.

The importance of connections probably goes a long way towards explaining why it is that particularly small areas without any other distinguishing features produce so many jihadists and foreign fighters. Notable in Europe, of course, is the impoverished Brussels suburb of Molenbeek that produced the Paris terrorists.

Other countries have their own hotspots – most of the disproportionately large number of Tunisian fighters who have gone to fight with IS come from the two well-known jihadist hubs of Ben Gardane, Bizerte, Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher.

There is thus merit for a focused approach, identifying key areas of recruitment of suicide bombers and investing in thoughtful and considered interventions in these areas to reduce the allure of suicide bombing as a form of violence.

7.1.3 CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT

It is something of a cliché to say that violence breeds violence, but it is nonetheless true that the wide-ranging social repercussions of armed conflict – direct and indirect experience of violence, lack of economic opportunities, the disappearance of a positive social structure and a sense of belonging – can all stimulate further conflict.

Experience of violence may generate a strong desire for revenge on the part of those who have been victims. This has been particularly well-studied in the Palestinian context. In 2001, a Hamas recruiter told journalist Nasra Hassan that “‘a’fter every massacre, every massive violation of our rights and defilement of our holy places, it is easy for us to sweep the streets for boys who want to do a martyrdom operation.”

Whilst it is important not to automatically take the organisation’s own claims at face value, the idea that
revenge fuelled suicide bombings launched during the Second Intifada is supported by the work of Brym and Araj, which found that most such attacks were not particularly strategically motivated, and instead came as a reaction to individual events. A similar point is made by Hilal Khashan, who notes the importance of frustration and despair as a motivation for suicide bombing.

Similar points may be made in the case of the Taliban. A Pakistani counter-terrorism expert, Sohail Tajik, claims that 90% of recruits at suicide bomber training centres in South Waziristan were Pashtuns. Of these, 70% came from one specific tribe, the Mehsuds. Hassan Abbas believed this reflected the level of sheer tribal frustration in areas beset by chronic underdevelopment, corruption and the constant threat of violence.

At the same time, the destruction of social structures, the absence of opportunity and positive alternatives may motivate individuals to find meaning in radical groups – which may entail becoming a suicide bomber. Anna Cornelia Beyer argues that despair and other mental health problems may encourage people to seek out inclusion, which is offered by terrorist organisations. This sense of inclusion and group solidarity may later allow individuals to subject their own survival to the ends of the collective.

7.1.4 THE GENDER POLITICS OF SUICIDE BOMBING

While historically suicide bombing campaigns in Palestine and Sri Lanka have seen women play a larger role, in the last five years women have taken part in very few attacks. In fact, the only continuous demographic for suicide bombers are young, single men. Of the 122 IS bombers in the Zaman Alwsl document, only 19.8 were married, whilst 68.6% were single and the rest unknown. This is mirrored in Dabiq, where of the 98 attackers identified, none were women.

Various studies have attempted to attribute psychosocial or biological explanations to this. Explanations include: adolescent rebellion, heightened testosterone leading to increased likelihood of aggression, and frustration generated by the inability to satisfy an evolutionary biological drive to mate. However, while potentially interesting, these factors are common to all young men the world over. This makes them of little value for developing a profile of a suicide bomber.

While the first female suicide bombing in Afghanistan did not occur until 2010, women have been involved in a number of attacks in Iraq. Between 2005-2010, a total of 44 attacks carried out by women took place in Iraq, 84% occurring between 2007-2008. Since 2014, Boko Haram has made the greatest use of female suicide bombers. In June 2014 a middle-aged woman detonated explosives at an army barracks in Gombe. 19 further attacks by women occurred that year; 85% of these were perpetrated by Boko Haram. 2015 has seen an exponential increase in these numbers; 124 women engaged in istishhadi operations last year, with 120 of these dispatched by Boko Haram.

As Boko Haram has shown, there are a number of advantages for using women in a suicide bombing campaign. From a strategic standpoint, women draw less suspicion than men and therefore face less challenge in reaching desired targets. Minimised body searches for women in Islamic countries and the use of pregnancy outfits and baggy clothing also make it easier to disguise explosive vests. Moreover, using female bombers often means that the fighting strength of an organisation is not reduced. From a social perspective, suicide attacks by women often produce much greater media coverage for the organisations. The belief that women do not engage in suicide terrorism and that it is inherently more disturbing also offers psychological advantage to campaigns.

On a wider social level, emancipation and freedom from traditional gender roles have often been used to explain why some women engage in suicide bombing. Historically, studies on the PKK and the LTTE (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), suggested that this was an important motivation. However the lack of attacks by women outside of Nigeria in the last five years suggests that the importance of this as a driver of suicide terrorism has declined. IS in Iraq and Syria maintain incredibly strict restrictions on women but this has not been accompanied by an increase in female suicide bombers in these areas. When IS has used female bombers, it has usually been a result of strategic necessity. For example, in August 2015 female bombers were employed in Sirte in a desperate attempt to hold the port against unity forces.

Historically, revenge has tended to be a better indicator for why some women engage in suicide bombing. This dynamic continues to be relevant. In Iraq, female insurgents have witnessed extensive warfare resulting in the
loss of close family, friends and wider community members. Revenge as a motivator in female martyrdom is evidenced in the case of Baida Abdul Karim al-Sham mari, a failed bomber from Diyala province in 2009. Having worked on IED construction with five of her brothers, all of whom were killed by US forces, she was captured attempting to complete the suicide attack that her brothers had planned to carry out.

More than 150 women have engaged in suicide attacks in Nigeria since 2014, killing over 1000 people. However determining the motivations of female Boko Haram bombers has proved particularly difficult. Coercion seems to play a much greater role for Boko Haram than other organisations. The group’s strategy of abducting women is well known, particularly the 270 Chibok girls in 2014 and the 400 women and children taken from Damasak in 2015. There is certainly enough evidence to support the view that some of these women have been coerced into blowing themselves up. In 2015, 35 of the 120 female Boko Haram bombers were teenagers or children aged 8-18 who were arguably too young to make an informed decision. There have also been reports that women were remotely detonated by their male accomplices.

Equally, there are many cases of women being active members of Boko Haram: in 2014 a female wing of Boko Haram recruiters was allegedly identified, female fighters have been known to attack Nigerian soldiers, and women have volunteered for suicide missions. Problematically, the data on female Boko Haram bombers comes almost exclusively from press reports, which makes determining their motives challenging. For example, we rarely know the names or ages of these women, they do not leave videos, their attacks are rarely claimed and they have predominantly struck low value targets like markets and bus depots.

Preparatory procedures for suicide bombers have included cutting off communication with friends and family, forbidding music and television in the run up to attack, undergoing education on the importance of the jihad, re-enacting past operations and reminders of the woes of life like sickness and old age.

For Palestinian suicide bombers this process often lasted weeks though for recent suicide bombers, particularly in Iraq and Syria, it seems the procedure is quicker and more streamlined. The only near constants are a few hours of religious preparations like prayer and recitations of the Qur’an and the creation of a martyrdom video, like those discussed above, explaining the motivations of the bomber. Even the creation of these martyrdom videos are not guaranteed, nor are all of them publicly released. Whilst some videos can be useful for determining the personnel motives of the bomber, they more often present disembodied propaganda speeches and say little about the individual conducting the attack.

Another important part of the indoctrination process is that it is often carried out in cells of multiple bombers. Of the 51 suicide bombings and combined operations mentioned in Dabiq 25 were undertaken by groups of bombers. It was implied that many had known each other in advance and likely trained together. For example, the October 2015 attack on a meeting of Saudi, Emirati and Yemeni officers in Aden was a coordinated operation by four bombers that had clearly planned and prepared for the attack together, as had Abu Zahra al-Shami and Abu Uthman al-Shami for their attack on an Iraqi military base in March 2016. The power of group commitment means that individuals feel they have a personal obligation to their fellow bombers. Consequently, backing out seems like a betrayal of the group and would be incredibly shameful for the individual and potentially his family.

7.1.5 INDOCTRINATION AND DE-RADICALISATION

Because organisations channel a diverse set of personal motivations many of them use elaborate rituals to reinforce the commitment of would-be suicide bombers and prevent backsliding. This indoctrination is not brainwashing, as the majority of suicide bombers are volunteers. For recent istishhadis there is often a paucity of information on what these indoctrination rituals include. While some likely underwent extensive preparation for their attacks, others (particularly on the battlefield) will have gone from making the decision to orchestrating their attack without much time for formal rituals.

7.1.6 COERCED BOMBERS

Beyond the soft coercion implicit in radicalisation and indoctrination procedures there are reports of bombers being more overtly coerced to act as proxies and commit attacks on behalf of terror groups. Any form of indoctrination of children is arguably coercion, as they cannot give truly informed consent.

The Taliban have long used children for insurgent activities such as blowing up IEDs, gathering surveillance and collecting discarded weapons after battles. Afghan authorities say they have arrested up to 250 children
over the last 10 years for such activities. The number of children employed by the Taliban is likely much higher. In 2011, UNICEF claimed that at least 318 children had been recruited by the Taliban\textsuperscript{17} while the Taliban technically forbids the use of children some of its officials have acknowledged that it occurs.

The Taliban has also used children for suicide bombing operations. Many of these children are recruited from madrasas – a school of Islamic instruction – on the Pakistani side of the border. There are thousands of unregulated madrasas in North-West Frontier Province popular with Afghans for the free education and board they provide. These madrasas represent a prime recruiting ground for Taliban groomers. In June 2012, three child suicide bombers from madrasas like these were arrested before they could conduct their attack\textsuperscript{119} as were Naqibullah\textsuperscript{120} and Mohibullah\textsuperscript{121} in 2014. Interviews with failed child bombers also show many are simply recruited from the streets.

Confessions from failed child suicide bombers give an insight into how children are groomed to commit these attacks. Many were told that women and children are raped by foreign forces and that the Qur’an was being burned by Americans. Children were also told it was their religious duty to join the jihad and that their success would ensure their parents place in heaven. Lastly, some were informed that civilian casualties were excusable because many Afghans were not proper Muslims and those that were would go to heaven as martyrs.\textsuperscript{122} Most disturbingly, some juveniles report being given an amulet containing Qur’anic verses that would allow them to survive the blast. Others were told that the bomb blast would be painless and were given a necklace of keys with which to open the gates of paradise after the attack.\textsuperscript{123}

In some cases, child suicide bombers are remotely detonated by adult accomplices to ensure they complete their attack. For example, an eight year old girl was remotely detonated at a police checkpoint in central Uruzgan province in 2011.

Though the exact figures are unknown, IS is also believed to have used children in some of its suicide attacks. It is likely they relied on similar indoctrination techniques to the Taliban. General recruitment of children into IS frequently involves coercion after abduction – a favoured method. The UN estimates that at least 800 between 5 and 15 have been abducted. These children are then taken to camps to become ‘cubs of the caliphate’ and trained as child soldiers and suicide bombers. The UN Human Rights Council has reported that in 2014 children were being deployed in active combat missions including suicide bombing.\textsuperscript{124} A further UN official has suggested that some of the children used in these bombings ‘are mentally challenged’.\textsuperscript{125} In the first half of 2016, IS propaganda has depicted 12 child killers.\textsuperscript{126} One video included a four-year-old British boy apparently detonating a car bomb killing four alleged spies trapped in the vehicle. In August 2016, a 12-14 year old boy also targeted a Kurdish wedding party in the Turkish city of Gaziantep wounding at least 69 people.

As discussed in the gender politics of suicide bombing, Boko Haram has a history of coercing young women and children to conduct suicide attacks through indoctrination and, at times, remote detonation. In 2015 one in five of these attacks was conducted by children, 75% of which were committed by girls between 8-18. Unlike the Taliban, who primarily relied on extreme indoctrination, Boko Haram often drugs the girls and then straps the explosives to their bodies before sending them out.\textsuperscript{127}

### 7.2 Economic drivers of suicide bombing

There is no direct, single-step link between economic factors and the use of suicide bombing. On country level, it also appears that there are no direct economic predictors of suicide bombing. The countries in which suicide bombing is most common are not top-ranking economies, but otherwise share little in common regarding economy or development.

Afghanistan – the country with by far the lowest GDP among the top five worst affected by suicide bombings – has one of the least developed economies in the world, even after huge infusions of foreign aid in the post-invasion period. Iraq, on the other hand, has a highly developed and profitable oil sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP per capita</th>
<th>% population under (2014) poverty line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2438.79\textsuperscript{128}</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>413.43\textsuperscript{129}</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>818.87\textsuperscript{130}</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>1091.64\textsuperscript{131}</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The absence of proof of direct links between a prevalent economic climate and the risk of suicide bombings is further evidenced when comparing AOAV’s data on suicide bombings with the World Bank’s data on GDP levels per country.

Among those countries worst affected by suicide bombings, only Pakistan demonstrates a correlation between an increase in GDP and a parallel decrease in SIED attacks between 2011 and 2015.

Afghanistan has, on its part, seen a decrease in both suicide attacks and GDP.

In Somalia, the (albeit very low) GDP has consistently increased whereas SIED attacks have remained on similar levels throughout the years looked at.

In Nigeria, on the other hand, GDP plummeted in 2015, which was the year that was by far the worst affected by suicide bombings.

There is no reliable GDP data on Syria, but it would be logical to assume that a major motivator behind suicide attacks is conflict rather than poverty.

Interestingly, GDP fluctuations have correlated with SIED attack levels in Iraq in an unexpected manner, as both rose from 2011 and peaked in 2013 before dropping. This suggests that SIEDs may increase together with general economic development, but also demonstrates that economic development is far from the only factor having an impact on a country’s exposure to suicide terrorism.

Another interesting detail in the analysis is that GDP levels in both Morocco and Tunisia, two countries that have seen many of its citizens join IS, plummeted after 2014. This coincides with rapid IS expansion, and could partly explain why so many young Tunisian and Moroccans decided to join.

Although making sweeping connections between the economy and terrorism does not provide a comprehensive view, correlations between certain kinds of economic growth and suicide terrorism have been found. For example, a study by Seung-Whan Choi at the University of Illinois at Chicago has demonstrated links between increased industrial economic growth and suicide terrorism. This is largely due to the increased security measures that industrially growing economies can afford to make, thereby forcing terror groups to apply the more clandestine and infiltratory method of suicide bombings. It should be mentioned that the study notes that agricultural economic growth does not lead to increased suicide terror. This could explain why Iraq with its oil economy, and the entailing presence of substantive security measures, has seen so many suicide bombings both in recent years but also in the aftermath of the US invasion.

Of course, an approach which focuses solely on the level of the country ignores huge amounts of variation within the countries themselves. When examining Nigeria, for example, we find that the northeastern provinces – the heartland of the Boko Haram insurgency – are markedly underdeveloped compared to other parts of Nigeria. It is also suffering, perhaps more directly than other regions, from resource shortages and the damaging effects of climate change. However, previous AOAV reports on Nigeria shows that whilst this can help explain the underlying grievances fuelling the Boko Haram insurgency, there is again no direct correlation.

Many other areas with similar levels of underdevelopment are not facing the threat of suicide bombing.

All of this said, economic factors may play a number of indirect or distal roles in the process that ends with the self-activation of a human detonator, whether it is for the individual or as cause of conflict.

In general, however, economic explanations are only one piece of the puzzle. The Tunisian case studies that AOAV conducted on site (see appendix) found that many suicide bombers were indeed poor, but testimonies also raised issues such as disenfranchisement and alienation, suggesting that suicide bombers experience something more personal than simply a lack of financial resources that turns them into suicide bombers. One should also keep in mind the increased usage of suicide bombings as a method of warfare by groups like IS and Jabhat al-Nusra, which would indicate that it is primarily conflict that is driving suicide attacks.

**7.2.1 INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC FACTORS**

The stereotypical image of the suicide bomber is of a young man with no education and no economic prospects, rendered desperate and so stupid he easily falls prey to the corruption of a Machiavellian Mullah. In practice, the picture is much more mixed. Detailed data from older surveys of suicide bombers found that they were both economically and educationally diverse – and
are, in many cases, both better-educated and financially better off than the average within the population from which they are drawn.\textsuperscript{133}

A study of factors correlated with support for suicide bombing in various Muslim-majority countries found that in some places higher levels of education were a statistically significant predictor of support. Though, of course, this is not the same as being willing to carry out a suicide bombing but may still be relevant.\textsuperscript{134}

One possible explanation for this phenomenon rests in the idea of ‘relative deprivation’. An individual may be a relatively privileged member of a population in what we might call ‘objective’ terms – if they are rich, for example, or better-educated, or have more obvious prospects than other members of their community.

This doesn’t, however, mean that they see their position in the world (or their community’s place in the world) as just. The idea of ‘relative deprivation’ (deprivation as a non-absolute, subjective measure) was used convincingly by Edward Sayre in the Palestinian context, to in part explain why suicide bombers with apparently bright futures were blowing themselves up for political causes.

Sayre suggests that Palestinian suicide bombers see their position more in terms of the perceived deprivation and unjust treatment of their group as a whole – not solely in individual terms.\textsuperscript{135} This lines up with other research, which has suggested that experiences of discrimination and a sense that Islam is under threat are often predictors of support for suicide bombing.\textsuperscript{136} The idea of being under threat is often pumped out in slogans like those discussed above, but can as this demonstrates of course be rooted in an individual experience of discrimination.

Another possible suggestion is that – at least in some countries – the educated may be more engaged with political issues, particularly international ones.\textsuperscript{137}

Whether this general trend holds for suicide bombers signing up for IS, for example, is less clear. In reality, the sheer scale of modern suicide bombing and the experience on the ground in Syria and Iraq – or indeed Nigeria or Afghanistan – makes it practically impossible to find out the identities of most suicide bombers in these countries.

Generally speaking, it is only possible in isolated cases – and particularly when the bombers target other countries – to gain a sense of who the bomber is. If foreign suicide bombers are reflective of foreign fighters more generally – which we have no reason to assume they are – then data suggests they are frequently from less well-developed areas of countries. Many of those travelling from Europe have criminal records.

Nonetheless, even with foreign fighters, it is impossible to generalise – if there is any commonality, it is that in most countries of origin relatively delimited areas provide the majority of those going to fight for IS. These areas all have their own, very specific, very local, very contingent environments which facilitate or encourage the spread of jihadi ideology or the recruitment of their young people to IS.\textsuperscript{138}

Most Pakistani Taliban suicide bombers are apparently from a quite delimited area of the chronically underdeveloped FATA area, which may be a point in favour for the relative deprivation theory.

Nabil Fadli, the bomber who carried out the Istanbul attack of January 2016, was from a relatively impovished background – but he was also a successful university student.\textsuperscript{139} The Paris bombers, on the other hand, were all uneducated and poor.\textsuperscript{140} Whilst little information is available on the British jihadis who have launched suicide attacks, IS recruits in general from the UK include professionals, graduates, university students and A-level students (17-18). Some of them were relatively financially successful whilst others were poor.\textsuperscript{141} There do not appear to be features distinguishing them
from other recruits not intending to become suicide bombers.

An in-depth examination of IS recruits will be provided later in the report.

7.2.2 ECONOMIC DRIVERS OF CONFLICT
At least equally important, is the link between the economy and armed conflict. There is an intuitive link between economic hardship and anti-state militant activity. A link between poverty, economic growth and civil war has been demonstrated by much academic research.\textsuperscript{142} Additionally, a quick comparison of countries which have low economic indicators, like income and percentage of the population below the poverty line, alongside countries suffering from insurgencies shows an unsurprising correlation.

Whilst obviously, as previously mentioned, there are suicide bombings launched by individuals with few solid links to groups – international or otherwise – the vast majority of suicide bombings take place as part of a strategic campaign orchestrated by an insurgent organisation. These organisations, regardless of their own positions and aims, often feed off a sense of political or economic grievance.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq, for example, managed to manipulate the grievances of marginalised Iraqi Sunnis in the north-west of the country. These same grievances helped to make northwest Iraq a comfortable foothold for a new generation of AQI which ultimately developed into IS. In Nigeria, economic concerns surrounding the struggle for resources form a core part of narratives on the underlying reasons for the Boko Haram insurgency. Similarly, the Pakistani Taliban are fuelled by socioeconomic despair in the Pashtun tribal belt. In a study by International Alert on the explanations for Syrian recruitment to IS and other extremist groups, economic factors – the lack of jobs or any financial prospects – were frequently mentioned.\textsuperscript{143}

This is not to say that IS, Boko Haram or the Taliban are explicitly fighting for the economic rights of their respective bases, or that the presence of economic grievances automatically leads to insurgency – nor does insurgency automatically involve the use of suicide bombings. Economic grievances alone cannot serve as a predictor. However, from a policy perspective, existing insurgencies – including those which make use of suicide bombings – can be analysed from an economic perspective.

Defusing or alleviating the economic grievances underlying insurgencies is an important part of combatting these insurgencies and reducing suicide bombing.

The reality of modern conflict and globalisation means that now more than ever, it is possible for fundamentally local grievances to take on an international dimension. Whilst the Taliban and Boko Haram operate within relatively restricted geographical areas, IS maintains a thoroughly internationalist model, attempting to attract fighters and establish affiliates (or ‘provinces’) worldwide.

A study of leaked IS personnel documents, finds that the majority of foreign fighters travelling to join IS come from very specific regions of source countries – often ones with economic grievances with the central government.\textsuperscript{144}

The economic drivers of a given conflict cannot be generalised. Although there are certainly similarities, local conflicts and disputes are exactly that – local, and thus contingent. Substantial bodies of work already exist on the underlying drivers of given conflicts, although much of what exists on northern Iraq, for example, dates from the occupation period and more research is desperately needed. Addressing underlying causes of conflict in places like northern Iraq is a key part of undermining and neutralising the groups launching suicide bombings and ensuring that a military solution – which is likely to only be temporary and resource-intensive – has lasting positive results.

7.3 Psychological drivers of suicide bombing
Psychological explanations are important for understanding the personal motivations for suicide bombing. It is well documented that no single psychological profile exists that can explain the motives of all suicide bombers. Organisations channel diverse personal motivations, which can only be understood in the socio-political context of the bombers themselves. Extensive academic work has demonstrated that feelings of honour, redemption, heroism, alienation and revenge all factor into an individual’s choice to carry out a suicide bombing. The significance of each may change over time; equally only one of these states may matter to the bomber.

7.3.1 ARE SUICIDE BOMBERS SUICIDAL?
With the exception of a few cases, there does not seem to be an apparent connection between suicide bombing
and personality disorders. Typically, most attackers are psychologically normal and well-integrated into their communities. Of course, a percentage of bombers demonstrate suicidal tendencies; studies lean towards about 10%, but can go as high as 30%. Even this is context specific. Tajik suicide bombers tend to more likely to suffer a personality disorder, whilst those who are Palestinian do not.

Suicide is obviously an integral part of suicide bombing, but the nature of suicide bombings is fundamentally different from ordinary suicides. Ordinary suicides are typically motivated by personal catastrophe, despair and psychopathologies that lead people to believe that their lives are not worth living. By contrast, suicide bombings fit into a category of “altruistic” suicidal actions, as the actions are taken by an individual who values his/her life as less than that of the group’s honour, religion or some other collective interest. The cultures of organisations that promote suicide bombing reinforce this idea. As we have seen above, historically most jihadi propaganda has avoided attempting to religiously justify suicide. Instead it has focused on the virtues of martyrdom for the individual and the community.

The Centre on Religion and Geopolitics data demonstrates that references to honour – linked with martyrdom – and solidarity with the community appear in 68% of IS, AQAP and Jabhat al-Nusra propaganda. Advocacy on the part of the oppressed Muslim community appeared in 27% of the material. Such advocacy is often framed in terms that indicate its importance to individual mujahedeen. For example, one AQAP statement claims, “It is crystal clear that all jihadi attacks on the West came as a belated reaction to the tremendous Western oppression of Muslims.” Jabhat al-Nusra and IS have released similar statements.

In the martyrdom videos of the eight individuals associated with the failed 2006 Transatlantic Aircraft Plot, three explicitly mention they were motivated to defend the umma, even at the cost of their lives. Waheed Zaman discusses striking back at the US and UK because they have invaded Muslim counties, killed Muslims and supplied weapons to the enemies of Islam. Similarly, the Syrian bomber Abu Bilal al-Homsy had played an active role in anti-Assad activities since 2011 and fought with a number of rebel groups before joining IS. According to his friends and family, during all those years his primary motivation was to defend his local neighbourhood in Homs.

Linked with suicide for the community is martyrdom for the sake of one’s companions. A review of Dabiq’s military operations section shows that over half of all suicide bombers conducted their attacks as part of a group. As touched upon earlier, placing individuals in tight-knit groups like this often creates a ‘band of brothers’ effect, similar to the one seen with conventional soldiers. In these situations, fear of letting one’s comrades down can become greater than fear of dying. Of the 105 attacks described in Dabiq, 19 were also combined operations in which bombers played an important role alongside more conventional forces, further exacerbating this desire to not let down comrades.

7.3.2 HONOUR, HUMILIATION AND REDEMPTION
Humiliation and honour play a key role for organisations and individuals in shaping the cult of suicide bombing. Humiliation is a complex emotional experience that operates on both an individual and communal level. It is always historically and culturally grounded in perceptions of self-worth and dignity. The evidence suggests that violence, torture, occupation, harsh repression, poverty, the violation of honour codes, helplessness and collective grievances can all act as major sources of humiliation and help fuel suicide bombing campaigns.

For Western fighters and suicide bombers, this may be ‘humiliation by proxy’ generated by media coverage of conflicts involving Muslims, particularly in Iraq and Palestine. For example, Abdulla Ahmed Ali, a British Muslim who continuously refers to the humiliation experienced by Muslims at the hands of Western powers, states, “we’ve warned you so many times to get out of our lands, leave us alone, but you have persisted in trying to humiliate us, kill us and destroy us.”

While exact sources of humiliation are context specific to the organisations and individuals involved, jihadi propaganda from all sources refers to it frequently. The emotion is a common theme for organisations that engage in suicide bombing campaigns from the LTTE to IS. This theme is present in 40% of IS propaganda, 31% of AQAP’s and 23% of Jabhat al-Nusra’s. The power of this message is that it already plays on the widely held belief that there is a conspiracy against Muslims worldwide. A 2007 survey found that two-thirds of respondents in Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco and Indonesia either did not know or thought the US or Israel was responsible for 9/11. A further three-quarters felt it was important to “stand up to America and affirm the dignity of the Islamic people.”
Certain sources of humiliation such as mass interrogations, random house searches and, most famously, the indignities committed by US prison guards at Abu Ghraib had a direct impact on suicide bombing rates. In the months after the publication of the abuse photographs, the number of Iraqi suicide bombings increased dramatically. General Stanley McChrystal said that, “In my experience, we found that nearly every first-time jihadi claimed Abu Ghraib had first jolted him into action.” This again demonstrates that jihadi propaganda that speaks of humiliation can easily tap into existing and even legitimate individual grievances. For someone going suffering humiliation, whether in an Iraqi prison or “by proxy”, jihadi groups may even appear as the only organisation showing any sort of understanding to one’s personal frustration.

Linked with humiliation is the opportunity for redemption. Using religion at multiple levels, the loss of dignity is often framed as a sin for which martyrdom is the answer. In martyrs’ videotaped statements, both personal and collective redemption is frequently mentioned as a motivation for attacks.

Organisations also play on this desire for redemption to encourage further recruits to become istishhadi. Dabiq, issue 9, includes the story of Abu Mus’ab al-Almani, an ex-German soldier who fought for coalition forces in Afghanistan before joining IS. In April 2015, he drove a truck containing seven tons of explosives into the headquarters of the 4th Regiment of the Iraqi Army, northwest of Baghdad. The Dabiq section on him constantly refers to how he once fought against Muslims but by becoming a martyr had redeemed himself in the eyes of Allah. His “name would now be written – by Allah’s permission – amongst those whose past had been tainted with Muslim blood and would atone for it by embracing Islam and fighting for the cause of Allah until they were killed.”

Along with a chance for redemption comes an opportunity to be a hero, which is a desire also highly visible in several suicide bombers’ video-taped wills. The asymmetry in power faced by most suicide bombing organisations is extreme. As Abu Musab al-Zarqawi regularly stated, his men “faced the strongest and most advanced army in modern times.” During a debriefing, an al-Qaeda operative is quoted as having compared himself to the Rebels in Star Wars using whatever means available to fight against a technologically advanced invader. These are romantic notions and have a part to play in motivating some individuals to become suicide bombers. For instance, the failed bomber Ibrahim Savant states in his martyrdom video, “Mujaheddin, for years I’ve desired to meet you, to walk the paths you’ve walked, to sacrifice what you have sacrificed. Now, Allah has honoured me with an invitation.”

Whatever the reality, the popular image of a young martyr is of a powerful, committed hero, bravely fighting the enemies of God. Recent suicide bombers may not be as glorified as they were in the past, but jihadi organisations still lionise the concept, and suicide bombers often strive for heroic status.

7.3.3 VENGEANCE

As eluded to in the wills of suicide bombers above, the personal histories of suicide bombers often include events for which an individual might choose to seek revenge. These events could be threats, assaults, the loss of family members and friends, or even more abstract circumstances such as communal grievances or injustices – in these cases, the dynamics of humiliation previously discussed factor heavily.

Psychological research on vengeance reveals that individuals are often surprisingly willing to make substantial sacrifices in order to achieve revenge. From a demographic perspective, men tend to hold more positive attitudes towards vengeance than women. Young people have also been found to be more willing to act in a vengeful manner than older individuals.

When this intent is manifested through suicide bombing it has the further effect of transforming the bomber into a victim of the attack and so giving their cause additional moral authority.

In normal circumstances, the desire for revenge would gradually subside and pass. However, in conflict-ridden environments with a culture and infrastructure of suicide bombing, grievances and injustices can more easily
become a catalyst for seeking martyrdom. Research on 67 Palestinian suicide attackers showed that almost all had a history of injury, arrest, or the death of a family member by the Israeli Defence Forces. Revenge also figured highly for the Syrian bomber Abu Bilal al-Homsi who wished to strike back at Alawites for the siege of Homs in 2014. Similarly, the failed transatlantic airline bombers in 2006 all mentioned vengeance implicitly and explicitly in their martyrdom videos.

7.4 Stemming the tide: Combatting suicide bombing

To talk about ‘combatting suicide bombing’ in general terms is impossible. A suicide bombing or suicide attack is a technique which can be used tactically or strategically for many different purposes in different conflicts or military theatres.

The reality is that it is almost always possible to find individuals who are willing to kill themselves for a cause – whether it is because they are depressed and want to end it all, because they are angry and politically disaffected, or simply because they have a strong ideological commitment to something bigger than themselves. Counter-radicalisation efforts and investment in mental health may in some cases help reduce the risk of lone wolf attacks or recruitment to international organisations, but the time when these measures might have had a positive effect in the areas worst hit by suicide bombing are long gone.

The only difficulty then lies in operational detail – manufacturing a suicide vest or car bomb and then launching the attack. As it stands, this process is hugely facilitated by the diffusion of knowledge and expertise through international jihadist networks. Breaking down links between jihadist groups and preventing the diffusion of this knowledge is an important first step to preventing further spread of infection – and to preventing the recruitment of foreign suicide bombers and fighters more generally for those organisations that make use of international man-power. Nonetheless, any organisation with the practical know-how to build an IED can probably develop a suicide vest without too many technical difficulties, and so this cannot be the be-all and end-all of efforts to counter suicide bombings.

Security responses to reduce the ability of suicide bombers to take such a huge toll are possible stop-gap measures for military organisations – improving the security of areas with large concentrations of people, developing technology to detect explosives carried by suicide bombers and so on. These measures are important and in many cases are already in place – resulting in many suicide bombers being stopped at checkpoints and causing far less deaths and injuries than would otherwise be the case. But they will only reduce the effect of the suicide bombings already being launched.

Given that stopping suicide bombings per se – in terms of stopping its supply – is very difficult, the question then generally becomes one of reducing the ability of groups to launch suicide bombings and establishing long-term stability. The major hotspots – Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan – the groups using suicide bombings are, ultimately, insurgenices which depend on a local base of, if not support, ambiguity and resentment towards the state. Without this base, these groups would find their ability to carry out attacks significantly reduced. The question then is how to deal with the sense of disenfranchisement found in these areas and win – or buy – the loyalties of local communities in the fight against these organisations, without the credit for those concessions being given to the organisation (unintentionally strengthening their hand).

This may seem like an ambitious goal, but has been successful in the past – in fact, it was the whole basis of the Iraqi Saḥwa (‘awakening council’) movement, which mobilised the northern Sunni population against al-Qaeda in Iraq in the late 2000s. The Saḥwa and the accompanying military response effectively crushed AQI. It was the breakdown of the post-Saḥwa order and the perceived or real return of pro-Shia sectarian government in Iraq (and with it all the return of sectarian politics that that involved) that led to the resurgence of AQI in 2013.

Of course, there are groups for which there is no such obvious constituency, as was the case with al-Qaeda central (and as will probably be the case with IS if their territory is reduced). These groups require a different response. But at present the vast majority of suicide bombings taking place worldwide are not of this kind.
8. CURRENT THREAT ZONES

The vast majority of suicide attacks take place in three major geographical hotspots crossing national borders: Iraq-Syria, Nigeria and Afghanistan-Pakistan. These hotspots are associated with specific conflicts and groups which operate in several countries at once. Some of these groups – in particular al-Qaeda offshoots in Iraq and Syria, foremost among them IS – have proven themselves to have the ambition and the resources to carry out attacks as far afield as Europe.

Together, attacks in these three areas caused 7853 civilian deaths and injuries in 2015 – 86% of civilian deaths and injuries from suicide bombings worldwide. In the same year Yemen – which lies outside these three hotspots – accounted for another 7% (644 civilian deaths and injuries). No other country saw more than 200 civilian deaths and injuries or more than a handful of incidents.162

8.1 Iraq

8.1.1 SUICIDE BOMBINGS IN IRAQ BETWEEN 2011-2015

Iraq has between 2011 and 2015 seen 382 SIED attacks, as reported in English language media sources. These attacks have claimed a reported 13,736 casualties (killed or injured), 76% of whom were civilians. Suicide bombings in the country reached their peak in 2013, but decreased in 2014 and 2015. However, 2016 has witnessed more SIED attacks than 2015, suggesting that suicide bombings do not show any signs of disappearing from Iraq.

One reason behind the 2016 increase in SIED attacks was that IS carried out reactionary attacks, partly as a response to lost territory. The battle for Mosul, for instance, where the Iraqi government and allied forces are (at the time of writing) attempting to retake the city from IS, has seen IS use suicide bombings as a line of defence against the charging Iraqi and Peshmerga forces. IS is the only group credited for a suicide bombing in Iraq within the past five years.

Despite the high civilian toll of suicide bombings in Iraq, armed bases and police stations are the most common targets for suicide bombings. Together they account for 37% of all attacks. Nevertheless, populated locations such as commercial premises (9%), public buildings (8%), public gatherings (8%), roads (6%), urban residential areas (6%), and markets (5%) are also targeted and such targeting inevitably results in a disproportionally high number of civilian casualties.

SIED attacks in Iraq 2011-2015

Of those recorded, AOAV’s data shows that 52% of the total amount of SIED attacks carried out in Iraq between 2011 and 2015 were from suicide VBIED attacks. This correlates with tactics – where locations such as armed bases and police stations are common targets, as groups in general and IS in particular, often use suicide VBIEDs to break through security barriers. Another reason behind the amount of suicide VBIED attacks is that IS has incorporated such attacks into their everyday military strategy. In fact, the exact same proportion (52%) of IS’ suicide bombings are suicide VBIEDs.

IS itself seems to be keen on marketing this type of attack. As many as two thirds of the suicide bombers eulogised by IS in their propaganda perpetrated suicide VBIED attacks. It is unclear if this is just a reality of the sheer number of suicide VBIED attacks, or whether it serves a propaganda purpose. According to the eulogies, IS has started to use several suicide VBIEDs simultaneously for the same operation, partly as a result of the Iraqi army having become better at coping with this strategy.163

The geographical spread of suicide bombings in Iraq reinforces the idea that suicide bombings are used predominantly in military battles, or at least in areas in the vicinity of them. For example, governorates where IS have historically been strong and engaged in battles have all seen more SIED attacks, such as Anbar (73),
Salahuddin (70), Diyala (43) and Nineveh (37). The Baghdad governorate is however the far worst affected region in Iraq, and is proof that suicide bombings are also used for fear-spreading urban terror campaigns. The capital has seen as many as 124 SIED attacks in the last five years, which have killed or injured as many as 5,066 people. Reciprocally, areas which have generally been spared by both IS and conflict in general have seen significantly fewer suicide bombings. This applies to provinces such as Dhi Qar (2), Muthanna (1), Basra (4), Wasit (2), Babil (5) and Karbala (3). However, there are exceptions to this trend. The Erbil and Kirkuk governorates have, considering their vicinity to IS activity, seen remarkably few attacks, with Erbil seeing only two and Kirkuk seeing 16.

8.1.2 IRAQI SUICIDE BOMBING: A NEW AND OLD PHENOMENON

Iraq is in many ways the cradle of the modern Salafi-Jihadi mass suicide bombings that have become so commonplace. According to most official accounts, the first suicide bombing in the country occurred a few weeks before the US invasion in March 2003. During the same year, there were a total of 35 suicide bombings, and the tactic drastically increased in the following years. In 2005 and 2007, there were as many as 304 and 291 SIED attacks respectively. Although Iraq is still the country worst affected by suicide bombings, it is worth remembering that it has seen 382 attacks in the past five years combined, meaning that examined over a longer period of time, the problem has been mitigated, at least comparatively, in recent years.

SIED attacks in Iraq 2003-2010

Although Iraq became the epicentre for suicide attacks after the ousting of Saddam Hussein, Iraq's former dictator is not completely innocent of having contributed to this phenomenon. For example, it is believed that the regime-founded paramilitary group Fedayeen Saddam carried out a suicide bombing against Kurdish opposition parties in 2000s, and there have also been reports of Baathists organising suicide brigades as a defence against invading US forces. Saddam also introduced Islamisation policies, leading to the prohibition of both alcohol consumption and gambling, whilst also imposing the strict Sharia punishment of amputation for theft. Moreover, new mosques and Islamic universities teaching ultra-conservative versions of Islam were opened. For example, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi graduated from Saddam University for Islamic Studies with a PhD in 2007. Saddam's so called “Faith Campaign” has been attributed as partly responsible for making many former Baath commanders susceptible for extremist religious ideas after losing their employment due to the US de-Baathification policy introduced shortly after the invasion.

IS’ predecessor organisation al-Qaeda in Iraq was the most prolific perpetrator of SIED attacks in Iraq in the years following the US invasion. Its leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, introduced the tactic after having been reportedly convinced of its usefulness by Egyptian jihadi scholar Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir, whom he had met in Afghanistan. According to Muhajir, ends justify the means. If a suicide bombing was carried out for the advancement of Islam, it did not matter that suicide is forbidden according to Islamic scripture. Although Muhajir is not as well-known as other jihadi theorists, his influence on IS in Iraq is still visible. For example, his book *Issues in the Jurisprudence of Jihad*, which sets out much of IS brutal military strategy, has been found in IS classrooms in Nineveh province.

ISI (Islamic State in Iraq), the organisation that sprung out of al-Qaeda in Iraq after Zarqawi’s death in 2006, and would later evolve into present-day IS, from the very beginning deployed suicide bombings to achieve important strategic aims. For example, in 2013, leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the ‘Breaking the Walls’ campaign, aimed at freeing several jihadi prisoners. As part of this campaign, ISI conducted several suicide attacks on prisons in Iraq. One of the most notable examples was the attack on the notorious Abu Ghraib prison, which led to the release to several former jihadi fighters that would later make up some of the core structure of IS.

Having previously noted how both imprisonment and humiliation, whether real or perceived, can be drivers of
suicide bombings, it is significant that these two factors are highly present among the top cadres of IS’ Iraqi leadership. Indeed, many of these leaders were imprisoned in jails that conducted well-known humiliating practices, such as Abu Ghraib. Responses to abuses – real or perceived – in prison are likely to feed the vengeance narrative that many IS suicide bombers propagate before their operations.

Furthermore, there appears to be repetition in the way that IS and its predecessor organisations operated in Iraq. Zarqawi quickly realised that sectarian attacks against Iraq’s Shia population could provoke them into engaging in sectarian warfare, which in turn could help mobilise Sunni support. This is very similar to tactics that IS has employed in recent years. The basis for both has been the sentiment of Sunni disenfranchisement, something which has appeared at various stages in Iraq’s recent history. It is a reality that, in part, shows how both IS and its predecessors have been able to benefit from poor decision-making in the country.

Terror groups in Iraq also gained many new recruits following the implementation of the de-Baathification policy, a flawed policy that left untold Sunni Iraqis unemployed. Similarly, the more recent failure of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to integrate the so-called Sahwa forces, an alliance of armed Sunni tribes instrumental in reducing al-Qaeda in Iraq’s strength, into the armed forces, once again left many Sunni Iraqis disenfranchised.

Al-Maliki, a Shia, has added fuel to the fire by also structuring his cabinet along sectarian lines, removing several influential Sunnis from top positions. In addition, sectarian grievances were deepened when Shia militias, sponsored by Iran, massacred Sunni with seeming impunity, attacks that were partially motivated by vengeance for the sectarian attacks carried out by IS’ predecessor organisations. These killings, and the impunity that surrounded them, not only caused fear among many Sunnis, but also has been reported to have steered an army of new recruits into the arms of the Islamic State in Iraq. To this day, IS still uses such sentiments to rally support for suicide bombings and mass violence in Iraq, a call to arms that is further encouraged by an increased Iranian influence in the beleaguered country.

8.1.3 Bombers and Tactics

A confluence of these influences has meant that IS evolved. Today it almost has a quasi-industrialised production of suicide bombers. As revealed by both fighters and leaked documents, there is a waiting list within the organisation of people wanting to become suicide bombers, and there are scant signs of the organisation’s supply of suicide bombers waning. There are even reports of centres where new recruits, eager to become suicide bombers or Inghimasi fighters, are divided into groups of nationality and age.

Of note in this recruitment process is the attraction of foreign fighters, men who are disproportionately used as suicide bombers in Iraq. For example, Saudi-owned news outlet al-Hayat has reported that Saudi nationals make up an astonishing 60% of suicide bombers in Iraq. Some of these foreigners carry out attacks within Iraq, like the British jihadi Kabir Ahmed, who blew himself up on 7 November, 2014 in Baji in Iraq, killing eight Iraqi policemen in the process.

Others are trained to be dispatched back to Europe. However, the attackers of the most notorious suicide attacks on European soil, such as the Brussels and Paris attacks, seem to have been trained in Syria.

In terms of age profile, the vast majority of IS suicide bombers in Iraq are young men. According to the leaked IS registration files (see appendix), 69% of new suicide bombing recruits were below the age of 30. There have been instances of IS using children and teenagers for suicide attacks as well. The 25 March 2016 SIED attack in the Iskandariya neighbourhood of Baghdad, which killed 29 civilians, was carried out a 16-year old IS bomber. Similarly, security forces in Kirkuk thwarted an attempted suicide bombing by a 13-year old member of IS youth force Ashbal al-Khilafa (Cubs of the Caliphate). Moreover, a Diyala Province official said in June 2016 that half of the suicide bombers who blew themselves up in Diyala were Iraqi teenagers, many below 18, recruited by IS. Children are reportedly also instructed to wear suicide vests whilst conducting non-suicide missions, such as guarding or patrolling, and told to detonate their vests if necessary.

In terms of the sex of the bombers, as elsewhere the majority are men. However, there have also been increasing reports of IS sending women to the frontline as suicide bombers. Although female suicide bombers trigger less suspicion and therefore have a tactical advantage, deploying female suicide bombers has, among groups like the Taliban, been seen as a sign of a deficit
of male fighters. Given that IS has not traditionally been known for using female suicide bombers, this shift in strategy could be a sign of increasing desperate tactics, or an indication of the spread of the allure of the suicide bomber to a wider audience.

IS’ most commonly used suicide attack, as mentioned above, is the suicide VBIED. The fact that IS has captured such large swathes of territory has allowed them to develop massive car bombs at remote and secure manufacturing sites. These car bombs are most commonly directed at armed forces and checkpoints, and have been incorporated into IS military strategy in an unprecedented manner. Disturbingly, it appears that the majority of targets from such car bombs reside in populated areas. According to AOAV’s data, 79% of the attacks that IS has carried out on markets, commercial premises and urban residential areas have been perpetrated in majority Shia areas.

Such attacks include two of the largest suicide bombings in Iraqi history; the attacks on a market in Khan Bani Saad in July 2015, killing 121 people, and the attack on a market in Karrada in Baghdad, which killed 325 people.

According to IS propaganda channels, the group launched as many as 431 ‘martyrdom operations’ within Iraq between January and September 2016. Such numbers are difficult to verify, likely overstated, and may include attacks which do not involve explosives. It is, however, certain that IS in Iraq has increased their use of suicide attacks as a response to loss of territory in the country, as well as during the ongoing battle for Mosul.

IS’ recent increase in their use of suicide bombings in Iraq appears to have been conducted with the aim to both instigate political divisions in Iraqi society, as well as to give the impression that the Iraqi government cannot protect its own citizens. In the theatre of sectarian warfare in Iraq, where IS predominantly targets Shia areas, and where the Iran-sponsored Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) have been accused of committing massacres in Sunni villages, increased mass violence could be a way of forcing fence-sitters into joining the IS camp.

Such sentiments are apparent in the video-recorded wills of Iraqi suicide bombers that AOAV has analysed (see appendix). A majority of Iraqi suicide bombers examined in this report talk about defending the Sunni community from infidels, as well as suggesting that those not partaking in the jihad against them are as guilty as the perpetrators.

IS makes a significant rhetoric effort to make it appear that suicide bombers blow themselves up for the advancement of Islam alone, and not for any sort of strategic or pragmatic purposes. Such ambitions are outlined in a piece of IS-affiliated literature entitled al-Sa’ada fi Nil al-Shuhada (Happiness in Pursuit of Martyrdom), written by a relatively unknown scholar known as Abu Qadama al-Muhajir. It is a paper that is said to have influenced many suicide bombers in Iraq.

8.1.4 THE BATTLE OF MOSUL: SUICIDE BOMBINGS AS A DEFENSIVE STRATEGY

Despite such external pressures, it must be remembered that suicide bombings are, of course, also used in a very pragmatic tactical and strategic manner.
Whereas much has been made of IS’ use of suicide bombings as an offensive strategy, the ongoing operation to retake Mosul from IS control, initiated on 17 October 2016, serves as a good case study in how IS uses suicide bombings as a defensive strategy.

According to US officials, the allied forces have, as of 30 November 2016, retaken 25% of the territory which has been controlled by IS since the summer of 2014. Given that Peshmerga forces estimated then that the operation to liberate Mosul would take just two months, it is clear that IS has so far managed to prevent significant advances in to the city. Certainly, there have been reports of suicide bombings slowing down liberation forces.

Reports from both IS and other sources on the ground make it clear that at least the second line has, as of late November 2016, been engaged, and many Iraqi army officers have admitted the impact of suicide bombings on the exhaustion and fear of their soldiers. IS has also used tunnels to enable suicide bomber to surprise their targets by emerging near them. Tunnels were also used during the Kurdish Peshmerga offensive that make it clear that at least the second line has, as of late November 2016, been engaged, and many Iraqi army officers have admitted the impact of suicide bombings on the exhaustion and fear of their soldiers. IS has also used tunnels to enable suicide bomber to surprise their targets by emerging near them. Tunnels were also used during the Kurdish Peshmerga offensive that

Several lines of defence
IS’ defence of Mosul consists of several defensive lines. The first line is that of landmines surrounding the city. The second line is comprised of about 300 snipers and 500 suicide bombers. The third line of defence is made up of ‘jonoud al-khilafa’ (Soldiers of the Caliphate) who are described as the essence of the IS fighting units. If all these lines of defence crumble, the fourth line of defence is made up of Inghimasi fighters who are expected to engage with the enemy in direct urban warfare, during which suicide bombings will be used by either detonating vests or cars filled with explosives.

An excerpt from the online version of Al-Sa’ada fi Nil al-Shuhada (Happiness in Pursuit of Martyrdom)

Press release from Amaq stating that an IS martyrdom operation was carried out against the Popular Mobilisation Units in the Qadsiyya neighbourhood in East Mosul.

According to IS’ news agency Amaq, 171 ‘martyrdom operations’ have been carried out, as of 29 November 2016, against advancing forces. That would mean that, on average, IS carries out almost six martyrdom attacks per day in Mosul alone. Again, these numbers are difficult to confirm, but various testimonies from Peshmerga and Iraqi army forces suggest a radical increase in the number of suicide attacks. And it looks like such a reality is not to change any time soon. While it is unclear how many suicide bombers are in Mosul, sources put the number of suicide bombers and Inghimasi fighters at 30% of IS forces in Mosul.

Several lines of defence
IS’ defence of Mosul consists of several defensive lines. The first line is that of landmines surrounding the city. The second line is comprised of about 300 snipers and 500 suicide bombers. The third line of defence is made up of ‘jonoud al-khilafa’ (Soldiers of the Caliphate) who are described as the essence of the IS fighting units. If all these lines of defence crumble, the fourth line of defence is made up of Inghimasi fighters who are expected to engage with the enemy in direct urban warfare, during which suicide bombings will be used by either detonating vests or cars filled with explosives. Reports from both IS and other sources on the ground make it clear that at least the second line has, as of late November 2016, been engaged, and many Iraqi army officers have admitted the impact of suicide bombings on the exhaustion and fear of their soldiers. IS has also used tunnels to enable suicide bomber to surprise their targets by emerging near them. Tunnels were also used during the Kurdish Peshmerga offensive that
began on 23 October 2016, to evict IS from the town of Bashiqa, north of Mosul. The Peshmerga then were faced with a barrage of suicide attacks, buildings filled with homemade bombs, and IS fighters using tunnels to reappear in areas that were supposedly “cleared areas.”

8.2 Syria

Despite several insurgent groups being active in the Syrian civil war, and many of them use suicide bombings, there were only two that have used suicide bombings on a large scale in the past five years: IS and Jabhat al-Nusra. There are many similarities between these two insurgent groups’ use of suicide bombings. Both rely heavily on suicide VBIEDs as a military tactic, for example. However, whereas Nusra mainly attacks regime targets with their SIEDs, IS has used the tactic predominantly against religious and ethnic minorities. IS has also used suicide bombings against other rebel groups, whereas Nusra has, in several cases, let other rebel groups ‘borrow’ suicide bombers from them in joint offensives. In addition, IS also seems to rely more heavily on foreign fighters as suicide bombers, whereas Nusra uses more Syrians in its attacks.

8.2.1 SIED ATTACKS IN SYRIA 2011-2015

Syria has seen 104 SIED attacks, as recorded by English language media, within the past five years. These attacks have claimed 5,385 casualties, 86% of whom were civilians. Similar to Iraq, attacks peaked in 2013, and have, after a short drop, begun to increase again. The first half of 2016, for instance, saw almost as many suicide bombings as all of 2015.

It is perhaps unexpected that Syria has been the scene for far fewer SIED attacks than Iraq, considering that the conflict in Syria in the last five years has been deadlier and featured several non-state actors that all use asymmetric warfare methods. The fact, though, that Syria’s crisis quickly evolved into a full-blown war could be a reason why fewer suicide bombings have occurred there.

Some analysts have argued that groups in Syria seem to have applied more restraint in terms of suicide bombings, attempting to use them more restrictively in civilian areas. Such analysis, however, does not seem to be reflected in the data. Whilst looking at target locations in Syria, AOAV found that only 22% of SIED attacks in Syria were carried out against armed bases. The majority of attacks were, it appears, carried out where civilians are likely to be present. These include urban and residential areas (14%), roads (8%), places of worship (8%), public buildings (7%), schools (6%) and police stations (5%). This, together with the very high number of civilian
casualties of SIED attacks, does not support the claim that Syrian groups practice more restraint in terms of civilian targets of suicide bombings.

It should be mentioned that a substantial part of civilian areas have been targeted because of the presence of one of two things: either people at the sites were seen to be regime supporters, or they were present in regime institutions themselves. AOAV has identified 42 such attacks, which is more than half of all the attacks on civilian areas. Of these, 60% took place in areas where perceived regime supporters reside, whereas 40% took place in residential areas where regime-linked institutions are based. This would suggest that although civilians are targeted, groups are careful not to provoke the type of backlash among its most likely supporter base (Sunni Muslims) that al-Qaeda in Iraq experienced in the latter half of the 2000s. This caution also seems to have led to SIED attacks being directed at minority groups. Such groups are, in many instances, seen as siding with the Syrian government, but attacks on them can also be seen as the bloody expression of the sectarian ideologies held by groups like IS and Jabhat al-Nusra, and as such unlikely to cause a backlash against Sunni Muslims.

A similar trend in terms of targeting civilians has been seen in the usage of suicide VBIEDs in Syria. 57 of the SIED attacks perpetrated in Syria in the past five years have been suicide VBIEDs. A surprisingly large proportion (49%) of these attacks occurred in civilian areas, whereas 32% struck armed bases.

The geographical spread of SIEDs shows a similar trend as in Iraq. Urban centres of conflict, such as Damascus and Aleppo, are by far the worst affected, having seen 26 and 18 suicide bombings respectively. Homs (11) and Hama (9) have also seen a significant share of SIEDs. Other more rural areas have also been affected by suicide bombings as a result of local battles. In this way, Hasakah in the northeast of Syria, which has been witness to battles between IS, Kurdish forces, and the Syrian Army, is the third worst affected region with 14 SIED attacks.

8.2.2 HISTORY OF SIEDS IN SYRIA

Before the 2011 uprisings, which called for the removal of President Bashar al-Assad, Syria had only seen two SIED attacks. But this should not conceal a hard, hidden reality. Anger against Bashar al-Assad had built up over decades, as both he and his predecessor (and father) Hafez al-Assad had employed repressive methods to deal with dissenting voices. These voices from both secular opposition parties and Islamist organisations, and were often predominantly Sunni. Indeed, both presidents created their main support base among Syria’s religious minorities, and primarily among the Alawite sect to which they belong. This had led to many Alawites - despite representing around just ten percent of Syria’s population – ending up holding prominent governmental and military positions.

Although the Assads also relied on vital support from parts of the Sunni community, the largest sect in Syria, the regime’s perceived favouritism towards minorities is often used in the Syrian jihadi narrative. The fact that the Assads have a long history of targeting Sunni Islamist organisations has further exacerbated such sentiments. The Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood was particularly targeted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. After a failed assassination attempt against Hafez al-Assad in 1980 by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian Defence Brigades killed more than 1,000 Islamist prisoners in the infamous Tadmor prison as punishment. After the Muslim Brotherhood continued to commit a string of attacks against regime officials, the Syrian army in 1982 commenced a 27-day long assault on the organisation’s stronghold Hama. During this assault, it is believed that between 5,000-10,000 (some even citing 40,000) people were killed, the vast majority being civilians. This Hama massacre has, in recent years, served as a source of grievance for both Islamists and other opposition forces. Furthermore, many of those who survived later relocated to northern Lebanon, which is partly a reason why so many foreign fighters from Lebanon’s north has joined jihadi organisations opposed to today’s Assad regime.

Although massacres of similar proportions did not occur, the Syrian regime continuously committed severe human rights abuses. When the Arab Spring protests erupted in 2011, the Syrian regime carried out abuses amounting to crimes against humanity from the first few months of the uprising, as documented by international human rights organisations. Some of the crimes involved torture, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, as well as rape campaigns directed at the families of those associated with opposition groups.

In a cynical move, the regime also released at least 260 political prisoners in 2011. Many of those released...
were jihadis with a track-record of engaging in militant organisations, and were – it is believed – to have been released as an attempt to radicalise the Syrian opposition which would allow for harsher tactics against them. The basis of many of Syria’s most prominent jihadi organisations can be found among those released in 2011. Two of the most important individuals released were Jabhat al-Nusra’s founder and leader Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, as well as one of the organisation’s spiritual mentors, Mustafa Setmariam Nasar (also known as Abu Musab al-Suri). 191

Another freed prisoner was al-Qaeda veteran Abu Khaled al-Suri, a man who was instrumental in founding Ahrah al-Sham. Several other Ahrah al-Sham figures were also released, such as Hassan Aboud, Mahmoud Teeba Abu Abdelmalek, Abdelnasser al-Yasseen, Hashem al-Sheikh, and Hussein Abdelsalam. 192 Abu Atheer al-Absi, who was released in 2011 before joining Jabhat al-Nusra and later IS, supposedly acted as the teacher to Brussels’ infamous suicide bomber Najim Laachraoui. Another prominent jihadi, Zahran Alloush, was also released in 2011. After this he went on to form the organisation that later evolved into Jaish al-Islam.

Inevitably, with more jihadi elements in the opposition, suicide bombings became a more frequently used tactic in the Syrian War. Moreover, the sectarian turn that the war has taken has in many ways benefitted jihadi organisations and increased suicide bombings. Although the Syrian Civil War is not sectarian in essence, and despite the fact that the various religious communities in Syria have co-existed peacefully for most of the country’s history, it is by various actors being portrayed as a religious war. This is partly due to the vested interest that the Middle East’s main powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran, have in the conflict, with Saudi supporting hard-line Sunni rebels and Iran backing Assad’s government. The presence of Iranian military personnel and Shia groups like Hezbollah in Syria has further played into the jihadi narrative of a Shia conspiracy against Syria’s Sunni population, which is part of the explanation behind the several suicide bombings carried out against Shia and Alawite areas in Syria.

8.2.3 BOMBERS AND TACTICS

29 of the SIED attacks recorded in Syria in the past five years were attributed to IS, whereas 16 of them were attributed to Jabhat al-Nusra. It should be mentioned that at least 56 attacks were not attributed to any group, but it is very likely that a substantial part of them were perpetrated by either IS or Jabhat al-Nusra. One attack was attributed to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and one was attributed to Kurdish YPG fighters.

IS in Syria

As mentioned above, it has been suggested that Syrian jihadis have been wary of creating a backlash within the Sunni community in Syria, and have therefore attempted to minimise SIED attacks against Sunni areas. With many of its top commanders experiencing the aforementioned Sunni tribal uprising in Iraq first hand, this suggestion is in part true of IS. Only three SIED attacks seem to have taken place in areas which can be described as majority Sunni. However, there are still several similarities between IS in Iraq and IS in Syria. For example, most of the group’s SIED attacks seem to be motivated by sectarianism, with IS targeting religious and ethnic minorities. They do so under the pretense that such groups are pro-regime supporters. 41% of IS suicide bombings, in this way, targeted religious or ethnic minorities, with a substantial part being attacks against Kurdish villages in northern Syria. 20% of IS’ suicide bombings targeted Syrian regime forces.

On the other hand, 24% of attacks were directed at rival jihadi organisations, with Ahrah al-Sham being the target of at least three suicide bombings. For example, on 23 February 2014, an IS suicide bombing in Aleppo targeted and killed Abu Khaled al-Suri, a Syrian Jihadist militant who was often affiliated with Osama Bin Laden’s al-Qaeda and the Syrian Islamist group, Ahrah al-Sham.

A little less than half (44%) of the group’s total attacks in Syria were suicide VBIEDs. When compared to similar IS attacks in Iraq, a larger proportion in Syria was directed at civilian areas. At least five attacks targeted Kurdish locations in Kurdish villages, whereas two suicide VBIED attacks targeted the area around the Shia mosque Sayyida Zaynab, considered one of the most important Shia sites in the world.

IS has also used suicide bombings as part of complex attacks, in some instances employing suicide VBIEDs, Inghimasi fighters and more traditional suicide vest-bombers in one single assault. In Syria, such tactics have been used successfully by the group in both Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zour. 193

In Syria, many of IS’ suicide bombers have been foreign fighters. According to the leaked IS registration files, which registered people entering the ‘caliphate’, of the
121 people listed as having signed up as suicide bombers, 32 were Saudis, 25 were Tunisians and 18 were Moroccans. That these nationalities are well-represented is not particularly surprising judging from both IS and local news reporting on suicide bombings in Syria. In fact, more than 6,000 Tunisians are believed to have joined IS, whereas it is estimated that around 2,500 Saudis have also joined their ranks. Furthermore, Arabic sources have reported that as many as 1,500 Moroccans have joined the organisation. More than 5,000 recruits have also arrived from the former Soviet Union and the Balkans, as well as more than 5,000 from Western Europe (discussed further below). Some of the motivations for foreign fighters to travel to Syria shall be discussed later in the report.

IS has on several occasions sent suicide bombers from Syria to attack targets in the centre of Europe. The suicide bombers involved in the Paris attacks in November 2015 and the Brussels attacks of March 2016 had all travelled to Syria to join IS before going back West, likely with orders to carry out the attacks. The same is true for the suicide bombing IS carried out in Istanbul airport in 2016, where the suicide bombers are believed to have travelled directly from IS’ Syrian stronghold in Raqqa and had help planning the strike from top IS commanders. This effectively means that IS’ Syrian branch has functioned as an exporter of suicide bombings in a way that does not seem to have occurred in Iraq, where foreign fighters seem to mainly carry out suicide bombings against local targets.

More recently, IS has reported a much larger number of Syrian suicide bombers in Syria, possibly in an attempt to counter accusations that they are a foreign force imposing their will on Syrians from the outside. For example, out of 50 suicide bombers named in IS reporting for January 2016, 28 had nisbas suggesting that they were Syrian. Some had regional epithets, such as al-Homsi or al-Idlibi, whereas some went by the name al-Shami, denoting the historical Greater Syria region.

Many of the local recruits often join the organisation out of either pragmatism, choosing to align with a specific group for protection or out of vengeance. Motivations are however often framed in sectarian and hostile language, and several Syrian IS suicide bombers have showcased sectarian rhetoric in their video-recorded wills. Whether this is pure IS propaganda or their own articulated personal beliefs is of course difficult to say, but it is certain that sectarianism has become an integral part of the Syrian war. The aforementioned Abu Bilal al-Homsi, an IS suicide bomber who carried out his attack on the predominantly Alawite neighbourhood of Zahra in Homs on 28 December 2015, showed no signs of sectarian hostilities before the war, but saw the Syrian government’s siege on his hometown Homs as a crime that all Alawites should be punished for. A detailed description of al-Homsi is provided in the appendix.

**Jabhat al-Nusra**

Jabhat al-Nusra has displayed some differences compared to IS in terms of their usage of suicide bombings. Firstly, 56% of Nusra's SIED attacks have been perpetrated against Syrian regime forces. Secondly, about 30% of Nusra’s attacks targeted general civilian areas, whereas only one attack could be considered as explicitly sectarian. These figures should nevertheless not overshadow certain key characteristics in Nusra. The organisation has, like groups that are considered to be more extreme, committed massacres against religious minorities in Syria. They have also reportedly forcibly converted hundreds of Druze people in addition to destroying several Druze shrines in Idlib province. Conversely, the group has developed a governance model which is based on gaining the support of the local population, which is partly why they have not become known for atrocities against (Sunni) civilians in ways that IS has. Jabhat al-Nusra has also made an effort to portray itself as primarily Syrian, and does not express any regional ambitions publicly. Although the group has foreign fighters within its ranks, it has strived to keep Syrians in both high-ranking and visible positions (such as public administration in the areas they control), which has helped the group attain local support.

Nusra has also successfully managed to integrate itself into Syrian revolutionary dynamics, which has, to some extent, given them the appearance of a legitimate anti-regime opposition group rather than the violent Salafi-Jihadi group that it is. This tactic has also spread to the group’s usage of suicide bombings, as Jabhat al-Nusra seems to be one of the few groups that have ‘leased’ suicide bombers to assist other groups with which they cooperate. Jabhat al-Nusra could therefore be described as a ‘force multiplier’. The group’s aid to rebel forces along the M5 highway outside Hama in 2014 is a good example of this. During the offensive on the regime-held towns of
Morek and Khan al-Shaykhun, Jabhat al-Nusra deployed several suicide bombers there. This allowed for other rebel groups to take advantage of the government forces subsequently weakened defences. Nusra’s willingness and expertise in suicide bombings – neither of which exist in several of the groups they have cooperated with - provides an asymmetric aspect to an otherwise conventional (and often inferior) armed operation.

The above example is demonstrative of Jabhat al-Nusra’s SIED tactics in general. Although suicide bombings is one of Jabhat al-Nusra’s preferred attack methods, SIED attacks are often used as part of a complex attack, with SIEDs weakening the defences of the enemy or to create confusion allowing ground forces to move into an area. AOAV’s data shows that 69% of Nusra’s suicide attacks are suicide VBIEDs, the vast majority of which targeting regime forces, which further suggests that the group mainly uses suicide bombings as a military tactic.

Despite a primarily Syrian outlook, foreign fighters do carry out suicide bombings for the group. Judging from the nisbas of suicide bombers that Jabhat al-Nusra uses, Saudis seem to be the best represented nationality among the group’s non-Syrian suicide bombers. Saudi suicide bombers include Abu Osama al-Jazrawi, who detonated himself in Aleppo in July 2015 and killed more than 26 Syrian soldiers, and Abu Muthanna al-Muduni, who killed more than 17 troops in December 2015. A 2016 documentary film called Dugma: the Button, which followed several conscripted Nusra suicide bombers, showed the vastly different reasons to why foreigners join Jabhat al-Nusra. Saudi national Abu Qaswara al-Maki stated that he left a comfortable life with a wife, family and a job because he felt guilty for living such a privileged life when Muslims were suffering in Syria. British recruit Lucas Kinney expressed anger over Western foreign policy. The Syrian fighters interviewed in the film all said that the Syrian government’s violent repression of the peaceful uprising made them turn to armed opposition. The same sentiments have been identified with the Syrian Nusra suicide bombers that AOAV has examined (see appendix). This again suggests that the decision to become a jihadi and a suicide bomber seems to be more ideological for foreign fighters, whereas it is often a reaction to personal experience for locals.

8.3 Af-Pak region

Pakistan

114 incidents

4,002 civilian deaths and injuries

SIEDs in Afghanistan and Pakistan are largely associated with the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban (Pashto or Dari Tālibān ‘religious students’) and their various splinter groups, most prominently the Haqqani network and Jamaatul Ahrar (Society of Free Men). AOAV recorded 1,453 civilian deaths and injuries in suicide incidents here in 2015. This beleaguered nation has suffered consistently from suicide bombings, perpetrated by the Taliban and other groups opposed to the US presence. The timeline of such attacks is since the resurgence of the Taliban movement in 2007 after the US invasion.

Afr-Pak region

PAKISTAN

114 incidents

4,002 civilian deaths and injuries

Until the US invasion and occupation in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the Taliban had never carried out a single suicide bombing. However al-Qaeda cadres in Afghanistan had assassinated Ahmed Shah Messud, the leader of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance using a bomb hidden in a video camera – killing the ‘cameramen’.

It seems that most of the attacks launched against US government forces in the immediate wake of the invasion were also carried out by members of al-Qaeda. However, by 2005 the number of suicide bombings had begun to increase significantly, and by 2007 – with the successes of suicide bombings in Iraq apparently evident – the Taliban were launching large numbers of suicide operations on a regular basis.206

Afghanistan has had the dubious honour of consistently being one of the worst-hit countries by suicide bombings for what is now approaching ten years.

The Pakistani Taliban – an imitation group which emerged in the porous border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan – do not share a command structure with the Afghan Taliban, and the Afghan Taliban itself has splintered into many smaller groups with varying connections to the central command. Nonetheless, the Pakistani organisation shares much with its Afghan inspiration, including its use of suicide bombings.
8.3.1 STRATEGY

**AFGHANISTAN**

283 incidents
5,480 civilian deaths and injuries

Unlike IS, which makes wide-ranging use of suicide bombers in a range of conventional territorial combat roles, Taliban groups largely deploy suicide bombing in a more traditional context, hitting symbolic targets – civilian gatherings, state buildings or gatherings of security personnel.

AOAV recorded 49 suicide bombings in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the course of 2015. 25 – just over half – were attributed to the Afghan Taliban (20), Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (4) or Jamaatul Ahrar (1), with the others going unclaimed.

Only two were recorded as targeting civilian gatherings – almost all of the others targeted either state forces or government employees.

The Afghan Taliban have regularly claimed not to attack civilians – but exclude government employees or ‘collaborators’ from the definition of civilian. In any case, regardless of their rhetoric, groups closely associated with the Afghan Taliban certainly do carry out mass-casualty civilian attacks.

8.3.2 RECRUITMENT

Finding biographical details on bombers is perhaps even more difficult in Pakistan and Afghanistan than in Iraq. Often in Taliban reporting not even a *nom de guerre* is given – the usual terminology is simply ‘a lion’ (*asad*) – and martyrdom videos are now rarely released publicly, even if they are still produced.

The Taliban in general – on both sides of the border – recruit predominantly from Pashtun tribal areas. In Pakistan this largely means the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a chronically underdeveloped area along the Afghan border, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province more broadly.

Ideas of ‘tribal culture’ are often evoked in relation to suicide bombing. In the vast majority of cases, they are totally irrelevant – the idea of the tribe ceased being important to most Arabs hundreds of years ago, for example. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, however, the tribal dynamic probably does play a role in suicide bombing recruiting. A Pakistani counter-terrorism expert asserts that around 90% of suicide bombing recruits in training centres in South Waziristan are Pashtuns; 70% were from the Mehsud tribe specifically. Likewise, according to a study of bombers’ remains, 80% of Afghan suicide bombers were missing limbs or suffering from serious illnesses – illnesses for which treatment was not readily available. This speaks to a deep-seated disaffection and lack of prospects.

As well as the serious underdevelopment and poverty that afflicts many of the areas the Taliban sources its bombers from, it is also important to note that these areas have suffered from a simultaneously heavy-handed and indecisive security response from the central government. Both the Pakistani *Zarb-e-Azb* campaign and NATO drone strikes have been widely criticised for accidentally killing civilians. This may have an effect on recruitment for suicide bombing; the security response has certainly been credited with accelerating Taliban recruitment.

As well as recruits, the Afghan Taliban has – at least on a few occasions – made use of what appear to have been coerced bombers; at least one drugged child has been used in a suicide bombing (which failed; the child was later pardoned).

8.4 Nigeria

The third area, whose epicentre lies in northeastern Nigeria, is associated with the Boko Haram group, which was founded in 2002 as the ‘Nigerian Taliban’, developing into an armed insurgency in the late 2000s. In 2015, which saw the expansion of Boko Haram’s suicide campaign to neighbouring Chad and Cameroon for the first time, AOAV recorded 2,952 civilian deaths and injuries in this region, 2,062 of them in Nigeria.

This area is a new hotspot that has emerged in the last two years. Although suspected Boko Haram cadres launched attacks in Nigeria before 2014, often quite spectacular ones, it was only in 2014 that casualty numbers began to spike and the campaign intensified.

“I enjoy killing anyone God wants me to the way I enjoy killing chickens and rams.”
Abubakar Muhammad Shekau, leader of Boko Haram
8.4.1 STRATEGY

Boko Haram, like the Taliban, is in some ways a relatively traditional user of suicide bombings. At the height of their territorial insurgency in 2014, they occasionally used suicide bombings in population centres to draw troops away from their main areas of operation in the north of the country. However, in late January 2015 a local coalition of states launched a major offensive against Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and Cameroon, driving them back into their remote strongholds.

Struggling with military setbacks, Boko Haram has increasingly engaged in mass-casualty suicide bombings making use of large numbers of suicide bombers equipped with relatively simple suicide vests. Despite their dependence on these relatively simplistic explosives, their use of multiple suicide bombers and double-tap strikes (the second targeting first responders and bystanders who gather around the site of the first bombing) has made them one of the most lethal users of suicide bombing in the world.

At least part of the high lethality of Boko Haram attacks is probably due to the sophisticated military-grade cluster weapons that the group has acquired, probably from Nigerian stockpiles.212

8.4.2 RECRUITMENT

As in the other two hotspots, information about individual suicide bombers is very hard to come by in Nigeria. Boko Haram’s membership is sourced not only from the remote and underdeveloped far northern regions of Nigeria itself, but also from areas across the border in Cameroon and Niger. Identifying the bombers is rarely the foremost concern for law enforcement, and even if work is being done information is not made publically available.

What we do know is that many of Boko Haram’s suicide bombers – in a break from typical practice by other Salafi-Jihadi groups – are women or, more commonly, younger girls. At least one bomber has claimed to be one of the abducted Chibok schoolgirls, indoctrinated and coerced into carrying out an attack.213 Reports from inside the group bear many of the hallmarks of cult-like experiences (such as charismatic leadership, heavily restrictive policies, isolation, sexual exploitation). Another bomber in Nigeria, who ultimately refused to detonate her bomb, claimed that she joined Boko Haram because of ‘spiritual problems’, married twice and then – when she refused to remarry – was expected to carry out a suicide bombing.214

8.5 Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has become increasingly vulnerable to SIED attacks in recent years. In fact, almost half of the 16 SIED attacks that the country has seen throughout its history have occurred since 2014. Of the recent attacks, a majority have targeted Shia mosques.

In terms of understanding the cult of the suicide bomber, however, analyzing Saudi Arabia is as, if not more, crucial to understanding their role as an exporter of suicide bombers as it is to analyzing the country bearing witness to the victim of them. In this section, we shall try to examine both the domestic threat of suicide bombings but also the regional implications and repercussions suicide bombings and Saudi Arabia might have.

8.5.1 SIED ATTACKS IN SAUDI ARABIA 2011-2015

Saudi Arabia has only experienced seven attacks within the timeframe examined in this report. In 2014, AQAP took credit for a suicide bombing in Sharurah, just a few miles from the border to Yemen. Suicide bombings would increase drastically in 2015, with Saudi Arabia seeing five attacks, three of which targeted Shia mosques in the country’s east and south, whilst the others targeted a mosque used by security forces and a police station (using a suicide VBIED). The first half of 2016 had one suicide attack, on 29 January, which also targeted a Shia mosque in the Eastern Province. All of the SIEDs in 2015 were been claimed by IS, who are also suspected for having conducted the one occurring in January 2016.

8.5.2 WAHHABISM, VIOLENCE, AND SAUDI SUICIDE BOMBINGS

The first SIEDs in Saudi Arabia were almost exclusively anti-Western. The first recorded SIED attack occurred in 2003 and targeted Westerners as a response to the US invasion of Iraq. Two years prior, 15 Saudi nationals had participated in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. Many Saudi jihadis were critical of
the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States, which led al-Qaeda affiliated groups to carry out more than eight attacks against Westerners and Saudi security forces in 2003 and 2004.\(^{215}\) However, since 2014, SIEDs have predominantly targeted Shia mosques, indicating a shift regarding the perception of who the most important enemy is among Saudi SIED perpetrators.

Saudi state ideology, Wahhabism, is often blamed for being the ideological basis for many of the Salafi-Jihadi ideologies practiced by groups like IS and al-Qaeda. Although Wahhabism is very radical compared to mainstream Islam, and even to other forms of Salafism, it would be wrong to see the ideology as inherently violent. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which Wahhabism may inform some of the violent aspects found in Salafi-Jihadism. The most obvious one would be the very hostile sectarian tendencies which are found within Wahhabi scholarship and literature, some of which is mandatory reading in the Saudi educational curriculum. The recent rise of sectarianism in the Middle East has also seen Wahhabism being used to religiously motivate anti-Shia sentiments, most expressively expressed in Saudi Arabia’s regional rivalry with Iran.

Although there is a history of peaceful coexistence between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia going back hundreds of years, the legacy of Wahhabism is unfortunately intertwined with hostilities against Saudi Arabia’s Shia population, a minority that makes up between 10% and 15% of the country’s population.

Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), the founder of Wahhabism, based many of his beliefs on literal Islamic scholars such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya. He also considered those who deviated from the strict Salafi interpretation of Islam as non-Muslims and apostates.

When Wahhab formed an alliance with local warlord Muhammad bin Saud, assaults on villages or rivaling tribes were religiously motivated by Wahhab’s doctrines. Saudi Arabia’s Shia population did, expectedly, not conform with Wahhab’s views of ‘true’ Muslims, and Wahhab used *takfir* (a practice now used by several jihadi groups) in order to excommunicate them. Several Shia shrines were also destroyed during this and subsequent military campaigns carried out by the Saud ruling family, all sanctioned by Wahhab’s ideology.\(^{216}\) Moreover, in the 1920s, the Saudi Wahhabi ulama ordered the demolition of Shia mosques and forcibly took charge of teaching duties in the remaining ones, in addition to attempts of converting the Shia population.\(^{217}\)

The Saudi curriculum has also come under fire for inciting violence against religious minorities. Freedom House concluded in the mid-2000s that Saudi educational texts then contained a plethora of inflammatory and hateful messages. This was particularly true of Islamic studies textbooks that, according to Freedom House, propagated hatred against ‘unbelievers’ such as Christians, Jews and Shia minorities.\(^{218}\) Saudi cleric and regime critic Hatem al-Awni went even further in his criticism, stating that certain books used in the education system practically serves as jihadi propaganda.\(^{219}\)

If education forms the roots, then the flowering of that seed has been a bloody one indeed. Sunni-Shia tensions have reached levels unprecedented in modern times - particularly in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and as a result of the regional power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia has often slammed domestic dissidents and protestors as being mere ‘Iranian stooges’, both at home and in neighbouring Bahrain, where Saudi assisted the Bahraini regime in crushing protests by sending in troops during the Arab Spring. Such epithets are also used for Saudi Arabia’s enemies in Yemen, where the country is fighting the Shia Houthi rebels, and in Syria, where Saudi Arabia has supported several hard-line Salafi-Jihadi organisations as an attempt to oust the Iranian-supported Bashar al-Assad.

Although their aims appear to be far more geo-political than religious ones, Saudi Arabia’s own rhetoric and domestic experience leads any observer towards looking at the regional wars of the Middle East through the prism of sectarian violence. It is a sectarianism that has been ramped up by the prolific presence of several TV preachers propagating extreme anti-Shia views on Saudi TV channels, preachers such as Nabil al-Awadhy, Adnan al-Aroor and Mohammad al-Arefe.

In light of this, it is necessary to question the connection between Saudi official ideology and the recent SIED attacks the country has faced. On 22 May 2015, for example, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a Shia Muslim mosque in al-Qudeih village, in the governorate of al-Qatif in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province, killing 20 and injuring 120 civilians. IS claimed responsibility for the attack, identifying the bomber as Abu ’Amer
al-Najdi,²²⁰ his nom de guerre indicating that the attacker was from Najd, which incidentally is the historical stronghold of Wahhabism.

Mohammad al-Obeid, a brother of one of the victims, confronted Interior Minister Mohammad bin Nayef during a visit he made to families of the victims, saying that the government did not do enough to protect Saudi Arabia’s Shia population.²²¹ In January 2016, al-Obeid was detained by the security forces²²² and as of mid-April 2016, was still being held without charge.

On 29 May 2015, a few days after the al-Qudeih attack, another suicide bomber blew himself up in a parking lot of the Shia Imam Hussein Mosque in the Eastern Province city of al-Dammam,²²³ killing four civilians. A video shows the suicide bomber, who was disguised as a woman and wearing a long black ‘abaya religious dress, blowing himself up as he was pushed away, apparently after being recognised by a Shia man volunteering to protect the prayers.²²⁴

On 29 January 2016, four more people were killed in a suicide bomb attack in the Shia Imam Rida Mosque in al-Ahsa in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province. The attackers were identified as 22-year-old Saudi Abdulrahman Al-Tuwaijri and an Egyptian called Talha Hisham Mohammed Abda.

Terrorism in Saudi is, however, not only born from sectarian intolerance. Saudi security forces have also been targeted, and despite claims that Saudi Arabia partially founded (and funded) IS, the group has itself called for the downfall of the House of Saud.²²⁵ There is, however, a consensus among many analysts that the ultra-conservative and rhetorically sectarian policies of Saudi Arabia have come back to haunt the country.²²⁶ Even the country’s religious credibility gained from being the home of the two holiest sites in Islam, Mecca and Medina, does not seem to have saved the country from terrorist attacks, as evidenced by the suicide bombing in Medina in July 2016.²²⁷

On 29 January 2016, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a parking lot outside a Shia mosque in Qatif, killing only themselves. The same day, another suicide bomber managed only to kill himself outside the US consulate in Jeddah. Local intelligence suggested that the lack of organised training given to these bombers resulted in poor technical skills, which is why civilian lives were spared.²²⁷ However, given that terror groups active in the country seem to be willing to target even the holiest of Muslim sites, coupled with the significant ability of groups like IS to recruit individual attackers, shows that there is reason for concern regarding future SIED attacks in Saudi Arabia.

8.5.3 Exporting Suicide Bombers?

Saudis have, historically, played important roles in jihadi organisations. In fact, Saudis formed a majority of the ‘Arab Afghans’ that took part in the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s.²²⁸ As has been noted in the preceding sections on Syria and Iraq, Saudis also seem to be over-represented in groups like IS, and hold senior positions in several al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. In fact, more than 2,500 Saudis are believed to fight for IS. And an astonishing 60% of suicide bombers in Iraq are apparently Saudi, according to Saudi outlet al-Hayat.²²⁹

Interestingly, a surprisingly small number (6%) of Saudi recruits identified in the IS registration files stated that they had advanced Islamic education; the rest either stated that they had basic or intermediary Islamic education. This is surprising given that religious education is compulsory in Saudi Arabia. According to Saudi analyst Abdullah al-Malki, IS deliberately targets those with poor knowledge or Islam, as they seem to do elsewhere in the world too, since they are more easily convinced of IS’ ideology.²³⁰ It has also been noted that most of Saudi Arabia’s foreign fighters have come from the centre of the country, from regions such as Qassim, which are well known for being conservative, as well as for holding anti-government views.

In an interview in Arabic media, jihadi expert Hudheifa Abdullah Azzam claimed that the Saudis are often preferred by IS for suicide missions as well as for fighting roles, whereas Iraqis are preferred for more strategic positions.²³¹ The feeling seems to be, in some way, mutual. As mentioned, Saudis are the most represented nationality among those volunteering for suicide bombings in the IS registration files.

Jihadism scholar Thomas Hegghammer has suggested that Saudi participation in jihadi activities can be traced to a strong sense of pan-Islamic nationalism, or solidar-
ity, cultivated by the Saudi state. State-sponsored hard-line interpretations of Islam and tribal connections over the Iraqi border may also play a role in this. Toby Mathiessen, an expert on sectarianism in Saudi Arabia, has written that IS and al-Qaeda recruits from Saudi Arabia are often motivated by a desire to contain both Shia and Iranian influence. On a similar note, academic Aaron Zelin has suggested that the influx of Saudis to Syria rapidly increased after the public entrance of the Shia movement Hezbollah in the conflict in 2013.

One example of a sectarian-motivated SIED attacks perpetrated by a Saudi national in Syria was that carried out by Abu Dujana al-Asiri, a suicide bomber acting for either IS or Jabhat al-Nusra (local sources state different groups). He attacked Syrian armed forces in May 2013, and stated in his will that he aimed to cut the heads of all Alawites in Syria. Although the caveats regarding wills should be stressed here, such rhetoric is not entirely different from that of certain clerics present on Saudi TV networks. Adnan al-Aroor, for instance, a man originally from Hama in Syria, and a frequent guest on Saudi TV channels, once publicly promised to ‘grind the flesh’ of pro-regime Alawites and ‘feed it to the dogs’.

Mohammed al-Arefe, who has his own TV show on the Iqraa network, has also said that Shia Muslims are ‘non-believers that must be killed.’ Considering that such statements are permitted on broadcast channels, it is impossible to completely disconnect Saudi domestic policy from the actions of the thousands of foreign fighters the country has either sent or permitted to go abroad, just as it is impossible to ignore the deep similarities between public discourse in Saudi Arabia and jihadi propaganda. Both these things – foreign fighters and propaganda – have played a vital and disturbing role in the rise of the use of suicide bombing, and a large part of that rise can only be understood in the wider context of the political and military actions of Saudi Kingdom.

8.6 Yemen

Like Syria and Libya, Yemen has found itself facing violence in the aftermath of political change in the country after the Arab Spring. The chaos in the country has been taken advantage of by groups like AQAP, and more recently, IS. Moreover, the Houthi insurgency and ensuing Saudi intervention have provided the perfect setting for jihadi groups to advance their positions, often taking advantage of the despair and grievances created by the war. AQAP currently holds large swathes of territory in Yemen, often using their suicide attacks to attack Yemeni military targets. IS has also used it as a military tactic, but has in general targeted civilians to a larger extent. IS has also displayed an ability to adopt more sophisticated tactics in regards to suicide bombings.

8.6.1 SIED ATTACKS IN YEMEN 2011-2015

AOAV has registered 54 SIEDs in Yemen between 2011 and 2015, as recorded in English language media. Even though not all attacks have been claimed by their perpetrator, all suicide bombings that took place before 2015 are suspected to have been AQAP perpetrated, leaving just two attacks not clearly attributable. However, IS has since its arrival in Yemen in 2015 claimed a majority of the attacks.

SIED attacks in Yemen 2011-2015

Attacks committed by AQAP

There have been 49 suicide attacks that AQAP (including Ansar al-Sharia) has either claimed, or that have been attributed to them in the period noted above. 82% of these attacks were directed at military facilities, government buildings, militia checkpoints or politicians. The other nine were directed at Houthi gatherings, a hospital, a school, a market, a protest and a Sheik’s residence. As a result of these attacks, from the 1,723 people reported killed or injured in them, 44% were listed as civilians. AQAP has to some degree been inspired by Jabhat al-Nusra and the group’s governance model, which is why civilian areas are less frequently targeted.

In terms of suicide attack locations, the southern Abyan Province was the most frequently targeted, with 12 bombings. Aden, the acting capital for the Hadi government, was the second most targeted with eight...
bombings. The southern provinces of al-Bayda and Hadramawat both saw seven attacks each, and Sanaa, the capital which has been taken by the Houthis, saw four. Less frequent attacks were carried out in other parts of the country.

**Attacks committed by IS**

IS has claimed 19 attacks since its arrival in Yemen in 2015, although a majority of these have occurred after 2015 and therefore after AOAV’s data collection period. 69% of the attacks have been directed at military facilities, government buildings, militia checkpoints or politicians, and 31% at Shia mosques. Seven of these bombings included coordinated attacks of more than one device. As a result of these attacks, from the 1,203 people reported killed or injured in ISIS attacks, 62% were civilians.

Regarding the locations for IS bombings, Aden was the target of seven attacks, Sanaa saw six attacks, Hadramawt saw five and Al-Bayda was witness to one.

IS in general seems to use a more sophisticated strategy in their use of suicide bombings than AQAP, and seems to be using more complex attacks. For instance, on October 5, 2015, IS used four suicide bombers when they targeted political gatherings being held between Saudi, Yemeni and Emirati officers at a hotel in Aden, killing more than 15 troops. 238

### 8.6.2 YEMENI SUICIDE BOMBINGS IN HISTORY

Yemen’s history with suicide bombings goes back to the year 2000, when Al Qaeda carried out its first known suicide attack. The bombing targeted the USS Cole destroyer, which was at the time being refueled in Aden’s harbour. Seventeen American soldiers were killed and 39 injured. In the following years, Yemen became a fertile ground for suicide attacks.

This was partly down to two reasons: its geographic location and political situation. Jihadis consider Yemen part of the greater Arabian Peninsula, rejecting any manmade borders. Moreover, the political conditions in Yemen have made it the ideal place in the region to carry out a jihadi insurgency. AQAP’s Abu Musab al-Suri has himself alluded to this, citing Yemen as the ideal location for mounting a jihadi insurgency in the organisation’s Inspire Magazine. 239

Moreover, the presence of foreign troops in Yemen has given jihadists justification to launch operations in the country, not only making use of their local followers, but also enticing many foreign fighters to carry out ‘martyrdom operations’ there. In 1992, Al Qaeda carried out in Yemen what is believed to be its first ever attack against the United States by bombing two hotels intending to kill US Marines. Though unsuccessful in killing any US troops, Osama Bin Laden took credit for the attack, attributing it as the reason why the US left Yemen soon after.

On October 12, 2000 Al Qaeda launched its suicide attack on the USS Cole, and in June of the next year, as-Sahab, the Al Qaeda media branch, released a tape featuring Osama bin Laden claiming the bombing and encouraging similar attacks.

In 2009, Al Qaeda in Yemen and Saudi Arabia merged, creating Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Later that year, the United States began its drone campaign in Yemen against AQAP targets. These attacks were commanded by the CIA and JSOC (The Joint Special Operations Command), and not the military; such a directive gained international criticism for their targets and civilian casualties. On September 30, 2011, a joint CIA-JSOC drone attack killed Yemeni-American Anwar al-Awlaki, and in December 2013, a wedding was targeted killing 15 civilians.

All of these attacks helped Al Qaeda both to reinforce their propaganda strategy and to attract young fighters, including some even from the West, in their fight against the United States’ intervention in the region.

During the years that followed, Yemen found itself trapped in political chaos. The 2011 uprising saw the ousting of President Saleh, and his replacement by his vice president Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi. The Houthi rebels, Shia Muslims who opposed the new government, went on to take effective control of the north of the country against Hadi’s government, and the tribes from the South saw their opportunity to re-claim their independent state. In this political turmoil, Al Qaeda took control of the east part of the country claiming their own Emirate, and in January 2015 a Yemeni official confirmed that IS had a presence in at least three provinces in the same area and was actively recruiting.

In March, 2015 a Saudi-led coalition launched air strikes against the Houthi rebels, stating that it was defending the legitimate government of President Hadi. However, the coalition strikes have seen more civilian than armed
casualties, bringing further devastation to an already poor and desperate population. Inevitably, this intervention was to further infuriate elements of the population, and resulted in more foreign fighters travelling to Yemen, searching for a ‘legitimate’ cause for martyrdom.

8.6.3 PERPETRATORS AND RECRUITMENT
As shown, two groups claimed responsibility for those suicide bombings carried out in Yemen over the past 16 years: AQAP (and its offshoot Ansar al-Sharia) and more recently IS, which has been responsible for the majority of attacks since its arrival in Yemen in 2015. Both AQAP and ISIS have used their English media outlets and magazines, Inspire and Dabiq respectively, to spread their message as well as to lure foreign fighters and prospective suicide bombers to Yemen. Other means of propaganda have been video releases and press releases and statements on the groups’ Arabic language communications channels.

AQAP
In the very first issue of AQAP’s magazine Inspire in 2010, Ayman Al-Zawahiri called upon Yemen’s tribes to take action:

In a later issue from 2010, Anwar al-Awlaki, the American and Yemeni Sheikh who was later targeted and killed by a drone attack, was to continue on this theme of rising up - addressing the issue of the American drone attacks and the loss of innocent civilian lives from them. His call was to action: “…we have just seen in Yemen the death of 23 children and 17 women. We cannot stand idly in the face of such aggression, and we will fight back and incite others to do the same.”

More recently, the expansion of the Houthis in the North was used as another justification and recruitment tool in the case of martyrdom, a call that was often framed in a very sectarian language.

In addition, in the same issue of Inspire, AQAP dedicated a whole article on the justification to target non-Muslim civilians and Yemeni soldiers, claiming that they were legitimate targets due their affiliation with Western governments that were responsible for the slaughter of Muslim civilians in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq.
IS in Yemen

IS in Yemen has advocated the same reasons to justify their actions and encourage the martyrdom of its followers as AQAP. However, IS have a more aggressive approach towards the killing of civilians, with a focus in targeting Houthi rebels and supporters, accusing them of being murtaddin or apostates. Under this pretext, in under two years of recorded attacks in Yemen, IS has targeted six Houthi mosques with suicide bombings. And in November 2014, IS dedicated an entire section of the propaganda magazine Dabiq, to Yemenis who carry out suicide attacks on Houthis:

“Sadly, the dominant methodology in Yemen, especially after the so-called “Arab Spring,” was one that prohibited the targeting of the Rāfidī Houthis because they were allegedly “Muslims” excused due to ignorance! (…) For these reasons and others, Shaykh Abū Muhammad al-'Adnānī (…) said: ‘As for Yemen, then O alas for what has come upon Yemen. Alas! Alas for Sanaa. The Rafidī Houthis have entered it, but the car bombs have not roasted their skin, nor have the explosive belts and IEDs severed their joints. Is there not in Yemen a person who will take revenge for us from the Houthis?’”

In March 2015, shortly after the publication of this article, IS carried out a major attack in Yemen, simultaneously targeting two mosques using four suicide bombers. As a consequence, 141 people were killed and 345 were injured; all being civilians except for 4 security personnel. Dabiq promptly published the pictures and a text praising the attack.

8.7 Tunisia

Tunisia has only experienced two suicide bombings between 2011 and 2015: the suicide bombing on a beach resort in Sousse in October 2013, as well as the attack on a bus carrying member of the presidential guard in Tunis in November 2015.

The country has however seen a large number of its nationals travelling to join and carry out suicide bombings for organisations like IS and Jabhat al-Nusra. According to the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries, Tunisian nationals form one of the largest groups of foreign fighters travelling to Syria, Iraq, Libya, Mali and Yemen. Furthermore, in June 2016, Tunisia’s Ministry of the Interior announced that 2,400 Tunisian jihadists were currently fighting in Syria. 80% of these foreign fighters are members of IS, while the rest appear to have joined Jabhat al-Nusra.

Others reports have however stated that the number of Tunisians fighting for IS is as high as between 6,000 and 7,000,243 and Tunisia has been identified as the number one source of IS foreign fighters.244 Some of those radicalised have either returned to Tunisia after travelling to Syria, and some of them have even taken part in terrorist operations. Houssam Abdelli, who carried out the suicide bombing in Tunis in November 2015, had according to some claims travelled to Syria for a short period before returning to conduct his operation.245

In light of this, Tunisia’s status as an exporter of jihadis and suicide bombers makes it an important case study.
Furthermore, the political situation in Tunisia makes it one of the few countries in the region which allows for field studies and interviews with relatives and friends of suicide bombers, which is why AOAV sent a researcher to the country in the summer of 2016. Detailed descriptions of the Tunisian suicide bombers will be provided as case studies in the appendix.

8.7.1 SALAFI-JIHADISM IN TUNISIA

Tunisians have taken part in global jihadi campaigns ever since the 1980s, which saw several Tunisians joining the Afghan anti-Soviet resistance. Tunisians have since fought in Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq and Mali as part of various jihadi organisations.246

This is perhaps surprising given that Tunisia has since its independence from France in 1956 been considered as arguably the most secular country in the Arab world. However, secularist policies were coupled with the imprisonment of opposition groups, and especially those belonging to the Islamist camp. Under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011), 265 members of Islamist Ennahda Party were tried on vague and imprecise charges after unfair trials. In August 1992, they received long sentences, with prison terms ranging from 20 years to life behind bars. Moreover, torture detention centres was also widespread and many Islamist activists were forced into exile.

When President Ben Ali was ousted during the Arab Spring protests in 2011, it opened up the door to many of the Islamist forces that had previously been outlawed and persecuted (such as the Ennahda Party) and several political prisoners were freed. Although most were political prisoners, some of them had previously been affiliated with al-Qaeda, such as Sami Essid. Moreover, for the first time in the country’s history, Salafist political parties were allowed to act openly, and many of the interviewees during AOAV’s research in Tunisia noted the increased involvement of Salafists in public institutions.

However, more radical elements of Salafism had also begun to make themselves present. For example, groups like Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST) began in 2011 to openly promote their activities and to proselytise in poor neighbourhoods in Tunis. AST has been accused of acting as religious police in some neighbourhoods, physically abusing people who violate Islamic values. The Tunisian government has further claimed that the group is behind multiple attacks on the country’s military. Since 2014, restrictions on Salafist groups have increased in Tunisia, which has to some extent made it more difficult for groups like AST to operate in the open. Despite this, AST are suspected for having actively encouraged large amounts of Tunisians to join IS.

8.7.2 TUNISIAN SUICIDE BOMBERS

There are several possible explanations to how Tunisia has ended up exporting so many fighters to groups like Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra. One reason could be the more open policies implemented after 2011, which allowed radical groups to mobilise.247 Another explanation could be that in the eagerness to drain the swamp of Ben Ali’s bureaucracy, the national security apparatus was weakened, which incapacitated the government from adequately monitor newly formed organisations.248 In addition, people have testified to the persecution that some Tunisians feel, citing that overtly religious and suspected Islamist supporters are discriminated against in a manner similar to the Ben Ali years.249

One explanation that seems to be universally accepted is socio-economic deprivation, as most jihadi recruits seem to come from the poor suburbs of Tunis. Further, studies have shown that a lack of jobs and social services are among the top concerns among people aged 18 and 34, which are also the age group that most predominantly joins jihadi organisations. The study was primarily conducted in Tunis suburbs Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen, where 81% of respondents also said that they knew someone who had travelled to Syria. Moreover, 57% disagreed with the government’s decision to list AST as a terror group. Interestingly, only 29% said that they regularly pray or attend a mosque.250

Although these figures are not comprehensive, they epitomise much of the problem with jihadism in Tunisia today. There was widespread belief that economic opportunities would increase after the revolution. However, as that has not been the case and the national unemployment of around 15% is often much higher among recent high-school or university graduates. Many are instead forced to work in ‘low status’ jobs in the country’s informal economy.251 There is also a sense of inferiority and social stigma. People that AOAV interviewed in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen said that they are occasionally stopped by police in central Tunis who allegedly tell them to go back to ‘where they belong’, given the perception of criminality that ensues such neighbourhoods. Such sentiments has led to areas like Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher traditionally being a stronghold for Ennahda and other anti-regime forces, both of which...
seem to have incrementally been replaced by more radical forces.

Jihadi organisations have been very effective in targeting grievances created by lack of economic opportunities in Tunisia, and have according to the people AOAV has spoken with in areas like Ettadhamen managed to recruit youth by offering them a way out of poverty. Besides the salaries that some organisations pay, joining a jihadi group might also function as revenge against the state which has failed to provide opportunities for its citizens. Moreover, given the traditional antagonism between the Tunisian state and conservative strands of Islam, joining a radical Salafist serves as act of ultimate rebellion. Last but not least, groups like IS also offers recruits a standing in which they enjoy status and a sense of fulfilment, which is the direct opposite of what many young unemployed Tunisians feel.

Much of these sentiments and perceptions are found in the case of Houssam Abdelli, who was 28 years old when he detonated himself on the bus in Tunis in 2015. Abdelli was from a poor family, and neighbours and friends that AOAV spoke with said that he was worried about their financial well-being. From Ettadhamen, Abdelli worked as a street seller, selling plants and clothes. According to his friends, he had tried to find a better job, but had had no success. He reportedly drank alcohol and smoked hashish several times per week. Abdelli used to sell his products outside of the El-Guffran Mosque in Ettadhamen, which has become known for its strong Salafi leanings, and it was there his friends say he was convinced by radical clerics to become a jihadi. Abdelli was later arrested due to his affiliation with the mosque, which is likely to have sped up his decision to carry out a suicide attack. It is also believed that Abdelli went to Syria for about three months before his attack, as his friends or relatives did not see him during that period.

Another Tunisian suicide bomber, Sabr al-Ayari, who carried out a suicide bombing in Baghdad in June 2013, showcases similar characteristics. Ayari was originally from Dubrazville, another poor suburb outside Tunis. The neighbourhood is infamous for its crime rates, and Ayari’s brother was a well-known criminal in the area. Like Abdelli, Ayari was concerned over his family’s financial well-being, and struggled to find a job himself. He was not seen as very religious by his friends and family that AOAV spoke with, but was also not known as a criminal or a trouble-maker. Apparently, local Salafists offered him some money, after which he started to attend his local mosque frequently, where he allegedly became radicalised before travelling to Iraq. Detailed descriptions of both Abdelli and Ayari can be found in the appendix.

It should however be noted that socio-economic deprivation is not always a sufficient explanation. For example, several Tunisian teenagers from middle-class backgrounds in Sousse with relatively comfortable lives have left to join either IS or Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria.
As in many other countries, the cases above demonstrate that presence of radical religious ideas are alone not sufficient to inspire someone to commit an act of terror. Tunisia’s particular history of state repression of Islamist organisations has made jihad the ultimate rebellion against the state, which many young Tunisians feel disappointed with. Moreover, the conflict in Libya has increased the presence of jihadi organisations close to the country’s borders, something which may have revitalised Tunisia’s own radical groups. However, the reality is the Tunisia’s production of suicide bombers does not have concise answers, but is as always a matter of assessing each case individually. For further analysis, see the appendix on Tunisian suicide bombers.

8.8 Europe

This chapter aims to shed light on European suicide bombers, which have become more and more commonplace during the last five years. The rise in the number of suicide bombings taking place within and outside Europe by European-born individuals raises profound questions as to how such operations are able to take place and as to why the incidence of such attacks has increased in recent years. Such questions are invariably linked to the issue of home-grown terrorism and remote jihadi radicalisation in Europe.

AOAV has gathered information on 13 European suicide bombers and analysed the reasons behind their decisions to become suicide bombers. The analysis shows that out of 13 European-born suicide bombers, four were Belgian, two were French, one was German and six were Britons. However, many of the suicide bombers came from immigrant families. When looking at their origins, it was discovered that five had Moroccan origins, three were Pakistani, one Kosovar, and one half Kenyan. Nine out of 13 were single, two were married with children, whilst one was married with no children and one was divorced.

When looking at their educational background it was found that six of the 13 had not completed higher education. Four of the perpetrators had a criminal background. Eleven of the examined individuals had travelled to Syria or Iraq, and some of them even committed their suicide bombings there. The families of six of the suicide bombers said they had not noticed any signs of their sons’ radicalisation.

To understand why these individuals became suicide bombers, one needs to take a look at the major reasons and explanatory factors underlying in Europe. These reasons are predominantly issues of identity within diaspora communities, perceived and real issues relating to socio-economic deprivation, and resentment towards the foreign policies of Western countries with regard to the MENA region.

8.8.1 IDENTITY POLITICS AND DIASPORA COMMUNITY

Radicalisation studies often find that one of the key influences in an individual’s radicalisation process is related to the search for identity. This is especially relevant when it comes to diaspora communities. Throughout history, diaspora communities have been especially susceptible to a variety of forms of radicalisation, and this trend is particularly noticeable in the case of second and third generations of immigrants and refugees. These communities normally suffer from what can be termed ‘cultural marginalisation’, which is the process by which they come to feel they lack a cultural sense of belonging, both to their ‘new’ home society as well as their country or origin. These reasons, combined with marginalisation, racism, xenophobia, perceptions of ‘aggressive’ secularism, and the lingering sensitivity arising from the colonial history of inter-societal relations, have become significant factors in explaining the causes of radicalisation.

In the UK, an MI5 briefing note called Understanding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism identified vulnerabilities which contribute to terrorists’ adoption of extremist ideology, which included migrating to Britain and experiencing a perception of marginalisation and racism once there.

Furthermore, the lack of integration or embeddedness (as described by Jocelyne Cesari) in both the home and the host community, mainly affecting the second or third generation of immigrants or diaspora communities, could drive them to join fundamentalist groups. These groups offer them a sense of belonging, affiliation and acceptance, and provide them with social ties and networks. This has been successfully exploited by IS, which offers young Europeans the opportunity a sense of belonging to a ‘country’ (i.e. the ‘Islamic State’) in which they are vital contributors.

In light of this, the phenomenon of foreign fighters burning their passports has become a significant trend, which has exposed the level to which many IS recruits feel that they don’t belong to the nation where they
originating from or reside. As Kabir Ahmed, a British jihadi who detonated himself in Baiji in Iraq on the 7th of November 2014, said: ‘Our citizenship means nothing to us.’

Discrimination against Muslims by non-Muslim communities in Europe (whether the discrimination is real or perceived) is also a source of frustration which heavily contributes to the identity crisis of young Muslims.256 In the UK for example, a study carried out by Abbas & Siddique (2012)257 showed that British Muslims from South Asian backgrounds predominantly do not feel a sense of complete belonging to Britain. This was ascribed to the xenophobia and discrimination they face mostly because of their origin.258

Kabir Ahmed also said that the media in the UK is contributing to the xenophobia and discrimination against Muslims, claiming that it was creating a fear amongst the public and portrays a negative image of Muslims in the UK. Ahmed also believed that the UK’s political right-wing is pushing people to go to Sham, and that the West will not accept Islam until Muslims accept all of the Western moral values, particularly secularism. His argument shows clearly the perceived feeling of a dichotomy between the Western values and Muslim values, a feeling promoted both by Islamic fundamentalists and by far-right nationalist groups. This does not just apply to the, UK also to all of Western Europe.

In addition to this, the status of Islam as a religion in the host countries brings a sense of alienation among the religious Muslim diaspora communities. In Europe, particularly in France, there is a firm belief in secularisation, which has made the Islamic values, rituals and clothing come to be seen as more and more unacceptable. Controversies over the hijab and the burka and the recent Burkini ban have clearly demonstrated this.

Furthermore, the aim to forge a national identity in certain European countries gives the impression of an attempt to minimise cultural or religious differences within society; which some see as depriving diaspora groups from being able to maintain their distinct identities, making them feel threatened, more closed to their own communities, and in a state of defence regarding their customs and traditions. For example, the French jihadi Kevin Chassin, who detonated himself in Iraq on 22 May, 2015 expressed anger with the French notion of laïcité in an IS propaganda film.

8.8.2 FOREIGN POLICIES

As noted by Abbas & Siddique (2012), the negative effects of Western-led interventions and ongoing world events provides significant motivation for the attraction of disenfranchised young people towards extremist behaviour and organisations.259 Such events include conflicts in Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the invasion of Iraq 2003. Increasingly, Syria has come to take on this shape of an ‘epic’ battle between good and evil, which has motivated many to joined armed groups and ultimately becoming suicide bombers.

In the UK, the aftermath of the London 7 July 2005 suicide bombing raised the concerns over connection between UK foreign policy in the Middle East – specifically the invasion of Iraq – with the home-grown radicalism and the threat of al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist attacks on UK soil. When British suicide-bomber Kabir Ahmed, who went to Syria and detonated himself in Iraq, was asked about his radicalisation in the ‘ISIS show’ podcast he said that is was the British government’s actions that radicalised him.

Also, wills from other suicide bombers who were European-born or who carried out their attacks in Europe, highlight the role of the Western foreign policies into pushing them to conduct these acts, at least as a partial motive. In Germany, the Ansbach suicide attacker, who was a Syrian asylum seeker, left a video-recorded will which highlighted his reasons for making the attack, which included the participation of Germany in the US-led coalition that is bombing IS.

The same argument was used by Khaled El-Bakraoui, the suicide bomber responsible for the explosion on a metro train at Maalbeek station during the March 2015 Brussels attacks, who mentioned Western intervention in Iraq as one of his motivations. Bilal Hadfi, one of the suicide bombers in the November 2015 Paris attacks, mentioned in an IS-produced video how Western governments kill Muslim mothers, fathers and children as well as destroying their homes.260

Of course, we should as previously mentioned refrain from taking videotaped wills and declarations at face value. However, frustration over Western foreign policy decisions towards the Middle East, which may definitely merit criticism, does still seem to be a driver and motivation for someone to detonate themselves. For Europeans, this would most likely assert itself as humiliation
both in person and by proxy, as they may perceive Western governments to treat them miserably at home and bombing their fellow Muslims overseas.

8.8.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION AND CHALLENGES

Social and economic deprivation that Muslims in Europe have been suffering from was among the motivations the bombers of the Brussels and Paris attacks expressed. Brussels, for example, is as a city described as very segregated, and some of its immigrant neighbourhoods are considered to be no-go areas even for the police.261

Such neighbourhoods have become neglected by both state and society, and have become migrant ghettos which suffer from unemployment, drugs, alienation, marginalisation and poverty. As a result, these areas have become a fertile environment for jihadist recruitment. The three suicide bombers that attacked Brussels on the 22 March 2016 were from Moroccan backgrounds and lived in middle class or poor neighbourhoods (occasionally described as ‘Muslim ghettos’) in Brussels.262

The same phenomenon is visible in France, which has produced the highest numbers of home-grown terrorists. Such home-grown fighters are often brought up in deprived socio-economic contexts.263 Brahim Abdeslam, another Paris suicide bomber, was unemployed and living on state benefits for a long time with his ex-wife. In general, Muslim minorities in Europe are ranked amongst the lowest economic levels, and the rate of unemployment is high – sometimes twice the average – among Muslim youth. Most of Europe’s Muslims are employed in low-skills and low-paid jobs. Three of the suicide bombers studied in this report were trained as or working as electricians, whilst the others had personal financial difficulties.

Furthermore, the access to quality education remains a challenge for many European citizens with foreign origins.264 Although France has focused on integration initiatives which target youth and aim to improve education levels, employment opportunities and social cohesion, recent studies show that primary and secondary schools are still segregated along cultural, ethnic and religious lines.265 Four out of five of the Paris and Brussels suicide bombers studied for this report did not complete a high level of education. Out of all the 13 European-born suicide bombers profiles profiled, we found that eight of them either did not finish their higher education or did not go to college. Five of them were alternatively interested in studying Sharia and Islam.

8.8.4 OPPORTUNITY FACTORS FOR RADICALISATION

Opportunity factors for radicalisation are identified as the venues or the locations that offer an opportunity to meet like-minded people, or which provide an environment in which to change and become radicalised. The most common of these locations are mosques, prisons and online/offline communities.

Local mosques

The role of mosques in the process of radicalisation and in jihadi recruitment in Europe is controversial. In some European countries, especially in a country such as France, the mosques are seen as a place for radicalisation, mainly because they receive funds from radical overseas benefactors. This prompted former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls to call for a temporary ban on foreign funding of French mosques, especially related to funds coming from Morocco, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia.266 The concern over the role of the local mosques in radicalisation have increased in France since the killing of a priest at a church in Normandy267 in July 2016 by two IS supporters, who are believed to have grown sympathies for IS in a mosque in France. In December 2015, the French authorities shut down 20 mosques across the country for the suspicion of preaching radical Islam and advocating fundamentalist interpretations Islam.268

Mosques in the Muslim-majority Molenbeek neighbourhood of Brussels – the home of many jihadists and Belgium’s biggest jihadi recruiter Khalid Zerkani – were threatened with closure by Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, who threatened to shut-down “certain radical mosques” in the district.269 Many mosques in Belgium are receiving funds from Saudi Arabia, which fosters and promotes strict and occasionally intolerant and hateful interpretations of Islam. After the co-ordinated attacks in Paris and Brussels, the Belgian government expressed concern over the inflammatory sermons of Khalid Alabri – the previous director of the Islamic Centre in Brussels – to the to the Saudi ambassador. Khalid Alabri was later deported back to Saudi Arabia.270

However, this does not mean that local mosques are the only site of radicalisation, and many of the European jihadi travelling to Syria and Iraq have never visited a
mosque. For example, two of the Brussels suicide bombers, Khalid and Ibrahim El-Bakraoui, were never reported as worshippers at any of Brussel’s mosques. Khalid el-Bakraoui was reportedly not interested in religion until he went to prison.

In the UK, the Islamic Tarbiyah Academy, a private school in Dewsbury, has been seen as an interesting case of possible radicalisation of students of Islamic studies. The Islamic Tarbiyah Academy was established by Mufti Zubair Dudha, a Deobandi preacher. The materials that were produced by the school focused on promoting an Islamic way of life and emphasized the disassociation of Islam from ‘Western lifestyle’ and values. Dewsbury has become known for being a centre for the radicalisation of Muslim youth in the UK, and for producing suicide bombers such as Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the London 7/7 bombers, and Talha Asmal, who blew himself up in Iraq in 2015.

**Criminal Background and time spent in prison**

The relationship between criminality and radicalisation is a complex one. The violent aspect of terrorism and jihad attracts some criminals, but also attracts those who have a sense of regret for their previous criminal acts. The aforementioned MI5 briefing note mentions that some radicalised individuals ‘appeared to have turned to violent extremist groups in the misguided belief that participation in jihad might help atone for previous wrongdoing’. Furthermore, for people with criminal backgrounds, a sense of acceptance and tolerance might in some cases only be found among radical communities, perhaps as a result of them already hosting people with similar backgrounds. Four out of the 13 suicide bombers that we have studied had criminal backgrounds and had previously spent time in prison. Two of them were apparently radicalised inside the prison.

Kabir Ahmed, who blew himself up in Iraq in 2014, had for example spent time in prison. According to the interview he made with the ‘ISIS show’ while he was in Syria, being in prison made him embrace jihad. Ahmed said that he spent months in his cell contemplating the struggle of other Sunni Muslims in war-torn countries, whilst he was leading a quite comfortable life. That guilt allegedly led him to join the jihadi cause in Syria and Iraq.

The link between criminality, time spent in prison and engagement in jihadism, can be extended to the whole of Europe, and is connected to several of the cases that we have studied. Khalid el-Bakraoui, one of Brussels suicide bombers, served some time in prison for criminal charges. According to IS publication Dabiq, he was inspired to take up jihad in prison after having had a vivid dream during which he saw the Prophet Muhammad.

Redeeming the self from old sins is often used by IS to promote martyrdom, often in the sense of a suicide attack. In the case of a German ex-military soldier who converted to Islam, joined IS and detonated himself in Iraq, Dabiq claimed that the soldier who once fought against the Muslims in Afghanistan had redeemed himself from his previous life in the eyes of Allah, by becoming carrying out this attack and becoming a martyr.

Inevitably, offering a sense of redemption for people who are stuck on a crime-filled path is a very efficient. Conversely, it may also be useful to entertain the thought of the people with criminal pasts might be more willing to join jihadi organisations since their way of life might actually suit partaking in the massive criminal syndicates that that the largest terror groups in the world have become. Certainly, there is truth in both stances.

**The Internet and Online/Offline Communities**

The internet and in particular social networks are offering to extremists the capability to communicate, collaborate, convince and recruit. IS has successfully used this tool in order to recruit and communicate with European youth to convince them to join the Islamic State. It is estimated that approximately 4,000 people from the European Union have joined IS in Syria and Iraq, of which around 850 people are from the UK. Talha Asmal, a 17 year-old teenager from Dewsbury and the youngest recorded British suicide bomber, was for example believed to have been recruited by IS online.

In 2015, 59 girls were believed to have left the UK for Syria to join IS. This led the Home Office to launch the Research, Information and Communications Unit, with the aim of countering IS’ online propaganda. The exact number of young people recruited over the internet is unknown, however the use of the internet to recruit and lure is evident in many cases.

It has also been found that family members may provide opportunities for radicalisation. The vast majority of people joining IS are recruited by family or close friends; four out of the 13 cases that AOAV examined have demonstrated cases of siblings going through a radical-
isation process or planning a terrorist attacks together. The UK-born suicide bomber Fatlum Shalaku, who blew himself up in May 2015, was encouraged to go to Syria and join IS by his brother Flamur, who later died on the frontline in Iraq.

A similar scenario occurred in relation to the Brussels attacks which were carried out by Khalid and Ibrahim El-Bakraoui, two brothers. Likewise, Ibrahim Abdeslam, who blew himself up in the Paris attacks, planned the attack with his brother Salah Abdeslam, who was also supposed to blow himself up that day but ended up not detonating his device.

The support of a terrorist’s wife is also shown in one of the cases: Mohammed Rizwan Awan, who blew himself up on 21 March 2016, had planned his trip to join IS with his wife Sophia, who joined him for the trip and has not returned to the UK since.

8.8.5 COMMUNITY RESPONSES AND REFUSAL
AOAV analysis of the 13 cases found striking similarities in families’ responses to their sons’ and relatives’ radicalisation and subsequent suicide attacks. In 6 cases of the European-born suicide bombers, the families denied that they had observed any signs of radicalisation. In the case of Bilal Hadfi, who was one of the Paris suicide bombers, his mother denied that she had seen any sign of her son’s radicalisation, although she withheld the information about her son leaving for Syria in 2014. She also denied that her son was acting of his own will. Instead, she accused IS of luring him into carrying out this act. She also remarked that she was relieved her son didn’t kill anyone but himself.

Both the mother of Bilal Hadfi and the mother of of Ibrahim Abdeslam believed that their sons did not have any intention to kill people. Whilst the mother of Bilal Hadfi admitted that she missed out her son’s radicalisation signs, the mother of Ibrahim Abdeslam blamed stress for his behaviour.

In another case of a UK-born suicide bomber, Talha Asmal, the family released a statement where they denied seeing any signs of radicalisation. Rather they blamed IS for using Talha’s vulnerability and innocence. The former MP for Dewsbury and former government minister Shahid Malik, a friend of the Asmal family, expressed similar sentiments.

The same can be seen in the case of Mohammed Rizwan Awan, where the family claimed that they had never noticed any signs of radicalisation and the father was reported as saying that he always encouraged his children into further education and employment and to pursue good professions, which according to him “makes the behaviour of Rizwan even more difficult to understand.”

In the cases examined by AOAV, one in particular stands out as an outlier: the case of British Abdul Waheed Majid. Majid blew himself up in 2014 in order to release the prisoners of Aleppo central prison in Syria, an alleged torture chamber for anti-regime fighters and activists. The brother, Hafeez Majid, showed considerable pride in his brother’s act and said that had it not been for his ethnicity and religion, his brother would have been treated as a hero for having released the prisoners. Waheed’s radicalisation appears to have occurred through a different process to those involved in the other cases, as he first travelled to Turkey to volunteer in a refugee camp for several months, before learning of the situation regarding torture in Aleppo. The details of this case highlight the varied nature of individual motivations for carrying out a suicide attack, suggesting that although many cases of radicalisation and suicide bomber recruitment have significant similarities, not all appear to fit the same model.

Mohamed Abdeslam, the brother of Brahim Abdeslam (a Paris suicide attacker) and Salah Abdeslam, (who was involved in planning the Paris attacks), said that he and his family had no idea that the two brothers were radicalised, and that they were in a state of shock after hearing of the acts that their family members had participated in. According to Mohamed Abdeslam, he and his family found out about his brothers’ radical path through news reporting in the aftermath of the Paris attacks.
Although information on individual suicide bombers is occasionally limited, some recently leaked documents offer insight into the people who join a terror organisation, as well as those who voluntarily sign up to conduct a martyrdom operation. The documents in question are the IS registration files, which were smuggled out of Syria by a former IS fighter. Although the documents only represent one organisation, it is one of the few large collections of data available through which some common basic traits can be identified.

The data consists of over 22,000 IS documents, all of which were application forms filled by those seeking to join IS. 4,173 individual applicants were identified in the files. The standard application form consists of 23 questions in Arabic and is stamped with an IS logo. The application forms, titled Bayanat Mujahed (‘the jihadi’s data’) appear to have been collected at an IS border crossing into Syria at the end of 2013.

An analysis of the leaked documents found that a typical IS fighter was male, 26 years old, single, reasonably well-educated but did not possess much knowledge about Islam and the Qu’ran.

Nationalities

The fighters in this dataset represent a remarkably diverse population, hailing from over 70 countries. However, there are two indicators in the form from which one can derive the nationality of the fighter and these are: nationality and the country of residence, and the following is the highlight of these numbers:

Out of the 4,173 applicants, 3,244 indicated their citizenship. Among these, the highest number of recruits came from Saudi Arabia (579), whereas the second most represented nationality was Tunisian (559). Other well-represented nationalities were Moroccan (240), Turkish (212), Egyptian (151), and Russian (141).

Out of the 4173 applicants, 4,000 indicated their country of residence. Again, Saudi Arabia was the most represented (797), followed by Tunisia (649), Morocco (260), Turkey (244), Russia (210), and Egypt (194).

Age groups, marital status and education

The average age of an applicant was 26 to 27 years old. 61% of these prospective IS fighters stated that they were single, whilst 30% were married.

The leaked documents indicate that applicants’ educational level ranged from everything from completely uneducated to doctoral degrees. 33% applicants stated that they had a secondary level certificate, whereas 28% said they were at university or college level, and 17% said they had been educated to elementary or middle school level.

Recruits were also required to answer questions about their knowledge of Islam and the sharia, choosing from three options: basic, intermediate, and advanced. A surprising 70% of applicants said they had only basic sharia educational level, whereas 23% said their level was intermediate. Only 5% said they had an advanced level of sharia education.

Prior jihadi experience and preferred fighting role

Application forms also enquired about the prospective members’ previous jihadi experience, including the location where this jihad had taken place and if the applicant had references who would recommend him. Interestingly, only 9.6% answered ‘yes’ on this question.

Three options were given in the application forms so that prospective IS members would choose whether they wanted to be soldiers, suicide bombers (İstishhadi) or İnhimasi fighters. 89% of the applicants selected to be fighters, whereas only 7% of the applicants selected to be suicide bombers; 5% said they preferred to be İnhimasi fighters. Apparently, these choices may be overruled by senior commanders in accordance with the group’s needs.

9.1 The 121 suicide bombers

Only 5%, or 121 individuals, found in the documents voluntarily signed up to be suicide bombers. Although this sample is small, it provides us with some key traits and characteristics among those willing to die for IS.
In short, most of these individuals were generally well educated, mostly single, below the age of 30, and had little knowledge of sharia. The most common nationalities were Saudi (32), Tunisian (25) and Moroccan (18).

Age, marital status and education
69% of applicants said they were below 30 years old. 69% of the applicants also said they were single, including 24 out of the 32 Saudi nationals and 20 out of the 25 Tunisian nationals.

74% of applicants said they held a secondary school certificate or a university degree. Those who said they had a university degree included 12 of the 32 Saudi would-be suicide bombers, 10 of the 25 Tunisians, and all three Lebanese nationals identified. On the other hand, 13 of the 18 Moroccan would-be suicide bombers said they only had an elementary education.

When asked about their knowledge of Islam, 72% of applicants requesting to become suicide bombers said they had basic knowledge of Islam and the sharia, including 23 of the 32 Saudi applicants and 16 of the 18 Moroccans.

9.2 Child suicide bombers
In June 2016, a council member of the Diyala Province said that a statistical study by the province’s authorities showed that half of the suicide bombers who blew themselves up in Diyala were Iraqi teenagers recruited by IS. Most of these suicide attackers where relatives or sons of IS commanders or members.

According to the leaked IS documents, almost 400 recruits were under the age of 18, with 41 of those being 15 or younger when they arrived. However, this data only affirms the already existing information on IS’ use of children. According to a study that analysed data collected between January 2015 and January 2016, there were children who were presented by official IS reports as “martyrs”. Out of the 89 cases featured in this study, 39% died upon detonating a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) against their target.

Receiving training to become a suicide bomber is one of the many roles that children are being prepared for, according to “Children of Islamic State”, which looks into IS mobilisation of child recruitment and training for Jihad. Children are reportedly being used as Inghimasi fighters too.

In August 2016, a 13 year-old child wearing an explosive belt attempted to detonate it in the city of Kirkuk. Security forces managed to prevent him and the Iraqi police announced that Ashbal al-Khilafa (‘Cubs of the Caliphate’) were behind the attack attempt. In March 2016, a child aged 16 carried out a suicide attack in Alexandria town in southern Baghdad, which resulted in the death of 43 people, most of whom were children.
Between January and November 2016, AOAV provisionally listed 236 suicide attacks globally, as reported in English language media. At the time of publication of this report, these figures were being crosschecked to ensure accuracy and to ensure that immediate survivors of these attacks were not recorded as later having died. Nonetheless, these terror strikes resulted in 11,621 deaths and injuries, a 19% increase on the same period in the year before.

With these negative trends in mind, is there a chance that 2017 might offer some respite: a hope of less, not more, deaths from suicide attacks?

Unfortunately, not much indicates it. Instead, most calculated predictions point to there being more, and deadlier, suicide bombs than ever before.

Of course, it is important to note that suicide bombings, over the past six years, have not fluctuated dramatically on the global stage. Between 2011 and 2016 – the period that AOAV’s data stretches over - the year with the highest amount of suicide attacks, 2013, had 270 attacks. In comparison, the year with the lowest, 2011, had 205.

What is concerning, though, is that suicide attacks are – it seems – becoming more expertly targeted and, in turn, deadlier. By mid-December, 2016, the average number of civilian casualties per attack stands at 38. This compares to 24 in 2014.

The very fact that the armed group Islamic State (IS) is losing territory is also likely to cause an increase next year in suicide attacks - with large numbers of civilian casualties following. Such attacks have already taken place from Paris to Jakarta, and are both a result of top-down decision-making by IS leaders, as well as a desire among IS supporters to ‘avenge’ the Caliphate.

In 2016 alone, IS has claimed over 1,000 ‘martyrdom operations’. Such figures are difficult to verify and are probably overstated, but the group has certainly increased suicide operations, both as a result of lost territory, but also through their defence of Mosul. There is no reason to think 2017 will be any less. IS boasts a long list of willing martyrs for the cause.

In addition, in Syria both IS and other groups such as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham have, throughout the conflict, gradually shifted their suicide attacks from predominantly targeting armed actors to targeting civilians. It is likely that populated areas lived in by people perceived as supporters of the Syrian regime will continue to be targeted in 2017.

Iraq may also see a bleak 2017. Admittedly, although Iraq is the one country in the world that has been most heavily affected by suicide bombings, levels of attacks there today are lower than they were between 2005 and 2007. However, in 2016 suicide bombings in Iraq increased for the first time since 2013; compared to last year civilian casualties of suicide bombings were up by 118%. Although much of this is due to the Mosul operation, it is likely that Iraq will see more suicide attacks in 2017. The country is still IS’ home-base, and is also the country where the group has traditionally committed its most lethal suicide bombings, such as the Khan Bani Saad suicide bombing in July 2015 and the Baghdad bombing in July 2016.

The arrival of IS into Afghanistan may also mean more large-scale suicide bombings in urban centres there, both as reactionary attacks but also as a result of rivalry with the Taliban. IS suicide attacks in Afghanistan have also, so far, been conducted along sectarian lines, something which the country has been relatively spared from thus far. If this trend continues, it does not bode well.

Libya could also have a worse year for suicide attacks. The ongoing civil war, along with the fact that IS has lost important territory in country (and as such might resort to defensive suicide bombing methods), combined with the presence of ever-fresh jihadi recruits from next-door Tunisia, means that it is likely to continue to see suicide bombings in 2017.

Turkey has already seen several high profile suicide bombings by both IS and Kurdish separatists, both of which the country is now fighting in Syria. As a result of this intervention, Turkey is likely to continue to see suicide bombings in 2017.
Pakistan’s future is also uncertain. Despite ‘successes’ in combatting terrorist groups in the country in recent years, there was a 114% increase in civilian casualties of suicide bombings in 2016, compared to the same period in the year before. It is likely that, as certain groups in Pakistan continue to be pushed back, more retaliatory suicide attacks may occur there in 2017.

Finally, there is the ever-present threat of suicide attacks in Western Europe. IS will ‘likely’ carry out new terror attacks across Europe, including suicide bombings – a fear expressed by the EU-wide law enforcement agency, Europol. Intelligence services estimate that dozens of jihadists under IS’ direction are already in Europe alongside other “lone wolf” terrorists who have no direct contact with the group. While this might be scare tactics designed to bolster national security funding, if the recent past is anything to go by, suicide bombings will likely remain part of Europe’s future.

Yet, despite these dire predictions, there is a frustrating lack of focused, constructive energy in the global community to address the rising use of suicide bombings. The use of aerial explosive weaponry to target insurgents has, repeatedly, been shown to act as a strong recruitment driver for terrorist groups. As AOAV regularly records, over 90% of those killed or injured in air strikes are civilians, and their surviving relatives are all too often radicalised following the explosive blast.

Suicidal violence is not, though, guaranteed. But it requires dynamic action to prevent future rivers of blood. Far more needs to be done in recording the impact of suicide strikes; more needs to be done in understanding how to prevent would-be bombers getting their hands on pre-cursor materials; Islamic scholars and Imams, as well as politicians and diplomats, need to be more vocal in their condemnation of the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons against civilians; and funding needs to be found to ensure that civil society, businesses, trade officials, police units, UN agencies, militaries and any other key component of the counter-IED networks come together to respond imaginatively and creatively to this terrible weapon.
11. PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

This section will offer some tangible suggestions as to what can be done to reduce the number of suicide bombings and their impact globally.

Quelling the cult: stopping suicide bombings
One thing is clear - there are no easy solutions to either terrorism in general or suicide bombings in particular. However, based on the traits displayed by the suicide bombers examined in this report, it is possible to identify certain key issues that need to be addressed in order to address the rising cult of the suicide bomber. In order to understand how to limit the spread of suicide attacks, though, there is virtue in first trying to understand if suicide attacks, indeed, achieve the end goals that they seek to achieve.

We know that – as described above – before 1980, suicide attacks were largely carried out under military orders and were motivated by a form of acute nationalism or political ideology. That between 1980 and 2001, suicide attacks changed, driven by a response to perceived or real iniquities carried out by forces or governments (often liberal democracies) occupying the attackers' homeland. And that since 9/11, most suicide attacks have been carried out for reasons largely framed under the banner of Salafist-Wahhabism jihadism, and that the spread of this ideology today has turned the use of suicide attacks into the form of a growing and pervasive death cult.

It is important to note this shift in motivations and reasons behind suicide attacks, because they what might have worked in the past in addressing the rise of the suicide bomber might not work in the present or the future.

The failure of the Kamikaze
For instance, the use of the Kamikaze in the Second World War was a powerful weapon against the might of the US military. Despite not being specifically strategically of merit (they did not, in the end, sink as many ships as many might think and were certainly not a tangible threat to the Pacific fleet), the sustained attacks on the US fleet still sent shock waves of fear through the rank and file.

It also entrenched a mind-set in the US High Command that saw in the suicidal willingness of the Emperor's troops to die no matter what, the dark shadows of a long and drawn out war through Japan's mainland. Such a concern about the cost of a protracted guerrilla war in American soldiers' lives was to harden the US' resolve. And in this way, the use of atomic weaponry to break the back of Japan's Empire was condoned at the Oslo Agreement. The end game of this was that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were to see ‘ruin rain from the sky’. The two bombings, which killed at least 129,000 people, remain the only use of nuclear weapons for warfare in history.

Such a nuclear Armageddon was to crush the Japanese will to continue fighting. On August 12, just three days after Nagasaki, the Emperor informed the imperial family of his decision to surrender. In his declaration, Hirohito referred to the atomic bombings: 'Moreover, the enemy now possesses a new and terrible weapon with the power to destroy many innocent lives and do incalculable damage. Should we continue to fight, not only would it result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization.'

In essence, when faced with the small but destructive power of the Japanese suicide bomber, the US brought out the most destructive weapon ever invented. It took a nuclear weapon to stop the use of the Kamikaze.

Such a lesson from history tells us two things. First, that when confronted with mentalities that are so extreme as to die in the pursuit of an ideal, the measures taken to combat such mentalities might have to be extreme in themselves. Second, that there is a real danger that, to coin the legendary phrase, that in order to save the city you have to destroy it. Certainly, using such an extreme weapon as the nuclear arsenal to crush the rise of the suicide bomb in Iraq or Syria is not a viable solution today. The transnational and dispersed nature of today's perpetrators of suicide bombers means that they cannot be so easily defeated by conventional weaponry. The US high command resorted to atomic bombs (and the Sri Lankan government ended up bombing civilian areas with impunity so as to stem the attacks against them). As such, there is – in this report's opinion – little of merit to be learnt from the historic confrontation of the Kamikaze.
Attacks against liberal democracies
Between 1980 and September 11, 2001, there were at least 188 suicide attacks globally. Such attacks tended to follow an attempt to force liberal democracies to make territorial concession. In this way, suicide bombers attempted to forced US and French forces to leave Lebanon (1983); Israeli forces to leave Lebanon (1985); Israeli forces to quit the Gaza strip and West Bank (1994 and onwards); the Sri Lankan government to create a Tamil state (1990 and onwards); and the Turkish government to grant autonomy from the Kurds in the late 1990s. Of these attempts, the only one that appears to have ‘worked’ – at the time of writing - was in Lebanon.

The case of Lebanon
The Multinational Force in Lebanon suffered its greatest number of casualties on October 23, 1983 when Shia suicide bombers driving two truck bombs loaded with the equivalent of six tons of TNT plowed into the U.S. and French barracks in two simultaneous attacks, killing 241 U.S. servicemen and 58 French paratroopers.

America eventually ended its participation in the Multinational Force at the end of March 1984. President Reagan said at the time: “Once the terrorist attacks started there was no way that we could really contribute to the original mission by staying there as a target just bunkering down and waiting for further attacks." The rest of the alliance left Lebanon in April 1984. Later that year 20 people were killed after the US embassy was attacked by another suicide bomber.

Gen. Colin Powell later aptly summarized the whole military misadventure: “Beirut wasn’t sensible and it never did serve a purpose. It was goofy from the beginning.” Regarding this ‘goofiness’, a few things are worth noting when trying to understand how suicide attacks worked in the case of Lebanon.

First, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff were unanimously opposed to the deployment and Regan did not have Congress’ approval. This lack of political support meant that there was no stomach for a prolonged and drawn out engagement in Lebanon, particularly with the ghosts of the Vietnam War still very fresh in the minds of many politicians and generals.

Second, the US force was effectively neutered in terms of engaging with the enemy. As Reagan said at the time: “Their mission is to provide an interposition force at agreed locations," but “in carrying out this mission, the American force will not engage in combat." As such, there was no ‘fight back’ after the bombings. Reagan never retaliated against Hezbollah or their Iranian and Syrian sponsors responsible for the bombings, a position widely endorsed by senior military officials. As then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. John Vessey declared: "It is beneath our dignity to retaliate against the terrorists who blew up the Marine barracks."

Third, there appears to have been a very mixed understanding of what the US forces’ primary goal was. Reagan contended that they would “assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in carrying out their responsibility for ensuring the departure of PLO leaders, officers, and combatants in Beirut from Lebanese territory,” and “facilitate the restoration of the sovereignty and authority of the Lebanese Government over the Beirut area.” He added: "In no case will our troops stay longer than 30 days." On Oct. 28, 1983, however, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger contradicted this, saying: "What we need is a multinational force until certain conditions have been achieved. Nobody knows when those conditions can be achieved. It is not an open-ended commitment." Overall, sending US Marines to Lebanon for such an imprecise and unachievable end-state was a tremendous mistake. And it was more a lack of domestic political will and a reluctance to expand the operation that led to the US withdrawal, than the power of the suicide bomber.

Nonetheless, Lebanon is a relatively rare case where suicide attacks appeared directly to work when they were used against an occupying force (other cases include Soviet use of suicide attacks in World War II, North Koreans in the Korean War and the Viet Cong in the Vietnam war).

Overall, suicide attacks do not appear to have worked against an incumbent government by a minority force (eg. In the case of the Tamil Tigers and the PKK). And they have yet to be shown to work by a supranational terrorist force (insofar as the Caliphate has yet to be established).
In short, it is worth noting, then, that a lack of political will supporting the force under attack from suicide bombers, a poorly defined mission, and the case of a foreign force with feet in a foreign land all increase likelihood of suicide bombers achieving their goals.

Stopping the drivers of suicide bombings
In addition to understanding how military forces ‘lose’ against suicide bombers, it is also worth understanding what factors drive suicide bombers and what measures might be taken to address these drivers.

Preventing Human rights abuses
It is clear that human rights abuses against opposition groups and repressive policies against non-violent Islamist parties in the Middle East have fuelled the attractiveness of ideological extremism and the desire for revenge.

These abuses must cease. The vast majority of Middle Eastern countries producing suicide bombers have a history of oppressing political dissidents, including Islamist groups. A large portion of today’s jihadi commanders have spent time as political prisoners, including Abu Muhammad al-Jolani and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It is a cliché that violence breeds violence, but state violence against non-violent groups is perhaps the most common foundational motivation among today’s Salafi-Jihadi groups. More inclusive and democratic procedures are needed to keep people off of the path of jihad.

Stopping the spread of Islamophobia
In the West, social cohesion needs to be promoted between different faith groups. Furthermore, the issue of Islamophobia must be taken seriously. Whether real or perceived, it demands more attention given that almost every Western suicide bomber has seen Islamophobia in the West as foundational element to their actions. Even though Islamophobia is a soft concept that might be difficult to prove, the comparatively high levels of unemployment and widespread socioeconomic deprivation among Europe’s Muslim communities are statistically proven. Programmes promoting integration in both the educational and professional sector are needed across Western countries to ensure social inclusion of young Muslims.

Targeting individuals vulnerable to extremism
Does understanding why people are radicalized or understanding the process they tend to undergo before committing their suicide attacks have value in developing solutions to prevent future harm? Does early community interventions and vigilance from families, schools or mosques help identify those young people ‘at risk’ from being radicalised and weaponised?

Such questions are crucial to understanding the degree to which engagement with community and religious leaders may reduce the number of radicalized youth in an area, but the answer to such questions are notoriously hard to gauge.

One of the main challenges to answering these questions is the issue of cause and effect. It is hard to prove that interventions absolutely work – especially when the end goal is the absence of something (extremism) rather than the presence of something. The other challenges is that there are, as this report has laid out, many diverse drivers of extremism. Indeed, the breadth of countering violent extremism was highlighted when the then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon revealed the UN’s plan of action in January, 2016. Over 70 recommendations were made for member states, ranging from development policy initiatives, good governance, human rights, to youth empowerment, gender equality, and the role of social media. And yet, despite these wide range of intervention, hard and fast correlations between improving structural development factors (such as high unemployment or low levels of education) and reducing terrorism are at best unclear and often contraindicated.

Nonetheless, countering violence extremism programmes have become rapidly institutionalised within national bureaucracies, and internationally through bodies like the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund. But there is no clear agreement on the alternative ideology to be promoted, and the charge of hypocrisy against the West and its allies is an ever-present problem.

In addition, the fight against extremism can often be blind to the very grievances that stoked the extremism in the first place. Promoting a vision of tolerance, for instance, sounds to many insincere when it is juxtaposed against media headlines that chronicle deepening xenophobia in the West. And the perception that certain communities are being targeted can also stigmatise and alienate. Overall, policymakers should disaggregate even the most radical movements and look for opportunities to end violence, not lump others in with them.
The first wave of countering extremism in the West was generally aimed at building community resilience to extremist ideas. This was usually a case of trial and error—with far more lessons on what not to do than examples of what worked. As such, and increasingly, the “battle of ideas” approach is being dropped in favour of more individual-level interventions so as to address specific cases of radicalisation. It is, in this space, clearly necessary to find more efficient ways to identify vulnerable individuals and to empower them in a manner that turns them away from terrorism. In some instances, this might mean giving them fulfilling employment. In others, it may mean preventing someone from criminal activities, which may lead to radicalisation. What is clear is that, just as every suicide bomber is diverse, preventive methods will need to be diverse as well.

**Diffuse extremist messaging**

Religious extremist messages promoting violence must be prevented from being diffused, both on social media and in mosques around the world. To some this might seem naïve, but if the suicide bombings, torture and murder videos as used by ISIS, for instance, were viewed with the same judicial repugnance as images of paedophilia, then there might be a way to address the spread of such black propaganda.

It is clear that the impact of violent videos as a propaganda tool is well known by terror groups. Indeed, IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi said in July 2015 that their group would desist from filming the actual moment of execution (though it will continue to show the moments before and after), indicating that even the terror group knows there are limits to their social impact.

Of course, it is difficult to prove that the filming of violent deaths has helped fuel suicide bombings. But what is striking, as the editor of this report has already expressed in the Guardian Newspaper, is that there are far fewer international legal restrictions on someone watching clips of a suicide bomber’s last moments compared to, say, viewing the sexual abuse of minors. Websites like LiveLeak.com just post a warning sign to viewers before they click through to images showing intimate death.

This begs the question: why is not more being done to attack this pornography of violence? While Facebook has a system called PhotoDNA that scans photographs then matches it with a police database in order to combat child pornography, when it comes to torture and violent murder the company relies on users complaining about such images. Google, similarly, has a zero tolerance approach to child sex abuse imagery, and shows warning messages for more than 13,000 search terms related to it. The same does not apply, though, to search terms such as suicide bombings or beheading.

But could blocking the dissemination of viscerally violent films reduce the impact that such films have? And in so doing might it reduce the use of such filmed torture? Imposing a “child pornography” approach to censoring terror videos could possibly limit the suicide bomber’s impact, even leading them to shift away from such graphic, public statements.

Of course civil liberty advocates will argue against the use of censorship. But, then again, there are few voices speaking out against the banning of viewing child pornography, so why not against watching the videos of suicide bombers targeting civilians?

**Support or engage with Islamic leaders in theological, non-violence debate**

First and foremost, preachers and mosques inciting violence or recruiting for jihadi organisations must be prevented from doing so. This needs to be done delicately, nonetheless. In the interest of free speech, ultra-conservative religious messages should be able to be expressed so long as they do not incite violence or recruit for jihadi groups. Past mistakes include stigmatising Salafi and other conservative communities based on the belief that their beliefs automatically lead to violence, which is both incorrect and counter-productive to C-IED strategies.

Nonetheless, it must be recognized that faith communities are among the most important partners in the struggle against terror, and although it might be difficult for intelligence agencies identify where Salafism ends and jihadism begins, followers must not be made into suspects solely on the basis of their faith.

In this way, there is merit in repeated engagements with opinion makers in the MENA religious hierarchies, in order to seek to express to the wider Islamic world the merit of non-violence.

One of the most interesting recent instances of such engagement, for instance, was the 2010 New Mardin Declaration, where an international conference was convened in Turkey over two days. It was designed to re-examine Ibn Taymiyah’s famous ‘Mardin fatwa’. Dozens of high-profile Islamic scholars from various
countries including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, India, Senegal, Kuwait, Bosnia, Iran, Morocco, Mauritania and Indonesia attended the conference, which was held in the historic city of Mardin. The conference was aired live on Al Jazeera television.

The famous ‘Mardin fatwa’ was given in the early 14th century by Islamic scholar scholar Ibn Taymiyah, against the Mongol rulers of the town. It has been used by some extremist groups such as Al Qaeda to justify terrorism. The way Ibn Taymiyah denounced the Mongol rulers of his time, who claimed to be Muslim to placate those whose lands they had taken over, has provided justification for some radical groups to denounce Muslims they view as less strict as ‘apostates’.

The scholars at the meeting agreed that this seven-century-old religious opinion has been taken out of context. It is being misinterpreted today and misapplied to the political realities of the modern world. They stressed the original fatwa did not designate Mardin as an abode of war, but rather asserted that non-Muslims needed to be taken care of as opposed to attacked. Overall, the conference unanimously announced that ‘nothing can justify terrorism and indiscriminate murder in the name of Islam… actions of terrorist groups are not jihad but arbitrary murder.’ The conference also noted that Islam ‘unequivocally forbids indiscriminate killing and murder,’ and that ‘terrorists are destroying their own faith and disparaging the honor of Islam.’

Such a meeting alone would have little deep impact, of course. But if there was a concerted and repeated effort to bring Islamic scholars together again and again, across time and space, to debate issues such as the use of suicide as a form of attack, the targeting of civilians as justified in Islamic teachings and the use of fire as a weapon, it would, this report contests, have merit. The intellectual and theological findings from such meetings should have PR support to ensure that they are widely reported on – perhaps teaming up with international media outlets to achieve impact.

Scrubtnise the impact of western foreign policy

Policy-makers should seriously assess the impact Western foreign policy has had on the Middle East in order to avoid past mistakes. This does not mean to surrender and accept the conspiracy-laden narrative presented by jihadi organisations. Neither is it realistic to assume that Western policies towards the region going back for decades can be completely altered. However, policy-makers should aim actively to factor in a potential future terrorist backlash whilst assessing partnerships with totalitarian regimes, and potential armed intervention in the region.

This includes the inadvertent arming of future jihadi groups though the US’ and other states’ uncontrolled supply of arms and explosives to militaries and police in the Middle East. For instance, AOAV’s analysis of a wide range of open source data reports showed that the US government has sent at least 1,452,910 small arms to Iraq and Afghanistan (949,582 for Iraq; 503,328 for Afghanistan) between September 11th, 2001 and September 11th, 2016. Such inadvertent supply of weapons to the Middle East must cease, if peace in the region is to be gained.

Furthermore, the use of drone strikes by the US and other Western governments has been shown, repeatedly to fuel support for Salafist-jihadism. As of end of February, 2017, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, a London based investigative unit, has recorded at least 2,017 US drone strikes, killing between 6,149 and 8,834 people. Of these at least 734 were civilians (at most 1,389), and between 240 and 305 of these were children.

In addition, AirWars, another London-based casualty counting outfit that monitors civilian casualties from international airstrikes in Iraq, Syria and Libya, has recorded 18,662 coalition Strikes (11,276 in Iraq, 7,386 in Syria) over 929 days. In that time, at least 2,405 civilians have been estimated killed by the US-led coalition, with over 69,337 bombs and missiles being dropped.

Such an amorphous and endless ‘war on terror’, claiming so many civilian lives, plays into conspiracy theories: Washington wantonly kills innocent Muslims across the globe, jihadists argue. Carrying out secret drone strikes worldwide with no explanation bolsters their claims. And holding prisoners for years in Guantanamo Bay without trial bolsters extremists’ argument that the US honours basic rights for its own citizen but ignores them for others.

Response to drone strikes is varied. Revenge is often targeted at those within the easy range of extremists (this means that in places such as Pakistan, those who are harmed by US drones strikes are often Pakistanis). The victims of these revenge terrorist attacks also often consider the drone strikes as being responsible for the violence. Consequently, both terrorists and ordinary people are drawn closer to each other out of sympathy.
This is against the logic of any successful counter-terrorism policy – which is to win over public confidence so that they join in the campaign against the main perpetrators of terror. To this end, public outrage against drone strikes circuitously empowers terrorists. It allows them space to survive, move around, and maneuver.

Such a debate is not one just held by liberal anti-war activists. Robert Grenier, the former head of the C.I.A.’s counterterrorism center, has warned that the American drone program in Yemen has risked turning the country into a safe haven for Al Qaeda like the tribal areas of Pakistan – ‘the Arabian equivalent of Waziristan.’ While the politician Imran Khan has said that drone attacks in Pakistan are ‘fomenting radicalisation’ and called on the US to name victims to prove they are killing terrorists, not civilians.

In light of this, drone and air strikes should be conducted with extreme caution – for every child killed by one pushes the father closer to the suicide vest, and every father killed by one sends the son.

Encourage peace building in the MENA region and beyond

The most important challenge in terms of quelling the cult of the suicide bomber lies in stopping the conflicts in which the vast majority of today’s suicide bombings and their casualties are found. Even though some of the problems identified above may persist, there would not be such an arena for widespread suicide bombings if the conflicts plaguing the Middle East today did not take place.

In the Middle East, terrorism is at an all-time high, battle deaths from conflict are at a 25-year high, and the number of refugees and displaced people are at a level not seen in 60 years.

Saudi Arabia’s plan for a Muslim alliance against terrorism – announced at a press conference in Riyadh early in December 2015 – was purportedly designed to display determination to fight the jihadis of Islamic State and to help the West do so. But key details about how it will work and whether it will even involve military forces on any front lines have been unclear from the get-go. The alliance goes beyond the obvious candidates in the Gulf and Egypt to include Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia as well as Nigeria, Mali and other African countries. It conspicuously excludes Iran and Iraq – supporters of what the Saudis call “Shia terrorism” – and Syria, where Riyadh backs rebels fighting to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. It also excludes Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim country, as well as Oman, the most independent state in the Gulf.

Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi foreign minister, said the coalition would share intelligence and deploy troops if necessary, but there has been little evidence that they have followed up the announcement with tangible actions.

Of course, many NATO states – and beyond - seek to peace-build in the MENA region. To do so, they often focus on liberal state-building activities, seeking to induce democratization, economic growth and the use of multilateralism and cooperation to implement region-building. This is based on a belief that peace can be built by eliminating poverty and the surrounding lack of opportunity, by creating democracies, and by transforming relations between states through cooperative links. After at least two decades, however, this approach has failed to work.

Partly, this is because a ‘functionalist-liberal’ approach does not correspond with the political reality of the Middle East – specifically the Arab states. The extent to which the regional system is amenable to integration and cooperative relations is questionable as the region’s actors operate in a very different way. In addition, while many NATO states hold a liberal vision of peace and a practical, reform-oriented process of peace-building, traditional Arab-Islamic notions of conflict and its resolution do not match these. They are based more on immediate conflict resolution, and seek a return to the status quo, rather than seeking wholesale transformation and reform.

In light of this, peace-building initiatives in the MENA region need to reflect the cultural conditions of the region, and not be a simple ‘sticking plaster’ of western sensibilities.

Bolstering CIED capacities

More needs to be done to fund specific CIED work in the Middle East and beyond. This intervention needs to be imaginative and nimble, able to respond to developing trends and threats. CIED work needs to spread beyond demining operations – any Attack The Network approach has to acknowledge that the network is built on cultural and ideological grounds, and that a militarized approach to preventing suicide bombing only goes so far. More on this can be read in the separate report published under this trilogy of reports – Addressing the threat posed by IEDs.
**Record the impact of suicide bombing**

Far more needs to be done in recording the impact of suicide strikes. Without a substantive evidence base funds on both a national and supranational level cannot be easily argued for.

Casualty recording the number of people killed or injured by suicide attacks is a crucial practice for the respect of human dignity, for the sake of surviving family members, and for the establishment of facts. It also brings additional benefits. Publicly accessible casualty records that are transparent, detailed, and reliable are critical towards providing accountability, and can positively contribute to post-conflict reconstruction and stability.

Such records can humanize victims, reduce the space for dispute over numbers killed, help societies understand the true human costs of war, and support truth and reconciliation efforts.

Research by AOAV has also shown that casualty recording is also valuable during conflict. Casualty data can feed into humanitarian response planning by helping to identify areas of risk and need, and contribute to the protection of civilians. Casualty records can also play a role in mechanisms that support increased compliance by conflict parties with the law and reductions in civilian harm from their actions.

More details on this can be found either at Action on Armed Violence’s website (www.aoav.org.uk) or at the Every Casualty website (www.everycasualty.org), from which the above position is taken.

**Addressing the spread of pre-cursor materials**

In addition to recording the deaths and injuries from suicide bombings, far more needs to be done in understanding how to prevent would-be bombers getting their hands on pre-cursor materials. AOAV undertook a major analysis of pre-cursor material and their role in IED creation – Material Harm – found on our website. In it, AOAV recommended the following:

All states should increase efforts to control access to the components of IEDs, including addressing the transfer and trade of illicit materials.

States should sign up and support the work of Programme Global Shield, and should provide resources to ensure its continuing survival.

As a matter of urgent priority states should share purchase information of large or suspicious transactions of precursor materials between countries and its law enforcements, as well as the industries that produce and sell precursor materials.

States and the private sector should both give and ask for support to secure stockpiles of explosives and detonators in the mining and construction industry need greater security.

States and the private sector should work together to create a database containing detonator manufacturers and the characteristics of their detonators, such as serial numbers or other distinguishing markings, would be beneficial to the international community. Such a database would allow detonators to be traced back to their point of origin.

States, the private sector and international organisations should create a greater awareness that unsecured stockpiles, whether fertiliser stockpiles, stockpiles of commercial or military explosives and detonators, is a source for those who manufacture IEDs.

Securing stockpiles must be a high priority for invading forces and states involved in armed conflict. Stockpiles must be guarded to prevent those who wish to make IEDs from accessing the material.

**Securing funding**

Finally, in order to achieve these recommendations outlined above, significant funding needs to be found to ensure that civil society, businesses, trade officials, police units, UN agencies, militaries and any other key component of the CIED networks come together to respond imaginatively and creatively to this terrible weapon. Without there being a coherent, co-ordinated, well funded and systemic approach to combating the rising cult of the suicide bomber, then there is little hope that the spread of this weapon will be curtailed.
12. CONCLUSIONS

The main findings of this report are that:

A
Suicide bombings have become a more widespread and pressing form of violence in the past five years. AOAV’s data has, between 2011-2015, a recorded 1,191 SIED attacks, which caused 39,910 deaths and injuries. Although suicide bombings are predominantly found in areas experiencing armed conflict, 79% (31,589) of all casualties were civilians. In 2016, five countries had 84% of all suicide bombings: Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey.

B
The worst current perpetrators of suicide bombings are IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, the Taliban and Boko Haram. All operate in conflict areas, where they either act as a party in war, armed conflict or in an armed insurgency. Furthermore, they have their ideological base in Salafi-Jihadism. Although suicide bombings are still being carried out by nationalist-separatist groups (such as the PKK), suicide attacks are today almost exclusively used by ‘Islamic’ terrorists.

C
Conflicts in Syria and Iraq have seen suicide bombings increasingly being employed as a military strategy, where groups like IS and Jabhat al-Nusra occasionally replaces conventional weapons with suicide bombers. The increase use of and the militarisation of the tactic have also led to groups ‘producing’ suicide bombers at alarming rate. IS in Syria has in particular proven effective as both a producer and an ‘exporter’ of suicide bombers. Jabhat al-Nusra is probably the only group that ‘leases’ suicide bombers to other groups, which they have done in order to help other Syrian rebel forces in order to take out Syrian regime fortifications.

D
Context affects targets. Although most perpetrators of SIEDs predominantly target civilians, there are differences between the ratio of armed or civilian casualties between different groups and different countries. For example, in Yemen, AQAP targets military facilities with 69% of their suicide bombings. In Iraq, IS targets armed bases in 37% of all of its attacks, whereas almost half of the groups’ SIED attacks in Syria targets religious minorities. The majority of Jabhat al-Nusra’s suicide bombings in civilian areas target perceived regime supporters. Suicide bombings are indiscriminate in terms of the wide area blast they create, but are discriminate in the sense that they can accurately select targets with relative ease. This is why target locations reflect their perpetrators’ aims and strategies. Moreover, in order to assess the threat of suicide bombings, there needs to be an appreciation of the contextual differences facing each country, region and city.

E
The cult of the suicide bomber is complex and almost paradoxical. In one sense, the bomber is lionised, eulogised and held up as a hero. In another sense, the bomber is an expendable resource. Suicide attacks carried out by jihadi organisations are often strategically calculated and planned by high commanders, a process in which the bomber does not take part until the very last stage.

F
The suicide bomber cult born from Salafi-Jihadi movements goes against several prohibitions in Islam, but rationalises the act of suicide and the killing of civilians through a number of ways. Although religion is the filter through which this rationalisation is expressed, most justifications focus on solidarity with the Islamic community, honour, and the virtue of martyrdom. The concept of martyrdom is, of course, framed in a religious manner and has long been present in Islam, but is in itself not unique for religious terrorist groups. Ironically, ‘martyrs’ appear to be becoming less and less lionized martyrs by the groups they give their lives for. IS, the Taliban, Jabhat al-Nusra, AQAP and Boko Haram today often only release short (if any) statements about a given suicide operation, thus moving away from the traditional iconic hero portraits presented by groups like Hezbollah.
Suicide bombings are portrayed by those who assist their perpetration as being a legitimate defence of the Muslim umma. Such rhetoric is rooted in a paranoid black-and-white world-view that is very present in Salafi-Jihadism. It is a world where everyone not adhering to their views is seen a legitimate target, largely due to their perceived threat to Islam. This is usually how attacks on Shia Muslims and other religious minorities have become justified and commonplace. Sectarian attacks, however, may also have a strategic purpose. Oftentimes, fighting a sectarian war serves the interests of groups like al-Qaeda and IS, with them using it to galvanise support from Sunnis. This has worked in Iraq, where IS’ violence provoked the increased presence of Shia militias, whose own sectarian tendencies have further polarized the two sects. Moreover, in Syria Jabhat al-Nusra has targeted Alawites, Christians, Druze and Shia neighbourhoods due to their perceived support for the Syrian government.

Each suicide bomber is unique. It is impossible to make sweeping statements about suicide bombers. However, certain traits are commonly found. Greater social aspirations, paired with economic woes as a result of governments being unable to provide economic opportunities, inevitably create political malaise. Often, this serves as fertile soil from which a sense of discrimination, humiliation, disenfranchisement, as well as a desire for redemption and status, grow. For foreign fighters, conflicts over identity in their diaspora communities often add another dimension to the mix.

Local suicide bombers are often motivated by personal experience. For example, several suicide bombers experienced harassment by regimes in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. Becoming a jihadi, and ultimately a suicide bomber, may be seen by some as the best way to protect one’s home community from the horrors of war. Therefore, one should to some extent refrain from mystifying certain individuals’ radicalisation processes and subsequent decisions to become suicide bombers, as it might be seen as their pragmatic solution to what they see is a hopeless situation.

Foreign fighters often have more ideological reasons for becoming a suicide bomber. Usually, this does not include religion, as many studies point to foreign fighters having a poor understanding of Islam. Instead, there is often a desire among foreign fighters to take part in a clash of civilisations, the reality and importance of which is convincingly presented by jihadi propaganda. To many, jihad is a way to avenge the perceived humiliation experienced by Muslims at the hands of corrupt regimes or what they see is a hawkish Western foreign policy. Humiliation occurs ‘by proxy’, as foreign fighters feel more affiliation to Muslims in the Middle East than to their home countries in the West. This is, in turn, driven by insecurity related to identity, as well as perceived humiliation and discrimination against Muslims in the West. Furthermore, a notable portion of suicide bombers coming from abroad have either been involved in crime or have been unemployed. This makes martyrdom more appealing, as it serves as both atonement and redemption for past crimes as well as status and a sense of purpose.

Regarding those who join jihadi organisations based on religious beliefs, which does occur, these zealots could be divided into two camps: those who have a historical affiliation with jihadi groups or ideology, and those who, after the Arab Spring, have come to the conclusion that the participatory approach promoted by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood has failed and that a violent approach that rejects such participation is the best option.

Recruitment can occur through online platforms, and is increasingly being done in this way. This does not mean that personal connections to jihadi movements are not important. However, even when personal connections are present, online recruitment often plays, at least, an additional role. Prisons and detention centres, both in the Middle East and Europe, have also played a part in many notable suicide bombers’ radicalisation process.
13. APPENDIX: INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

13.1 Analysis of ISIL recruitment files

The files examined in this section were passed to AOAV on a memory stick that held part of a large cache of documents, which were stolen from the head of Islamic State’s internal security police. The man who stole the files was a former Free Syrian Army fighter who had converted to IS during the course of the Syrian civil war. He was disillusioned with the leadership of IS, which he claimed has now been taken over by former soldiers from the Iraqi Baath party of Saddam Hussein. He claims the Islamic rules which he previously believed to underpin IS as an organization, have now totally collapsed within the group, prompting him to quit.

The documents to be explored here, are questionnaires for would-be IS recruits, listing their real names, their fake names, who introduced them, their countries of origin or residence, experience of jihad, education, date and place of birth, date of arrival in Syria, route, phone number and additional details about the potential recruit’s family.

Nationals from at least 51 countries had to give up personal information as they sought to join the organisation. The questionnaires that seem to make up the bulk of the documents cache were filled out in November and December 2013. The eventual value of the documents may lie primarily in offering insights into the patterns of recruitment at the time, including which countries the volunteers were mainly drawn from. A drawback however, is that the documents represent only a snapshot from 2013, and recruitment patterns may have changed as IS became better known in Europe over the following years.

Many of the men passed through a series of jihadi ‘hotspots’ - such as Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia, Libya, Pakistan and Afghanistan - on multiple occasions, but were apparently unchecked and unmonitored by various authorities, and were able to enter Syria to fight and then able to leave Syria to return home.

One of the files obtained as part of the larger cache – and the most extensively analysed here – was marked “Martyrs”. It detailed a brigade manned entirely by fighters who wanted to carry out suicide attacks and were trained to do so.
13.1.1 REGISTRATION AND EXIT FORMS
The ISIL registration sheet, which reads right to left as Arabic does, requested the following details:

| Name | 1 |
| Nickname | 2 |
| Mother’s name | 3 |
| Blood group | 4 |
| DOB and Nationality | 5 |
| Single ( ) | 6 |
| Married ( ) | 7 |
| Number of children ( ) | 8 |
| Civil status | 9 |
| Address and place of residence | 10 |
| Education level | 11 |
| Level of Sharia law knowledge | 12 |
| What was your occupation before arrival? | 13 |
| What countries have you visited and how long have you spent there? | 14 |
| What crossing did you enter through and who facilitated the crossing? | 15 |
| Do you have a recommendation? If so, from who? | 16 |
| Date of entry | 17 |
| Have you previously engaged in jihad? If so, where? | 18 |
| [Do you apply to become a] Fighter, Suicide Bomber or Suicide Infiltrator? | 19 |
| Fighter ( ) | 20 |
| Legal ( ) | 21 |
| Police ( ) | 22 |
| Administration ( ) | 23 |
| [What is your prior] Specialism? | 24 |
| What is your current place of work? | 25 |
| What possessions did you leave behind? | 26 |
| What is your level of hearing and ability? | 27 |
| What are the contact details [of your next of kin?] | 28 |
| Date of death and location | 29 |
| Notes | 30 |

The IS exit registration sheets are simpler:

| Name | 31 |
| Nickname | 32 |
| Nationality | 33 |
| Place of work | 34 |
| Specialism | 35 |
| [Responsible] Prince’s name | 36 |
| Date of entry | 37 |
| Date of exit | 38 |
| Reason for exit | 39 |
Would-be suicide bombers: number of nationals applying to ISIS to carry out suicide bombing (from a total number of 149).

Saudi Arabia (21%), Tunisia (19%) and Morocco (10%) were the three most represented nationalities.

Number of nationals applying to carry out suicide bombing:
- Saudi Arabia 26
- Tunisia 24
- Morocco 13
- Turkestan 9
- Egypt 8
- Libya 8
- Turkey 5
- Syria 4
- Jordan 3
- UK 3
- Algeria 2
- Azerbijan 2
- Indonesia 2
- Pakistan 2
- Australia
- A Gulf nation (unspecified)
- Germany
- Kazakhstan
- Kuwait
- Palestine
- Spain
- Sudan
- US 1

Would-be suicide bombers

81% under 31 years

75% applicants holding a secondary school certificate or a university degree.

70% applicants who were single (the remaining were either married or their status was unknown).

68% applicants who said they just had a basic knowledge of Shari’a (only 3% had an advanced knowledge).
13.1.2 METHODOLOGY
Of the 149 suicide volunteer cases, 146 were identified from registration forms and the remaining three were identified from exit forms.

Suicide volunteers include all registrants who indicated their wish to be a ‘suicide bomber’ or ‘suicide infiltrator’ or both. The Arabic term inghimasi or ‘suicide infiltrator’ is a relatively new term.294 The basic distinction between a suicide bomber and a suicide infiltrator is that suicide bombers attack an enemy target from outside, whereas suicide infiltrators attack enemy targets from within, by first infiltrating enemy positions before detonating their device.

For exit forms, suicide bomber was listed under the field ‘Specialism’. The researcher uses the term ‘suicide martyr’ as a catchall referring to either suicide bombers and suicide infiltrators.

The following colour coding applies to the spreadsheet based on the information obtained from the cache of documents.295 BLACK text is information directly translated from the forms, such as Date of Birth, Nationality and Date of Entry etc. BLUE text is data which was created through calculation (e.g. age at entry) or through the researcher’s reliable inference (e.g. age at entry into ISIL territory calculated from birth date and entry date, and the nationality of the person who recommended that subject, estimated from regional name variations). The column ‘Prior Affiliation’ was created to reflect cases where the applicant mentioned the group to which they previously belonged in the notes. It does not have its own field in the ISIL forms. RED text indicates suspected data entry error on the part of ISIL.

In the source documents, dates are presented in two calendar forms: Gregorian and Hijri. Where they originally were presented in Hijri, they were converted into Gregorian using the online converter http://www.islamicity.org/Hijri-Gregorian-Converter/ Family details – including the family address and family contacts – were removed by the researcher to protect their privacy.

The forms appear to have been sourced from several ISIL border points with different data handlers, reflected by inconsistent data entry. The manner in which inconsistencies were handled depended on the category. Further explanation of how inconsistent data was handled is discussed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil status</td>
<td>‘-’ is used where no status is mentioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality and</td>
<td>The old region of Turkestan is cited on numerous occasions. Merriam-Webster defines it as the “region cen Asia between Iran &amp; Siberia; now divided between Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, China, &amp; Afghanistan”.296 In other words, Turkestan does not match any single recognised state in present day. So, for Country of Residence, where the modern nation state could not be identified from the city mentioned, it was entered as Turkestan. ‘Jaziri’ and ‘Jazaouli’ was sometimes given as the nationality for individuals who stated residence in Saudi Arabia. The terms literally are adjectives meaning ‘of the Arabian Peninsula’ but are also used to refer to the Jazaouli, a tribe which extends across Gulf borders. Since Jazaouis are largely Saudi nationals, and where the individuals also resided in Saudi, the terms have been taken to refer to Saudi Arabia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation?</td>
<td>‘-’ is used where neither Yes or No is given or in the case of exit forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommender</td>
<td>The documents do not explicitly state the nationality of the recommender. However, many were reliably inferred from the nickname given, where the nationality was obvious e.g. ‘Ahmed the Moroccan’. In many cases the nationality was unclear as not all Islamists indicate their nationality in their chosen nickname. In the case of recommenders who had Jazaouli as part of the nickname, unlike for the column nationality, they were not assumed to be Saudis since there was no other information to corroborate the belief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nationality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at entry</td>
<td>Calculated from DOB and Date of Entry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other roles applied for Specialism</td>
<td>These are roles listed by individuals in addition to ‘suicide bomber’ or ‘suicide infiltrator’. The meaning of this field is not entirely clear, but is believed to mean skills gained through prior training or jihad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13.1.3 ANALYSIS

149 individual, male, prospective suicide bombers were identified from among 146 registration forms and three exit forms. Three of those also specified a preference to be suicide infiltrators. All sign-ups took place between 2012-14 and no female suicide martyrs were identified among the documents.

The vast majority of registrants entered ISIL territory through ISIL’s northern crossings, along the northern Syrian border with Turkey.

Again, the vast majority (77%) of registrants joined the group when they were between the ages of 20 and 31, with an average age of 26.

Of the registrants, the majority were single (70%) and most (76%) had no children. Of those who did have children, the majority had either one or two. In other words, they did not have large families to the extent that is common in the Arab and Islamic world.

Saudi Arabia (21%), Tunisia (19%) and Morocco (10%) were the three most represented nationalities in the data. The total population size of Saudi Arabia and Morocco is greater than 30 million in each of the two countries, whereas Tunisia only has a population of around 10 million people. Therefore Tunisia, far outdoes any other nation in terms of the number of jihadists exported relative to population size. We examine Tunisia’s role as an origin of suicide bombers later in this report.

Nationals and/or residents of the West (including Western Europe and Australia) were represented in only 9 cases, representing just 7% of the recruits. Only one US national was registered to become a suicide bomber. The typical education of a suicide martyr is secondary level (58%), followed by university (25%) and then primary level (10%). Not all secondary and university students completed their studies.

In perhaps the most surprising statistic, only 3% of suicide martyrs said they had advanced knowledge of Sharia law. The majority (68%) described their knowledge of Sharia as ‘basic’.

Occupations prior to joining ISIL were varied, but the largest proportion (29%) were either students or unemployed. The top five other professions represented in the dataset were all unskilled.

ISIL’s system of endorsement (or recommendation) of new recruits by known religious figures is a system used in order to prevent infiltration by spies and facilitate entry to the group. The vast majority (88%) of the 146 registrations joined with a recommendation. In 80% of those cases, the recommender’s nationality matched the individual’s country of residence. This suggests having a network of foreign agents (or endorsers) is critical to recruitment from outside ISIL’s territories since the process is more parochial than cosmopolitan.

Only 13% of registrants declared any prior experience of jihad. Of those, the majority (70%) experienced jihad in Syria or Libya, with the majority (67%) gaining their experience with Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.

Only 5 of the 146 registrants specified a prior specialism, all of whom had experience in combat.

**Age, civil status and children**

The age at sign-up could be identified from 138 of 146 records.

The average age was found to be 26. The median was 24 and the spread as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age bin</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 45</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 144 cases where the applicant’s civil status was identified, the majority were single.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civil status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total (144)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 individuals of 144 individuals who completed the civil status field indicated they had children, which represents...
23.61% of registrants. The vast majority (76%) had no children. Among those who did, the majority had one or two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of total (146)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>76.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nationality and residence**

The nationality of 124 individuals was identifiable. Among the 13 countries represented, Saudi Arabia (21%), Tunisia (19%) and Morocco (10%) are the most represented.

It is likely that the number of Saudi nationals is significantly higher. 11 individuals who identified as residing in Saudi Arabia did not specify their nationality. However, a look at the family name strongly suggests (but does not confirm beyond doubt) that they are Saudi nationals. If assumed to be Saudi nationals, the proportion rises to 30%.

Tunisia, whose population size is just over 10 million (2013), outdoes any other country for percentage of suicide martyrs exported relative to its comparably small population size.

Nationals or residents of the West (western Europe, Australia and the US) were represented in only 9 cases, representing 7% of the total number of recruits.

**Education, Sharia knowledge and Occupation**

The education level was identifiable for 130 individuals, with secondary and university educated individuals accounting for over 80% of registrants. However, not all secondary and university level registrants had completed their studies at the point of joining.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total (130)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>57.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher (diploma)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The level of Sharia law knowledge was indicated by 125 individuals. Of these, the majority (68%) indicated a basic knowledge of Sharia, followed by 29% saying they had intermediate knowledge.

Only 3% indicated an advanced knowledge of Sharia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Sharia law</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total (125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>68.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Occupation prior to joining**

Unsurprisingly, there was a highly varied spread of occupations prior to joining IS. 140 registrants responded to this field, with the remaining 9 having not answered the question.

The top occupations were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation prior to joining</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total (140)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual worker</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security guard</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction worker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data shows that the top occupations prior to joining IS were primarily unskilled.

**Recommendation to join ISIL**

Of 146 completed registration forms, the vast majority of recruits (88%) said had they received a recommendation (or endorsement) to join ISIL.
The spread of nationalities among the 81 IS Recommenders named in the documents was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommender nationality</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total (81)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tunisian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libyan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkestani</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijani</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algerian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagestani</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwaiti</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyz</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemeni</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See Methodology for an explanation as to why the figure is significantly lower than expected.

**Previous jihad, affiliation and specialism**

Of 146 individuals, 20 indicated having previously embarked on jihad, representing 13.70% of registrants. None had previous experience of jihad in more than one country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of previous jihad</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan (Kashmir)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan (Waziristan)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 20 with prior experience, only 6 indicated the jihadi group to which they were previously affiliated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior affiliation</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of total (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jabhat al-Nusra* (Syria)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansar al-Sharia (Tunisia/Libya)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (Syria)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Falcons Brigade* (Syria)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.87*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*One individual indicated experience with both Jabhat al-Nusra and Sham Falcons Bridge).

5 registrants of 146 (representing 3.42%) mentioned a specialism, presumably gained through previous experience or training. 100%, or all 5 of these individuals, mentioned a specialism in combat. Of them, 60% (3) noted prior jihad experience. It is assumed that the remaining 40% (2) had training in combat without having the opportunity to put it into practice during jihad.

Only 4 of 146 individuals indicated any desire to undertake a role other than ‘suicide bomber’. Of them, 2 indicated a desire to also be combat fighters, 1 ‘a suicide infiltrator’ and another as both.

**Prior travel and entry**

56 did not indicate that they had visited another country previously. 89 did list one or more countries. Again, there is great variation with regard to the countries visited, but a few stand out – namely Libya, Egypt and Turkey. It is unclear whether those countries were visited en route to joining ISIL or for other reasons. As is clear from the statistics on ‘Entry point to ISIL territory’ (below), most of the registrants entered through ISIL’s northern borders in Syria. It would therefore be unsurprising if Turkey is mentioned as part of the route of travel to jihad.

139 individuals indicated through which border point they entered Syria before reaching ISIL-held territory. The majority (66.18%) entered through the Jarablus or Tell Abyad crossings, and the vast majority or crossing points cited are located in norther Syria.
### 13.2 Suicide Bombers from Europe

#### 13.2.1 Overview of the March 2016 Brussels Attacks Bombers

On March 22, 2016, twin suicide bombings hit the main terminal of Brussels Zaventem International Airport, before a third suicide bomb exploded at Maelbeek metro station in the centre of the city, close to the European Union (EU) institutions. The explosions killed 32 and injured 340 people. The initial two blasts took place at the airport at 07:58, whilst Maelbeek metro station was struck at 09:11 local time, with the explosion taking place on a train departing in the direction of Arts-Loi. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attacks, and the suicide bombers were named by the press as Ibrahim el-Bakraoui, Najim Laachraoui, and Khalid el-Bakraoui.

Ibrahim El-Bakraoui was responsible for the first explosion in the departure hall at Zaventem Airport, killing 11 people and injuring more than 90. Ibrahim El Bakraoui is the brother of Khalid El Bakraoui, who was responsible for the later bombing at the Maelbeek metro station.

Ibrahim, a Belgian national of Moroccan descent, was 29 years old when he committed the attack. Ibrahim grew up in Laeken, a residential, working class suburb in the north-west of Brussels, not far from the Royal Palace. His father is a retired butcher and a devout Muslim who emigrated from Morocco, and his mother is conservative Muslim woman. Both Ibrahim and his brother did not finish high school.

In the years prior to the attack, Ibrahim has been involved in violent criminal activity – in 2010, he robbed a Western Union branch in central Brussels and shot a police officer. Ibrahim was sentenced to nine years in prison for attempted murder in August 2010, and received parole in October 2014. According to his uncle, Ibrahim committed the robbery for a purely financial motive.

Shortly after his release, Ibrahim was detained in June 2015 in the western Turkish city of Gaziantep, close to the border with Syria. The Turkish authorities have stated that they notified Belgian security officials at the time that they had detained him, warning that he was a “foreign terrorist fighter,” and putting him on a plane to the Netherlands, at his request. Later, The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had given the Dutch police information on the radicalisation of both Ibrahim and his brother. The FBI said that they had been tracking the pair since September 2015, and informed the Dutch police that both brothers were wanted – Ibrahim for his criminal background and Khalid for “terrorism, extremism and terrorist recruitment”.

Dutch authorities reportedly received the information from the FBI on the March 16, 2016 – a week before the Brussels attacks – and passed it on to the Belgian authorities. Hours after the attack, the Belgian authorities found explosives and bomb-making equipment (15kg of TAT explosives, 150 litres of acetone, 30 litres of oxygenated water, detonators, nails and screws, glass vials, plastic and ventilators) in the house where the two brothers lived in the Schaerbeek district of Brussels, along with IS flag.

In early March 2015, the police had raided an apartment in Forest that was rented by Ibrahim’s brother Khalid, in order to search for Salah Abdeslam, who was one of the Paris attackers. The police killed Mohammed Belkaid, an accomplice of Paris attackers, and Abdeslam was soon arrested. The arrest of Abdeslam possibly put pressure on Ibrahim and left him anxious that he might
also soon be caught by the authorities. Ibrahim left a will on his computer in a form of an audio file, addressed to his mother, in which he said “I don’t know what to do. I’m in a hurry. I’m on the run. People are looking for me everywhere. And if I give myself up then I’ll end up in a cell next to him.” It is not clear if the word “him” was a direct reference to Abdeslam or not. Ibrahim was reportedly worried about what might happen to him if he was captured by the Belgium security forces. The laptop where he left the file was found in a bin in the neighbourhood of Schaerbeek.

Najim Laachraoui (Brussels Attacks, March 2016)

Background of suicide bomber

Najim Laachraoui was the second suicide bomber involved in the attack at Zaventem Airport. Najim was born on May 18, 1991 in the town of Ajdir, Morocco, and was the oldest of five siblings. His family moved to Schaerbeek in Belgium, which is considered amongst the poorest communities in the country and has a long history of racism. Najim attended a Catholic school from the ages of 12 to 18. After that, he was a student of electrical engineering at the Université Libre de Bruxelles during 2009-2010; he dropped out of this university but continued studying electromechanics at the Université Catholique de Louvain from 2010-2011. Najim also worked at Brussels airport for five years until 2012, however there has been no official confirmation clarifying his employment or detailing the type of work he carried out. Unlike the other two suicide bombers involved in the Brussels attacks, Najim did not have a criminal history.

As a teenager, Najim was interested in Sharia – when he was 18 he wrote a paper for his religion class in school on how Islam views slavery; he also wrote another paper on stoning, and about punishment for adultery under Sharia. The primary aim of the assignments was to defend Islam, and Najim was hoping that Islam would not be judged harshly for such practices. By his last year of high school, he had adopted the dress favoured by Salafist Muslims, which meant rolling his trousers up to above his ankle, growing a beard and refusing to shake the hands of women.

In 2013, Najim left for Syria and joined the IS, as confirmed by IS itself in the 14th issue of Dabiq magazine. He was also one of the men who held four French journalists captive for months in Syria. Two of the former hostages, who spent 10 months in captivity and were freed in April 2014, confirmed that he was the jaller and that he was known by the name Abou Idriss. He was at that time in charge of interrogating the hostages and was apparently less brutal to the prisoners than Mehdi Nemmouche, who was another jailor with him in Syria.

When the dispute between Jabhat al-Nusra and IS occurred, Najim was part of Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen, a group led by Abu Atheer al-Abisi, and Najim was one of the first men from that group to pledge allegiance to IS caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He also participated in several battles against the army of Bashar al-Assad (described in Dabiq magazine as the Nusayri regime) and against Jabhat al Nusra – he was injured in his leg during a battle in Deir Ezzor. After fighting in Syria, he returned to Europe with a fake passport under the name Soufiane Kayal with his friend Salah Abdeslam, who is the only surviving Paris attacker.

In September 2015, he was stopped at a police checkpoint between Hungary and Austria with the same fake passport, and was with Salah Abdeslam in a rented Mercedes-Benz. Najim was allowed to continue his journey, and in October 2015 he rented a house in Auvelais, Belgium, which was used by the Paris attackers.

In February 2016, Najim was suspected of involvement with a possible terrorist cell led by Khalid Zerkani, a Moroccan citizen resident in Belgium, who was responsible for recruiting fighters in Syria including Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a Belgian-Moroccan citizen who gained notoriety as the primary organizer of the November 2015 Paris attacks. Najim went to trial and was awaiting sentencing – scheduled for May 2016 – at the time of the Brussels bombings. Prosecutors have requested that Najim be convicted in absentia and sentenced to 15 years.
Najim was also closely linked to the November 2015 Paris attacks, as his DNA was found on several suicide vests recovered at the Stade de France and the Bataclan Theatre. On December 10, 2015 investigators searched an apartment on Rue Henri Bergé and found traces of explosive material TATP and the fingerprints of Abdeslam and another Paris attacker, Bilal Hadfi. ISIS also confirmed Najim’s responsibility for making the explosives that were used for the Paris attacks.

Influences on decision to become a suicide bomber
Najim was frustrated by the high unemployment rate amongst Muslim youths in Belgium, which is as high as 40 percent in neighbourhoods such as Schaerbeek. He believed the lack of employment opportunities was compounded by racism and discrimination against Muslims in the country. Najim also had a close relationship with Khalid Zerkani, a street preacher and the country’s biggest recruiter.

Shortly before the attack, a prayer room was discovered at the airport where Najim used to work, and the airport management made a list of at around 50 employees that were suspected of having been radicalised. The prayer room was closed, which likely frustrated many employees, and may be one of the reasons for choosing to target the airport by Najim and Ibrahim.

Community and family response to attack
In a news conference following the attacks, Najid’s brother Mourad stated that his brother was a nice, intelligent boy and had displayed no signs of radicalization before he left for Syria in 2013, and said that Najim had broken all contact with his family while he was there. Mourad also said that if there had been a way to contact him, “I would have tried to get him back, to reason with him”.

Mourad’s lawyer, Philippe Culot, remarked at the news conference that “Mourad and his family are crushed to learn that Najim is the author of such barbaric acts.” He also added that “If you had asked his family about Najim, they would have said that, for them, Najim has been dead for three years.”

Khalid El-Bakraoui (Brussels Attacks, March 2016)

Background of suicide bomber
Khalid el-Bakraoui, known by the name Abū Walīd al-Baljīkī, was the third suicide bomber involved in the Brussels attacks, who blew himself up on the metro train Maelbeek. He was also the brother of one of the airport-attackers, Ibrahim el-Bakraoui.

Khalid was 27 at the time of the attack, and during his childhood had lived with brother Ibrahim and his parents, in the suburb of Laeken, after being was born in Brussels on 12 January 1989.

Khalid had a past record of violent crimes, participating in at least four car-jackings and a bank robbery. In October 2009, he kidnapped a bank employee, and armed with a Kalashnikov, forced her to drive to a Brussels branch of the AXA bank to deactivate the alarm. Khalid, along with two accomplices stole 41,000 euros. Two weeks after this incident he car-jacked an Audi S3, and was later located by the Belgian authorities in a warehouse full of stolen cars.

In September 2011, a Belgian court convicted him of criminal conspiracy, armed robbery, possession of stolen cars and weapons offences, and sentenced him to five years in prison. However, he was released on parole in 2013 having served less than half of his original sentence. In May, 2015 he was re-arrested for violating the terms of parole after meeting up with a former criminal accomplice, but the judge released him because he had continued to meet the other terms of his release.

In December 2015, two arrest warrants were issued for Khalid, one international and one European. The warrants were for renting an apartment in rue du Fort in Charleroi using a fake ID with the name Ibrahim Maaroufi – which was used as a safe house by some of the Paris attackers.
The 14th issue of IS’ Dabiq magazine described how Khalid was guided while he was in prison, after having a vivid and life-changing dream in which he saw the prophet Mohammed. According to Dabiq, after leaving prison Khalid started giving da’wah (proselytizing or preaching Islam) in his neighbourhood, and encouraged the youth to make the hijrah (migration) to Sham.

Just a matter of hours after the attacks in Brussels, the Belgian authorities found large quantities of explosives and bomb-making equipment in a house in Schaerbeek, where the brothers had lived. IS later claimed that Khalid and Ibrahim were responsible for the preparations of both the Paris and Brussels attacks.

Influences on decision to become a suicide bomber
IS released Khalid’s five-page will on July 17, 2016, however the language used suggested that Khalid may not have written the will himself, or that IS’s media branch Furat had heavily edited its content. The will was addressed to ‘the West’ and in particular ‘the Muslims of the West’, encouraging them to join IS and carry out attacks in its name. Khalid describes Western countries as the “Crusader West” and accused them of massacring Muslims in Palestine, Bosnia, Iraq and Myanmar. The will also emphasizes the role of countries such as France and its allies – including Belgium and Saudi Arabia – in providing logistical support to the “Crusader”.

He also accuses the “crusaders” of killing many innocent Muslims, stating: “Iraq and its million murdered children, and the general body count exceeding millions of people unjustly killed. The revelations of WikiLeaks are only a drop in the ocean of tyranny. The Crusaders have allied once again to massacre the community of Muhammad.”

He also accused the West of frequently using violence and said it was in a ‘state of war’ with Muslims, which in his view justifies retaliatory attacks on civilians, women, and children in the West, and provides justification for undertaking a “martyrdom operation”. He supported this justification by mentioning that prophet Mohammed tolerated the killing of women and children in some cases, and went on to say: “I am not saying you should target women and children specifically in your operations in the West, but that if Allah enables you to carry out a martyrdom operation or something, strike them harshly and do not worry about what is around.”

Khalid promised that there will be “blood for blood and destruction for destruction” for the countries that were involved in killing Muslims, and labelled jihad as an individual obligation for every Muslim. Khalid goes on to promise “horror until you put an end to cowardly and barbaric bombardments, and release our brothers and sisters from prison.” The will ends with a pledge of allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.

13.2.2 Overview of the November 2015 Paris Attacks Suicide Bombers
On the evening of Friday 13 November 2015, a set of multiple, co-ordinated, large-scale terror attacks – consisting of a combination of gun attacks on restaurants, bars and a theatre, and suicide bombings outside a football stadium – unfolded across the French capital, Paris, leaving 130 people dead and hundreds more wounded. Three co-ordinated teams of jihadists were responsible for carrying out the attacks at numerous locations across the city. The vast majority of casualties came from the shooting incidents, carried out by terrorists using Kalashnikov-type assault rifles. However, all of the attackers also wore suicide belts, the majority of which were detonated after the shootings had taken place. The main attack involving explosives began at approximately 21:20, and featured the use of suicide bombs outside the Stade de France in northern Paris – where France were playing Germany in an international friendly football match. IS claimed responsibility for the attacks, including the Stade de France blasts.

The first bomber – a man believed to be named Ahmad al-Mohammad – detonated his vest on the rue Rimet at 21:20. The second bomber attempted to enter the stadium, however his suicide belt was detected by the security guards, so he backed away and instead detonated the device in the nearby rue de la Cokerie at 21:30. This bomber was identified as 20-year-old Bilal Hadfi. The third bomber was named M al-Mahmod, who detonated his vest in front of one of the entrances to the stadium at 21:53. The third bomber was identified as 20-year-old Bilal Hadfi. The third bomber was named M al-Mahmod, who detonated his vest in front of one of the entrances to the stadium at 21:53. In the centre of the city, another suicide bomber Brahim Abdeslam blew himself up in a restaurant, injuring several people.

Little is known about two of the Stade de France bombers – Ahmad al-Mohammad and M al-Mahmod. However, they are believed to be from Syria and were identified only by their passports, which were found near their bodies following the explosions. The passports provided authorities with their names, ages and the regions where they resided in Syria. However, later
investigations revealed the passports to be fakes, and the two bombers have since been traced to have entered Europe posing as refugees through the Greek island of Leros on 3 October. More information is known about the other bombers involved in the Paris attacks, who are profiled below.

Bilal Hadfi
(Paris Attacks, November, 2015)

Background of suicide bomber
Bilal Hadfi, 20 years old, was also known as Bilal Al Mouhajir or Abu Moudjahid Al-Belgiki. Bilal was a French citizen of Moroccan origin who lived in Belgium, and was the youngest of the Paris suicide bombers. Bilal was labelled in the media as the “baby-faced suicide bomber.” He denoted his suicide vest near gate H of the Stade de France, killing no-one but himself.

Bilal was raised in Neder-over-Heembeek, a suburb in the north of Brussels. He attended the technology college Diest Koninklijk Technisch in the town of Diest, where he studied IT; however, he failed the exams and went on to attend another school, after which he trained to be an electrician. Bilal wasn’t described as ambitious in his school, and many times in class he reportedly expressed that he wanted to be a lorry driver.

Bilal could also be described as a typical teenager, who was obsessed with football and updating his Facebook profile with news and comments about his favourite teams. However, he wasn’t particularly popular at his school also wasn’t particularly religious prior to his radicalization. Bilal started posting photos of guns, piles of cash and photos of him sunbathing topless before he left to fight in Syria in 2015.

He also began to change some of his habits – he decided to quit smoking, stopped listening to music, saying that it was haram (forbidden), and began fasting two days a week. On many occasions he openly supported Boko Haram and displayed his approval of the Charlie Hebdo massacres in class.

Before leaving for Syria, he informed his classmates that he was leaving school, and when his mother was asked to explain why, she said that her son had gone back to Morocco because he was fed up with the school. The school issued a warning of Bilal’s departure to the local education authorities, and mentioned that he had been showing signs of radicalization before his disappearance. However, the warning was not passed on to the police. During his time in Syria, he contacted his mother once and told her that he was worried that she would go to hell as a result of living in the country of the ‘Kufar’ (infidels). When Bilal returned from Syria in July 2015, he issued a call on Facebook for Muslims to attack Western countries.

Influences on decision to become a suicide bomber
Bilal was having considerable difficulties at home, where he lived with his mother and his two brothers. He became upset after his father died several years before the attacks, and began to display significant changes in behaviour – he started smoking marijuana, skipping classes and ‘hanging out with the wrong friends’, as reported by his school.

It is believed that Bilal was radicalized by a Belgium imam, according to Het Laatste Nieuws. However, the name of the imam is still unknown. Bilal also began to associate himself with extremists and quickly transformed into a young man determined for jihad. He was reported to be friends with the Belgian Jihadi Abou Isleyem on Facebook, who is known to fight in Syria.

In his call against the West that was issued on Facebook, he said: “Hit the pigs in their communities so they no longer feel safe even in their dreams.” IS also released a video after Bilal committed the suicide attack, proving that Bilal had previously been present in Raqqa; the video shows IS fighters beheading several hostages, and Bilal talks to the camera saying “You destroy our homes and kill our fathers, our brothers, our sisters, our mothers and our children.”

ISIS released a poster with pictures of the nine Paris attackers, announcing that the Paris attacks have brought France to its knees and have brought the word of Tawheed high, and have lived the verses of Quran by killing the infidels (Kufar).
Community and family response to the attack

Bilal’s mother Fatima Hadfi, said she had missed major warning signs of her son’s radicalization; she said that her son had been friendly and helpful, and blamed herself for not being able to notice his behaviour changing. She was also glad that her son had only managed to kill himself at Stade de France and not anyone else. In another interview on La Libre Belgique, she said that her son’s change of behaviour was a threat and that he was like a ticking bomb, however acknowledged that she didn’t take any action regarding her concerns.

In the college where Bilal studied, some of the staff members noticed signs of radicalization, and in April 2015 after he went to Syria, they informed the education authorities of their concerns about his disappearance and behaviour. However, the warning was not handed to the police and only came to light after the Paris attacks had taken place. One of Bilal’s teachers at Diest Koninklijk Technisch also expressed how she has felt a sense of failure since the attack, as one of her students committed this act yet she wasn’t able to get through to him.

Background of suicide bomber

Brahim Abdeslam was born on July 30, 1984. Brahim Abdeslam (Paris Attacks, November 2015) blew himself up in the Comptoir Voltaire brasserie restaurant in the 11th arrondissement, killing himself and severely injuring a waitress. Brahim was dropped off by car outside the restaurant, before going inside and blowing himself up. The restaurant’s CCTC camera captured his death, and showed that Brahim was wearing a bomb belt strapped around his body.
Abdeslam was a 31-year-old French citizen who was brought up in Brussels by Moroccan parents, named Yamina and Abdaramane. His father was a metro driver, and was not particularly religious, only visiting the mosque on Fridays; whilst his mother Yamina can be described as progressive compared to other women from similar backgrounds. Brahim has five siblings; the most known of which is Salah Abdeslam, who was captured in March 2016 in Brussels after refusing to detonate his own device on the night of the Paris attacks.

Brahim had trained as an electrician, and along with his brother Salah, used to run a grocery and a café in Molenbeek called Beguine, together with other relatives. However just few weeks before the attack they both resigned their share in the family’s businesses. The café was run as a place to smoke Hashish, and had been closed down by the authorities in August 2015 for drug-related activities.

Brahim’s former wife Naima, who was married to him in 2006 before getting divorced in 2008, said that Brahim’s favourite activities were sleeping, playing cards and smoking weed. She said he used to smoke cannabis every day and drink alcohol, whilst he rarely prayed or attended a mosque except during Ramadan. For two years while he was married, Brahim didn’t work even for a single day and the couple lived off unemployment benefits, amounting to €1000 for both of them per month.

Further investigations into Brahim’s life after the attack uncovered that he had joined IS in Syria in early 2015 following a trip to Morocco. On 24 January 2016, Al Hayat IS media released a video as a tribute to the Paris attackers that showed Brahim in Raqqa, Syria. Belgian authorities confirmed that Brahim had travelled to Syria for 10 days, where he received a limited amount of training from IS.

Community and family response to the attack
After the attack, Brahim’s younger brother, Mohamed Abdeslam was arrested in Brussels and was later released without charges being filed. He gave a statement to the media following his release, explaining that he had no idea his brothers were radicalized and stating that his family was in a state of shock, and were deeply touched by what happened. He added that “At no point could we have thought that my brothers were involved in this… He did not know that my brothers had been radicalised. We only found out about this on television.”

13.2.3 OTHER SUICIDE ATTACKS CARRIED OUT BY EUROPEANS

Abu Musab al-Almani (Baghdad Attack, April 2015)

Description of the suicide bombing
In April 2015 in the northwest of Baghdad, a truck that contained seven tonnes of explosives drove into the headquarters of the 4th Regiment of the Iraqi army. IS’ magazine, Dabiq, announced that the operation to capture the military base had multiple phases, which included the use of aerial drones and ground units in order to target both the inside and outside of the facility. This tactic of using multiple operatives and differing forms of warfare in order to maximize the impact of an attack, has increasingly been practiced by IS in Syria and Iraq – three separate suicide bombers were used as part of this operation. IS claims that the attack completely destroyed the command centre building. One of the attackers in this case – profiled below – was a German citizen who had travelled to fight alongside IS.

Background of the suicide bomber
Abū Mus'ab al-Almānī, a former German army soldier also known by the name of ‘Mark K’, was 25-years-old when he participated in the attack on the 4th Regiment in Iraq. He and twin his brother are originally from Castrop-Rauxel in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. They both joined IS and travelled to fight with the group. His brother died fighting for IS, whilst Mark K. was responsible for the first suicide bombing on the military base.

Mark K. converted to Islam in 2012 through his engagement with the mosque community, at which time he was still in the German military service and was classified as ‘not dangerous’ by the Constitutional Protection Federal Office after his conversion to Islam. Mark was trained in the use of multiple types of weapons, including armoured tanks, during his period of military service.
It is not clear when his brother converted to Islam or when they initially travelled to Syria or Iraq, however what is known that visited Turkey in 2014 as tourists. According to the 9th issue of Dabiq, Abu Musab al-Almani fought for the German “Crusaders army” in Afghanistan – a term used to describe Western forces which are perceived to have fought against Muslims. However according to Dabiq, the successful attack had made him a martyr who has now redeemed himself in the eyes of Allah. His “name would now be written – by Allah’s permission – amongst those whose past had been tainted with Muslim blood and would atone for it by embracing Islam and fighting for the cause of Allah until they were killed.” In the magazine, a verse from the Quran is added to explain that god guides the people who were taking the wrong path into the right path: “His grace and favour, Allah chose to guide him, {And Allah guides whom He wills to a straight path} [Al-Baqarah: 213]. It is indicated that Allah chose to guide him and make him “replace his evil with good, and make him a warrior spilling his blood for this noble cause”. IS media also filmed his attack, likely for propaganda reasons, and described Abu Musab al-Almani as a martyr when the video was released.

Kevin Chassin
(Western Iraq Attack, May 2015)

Description of the suicide attack
On 22 May 2015, two suicide attacks were carried out in the western Iraqi town of Haditha by two French IS fighters, in a coordinated assault using vehicles filled with two tonnes of explosives. The attack resulted in a death toll of dozens of Iraqis. The two perpetrators were Kevin Chassin (Abu Maryam Al-Faransi) and Abu Abdul Aziz Al-Faransi. The official martyrdom statement released by IS said Abu Maryam al Firansi “targeted a headquarters where the apostates gathered in the area of al Khasfa,” and “he invoked Allah and wounded his steed amidst their gathering, leaving dozens killed and wounded, and turning their structures into rubble”. The other suicide bomber, Abu Abdul Aziz al Firansi, “followed him with a second truck, to target barracks of the apostates.”

Background of suicide bomber
Kevin Chassin, 25 years-old when he detonated himself, was also known by the name Abu Maryam Al-Faransi, and grew up in the city of Bourbaki, north of Toulouse. Kevin comes from a non-Muslim family, but converted to Islam and then became radicalised, before later going on to join Islamic State. Kevin is known for his presence in a picture with a severed head, and for featuring in the seven-minute long IS propaganda film entitled ‘What are you waiting for?’, which released by Al Hayat Media Centre, and shows three French jihadists (Abu Osama al-Faranci, Abu Maryam al-Faranci, Abu Salman al-Faranci) urging their fellow countrymen to ‘kill the enemies of Allah’. The film opens with the French Jihadists burning their passports, a move that became popular among the IS foreign fighters to show their detachment to their nationality, and demonstrate their belonging to the Islamic state. A masked man can be heard saying “We disbelieve in you and your passports, and if you come here we will fight you.”

Abu Maryam al-Faranci was also shown in the video, holding a large sword and an AK-47 assault rifle and threatening other French citizens that IS fighters “will not hesitate to cut your heads if the French government keeps bombing Iraq and Syria”.

Commenting on the banning of the niqab in France, he says “Just wearing the niqab [face veil] is very difficult”, he calls on French Muslims to wage jihad, exclaiming: “What are you waiting for? Do you not look around you?” He also appeals to other would-be terrorists, stating that IS is “ruled by the Sharia of Allah and gives every Muslim his due rights.”

The film also urges the people who can’t join the fight with IS in Syria and Iraq to “operate within France”, and encourages them to “terrorise [the French public] and do not allow them to sleep due to fear and horror.”

Confirmation of the suicide attack that was carried out by Abu Maryam Al-Faransi and Abu Abdul Aziz Al-Faransi was released by the Islamic State’s Wilayat al Furat, or Euphrates Province.

Kevin’s half-brother Brice was called by an IS jihadist in
the aftermath of the incident, to inform him that Kevin was one of the two French suicide attackers against the Iraqi military targets in Anbar. He also received a photo of Kevin smiling and pointing his index up to the sky, supposedly taken just before boarding a truck to carry out the attack. 371

13.2.4 SUICIDE BOMBERS FROM THE UK

Fatlum Shalaku (Ramadi, Iraq Attack, May 2015)

Description of the suicide attack
In May 2015, six suicide bombers drove into a government building in Ramadi, Iraq, and blew themselves up, allowing IS fighters to advance further into the city. 372 Fatlum Shalaku was one of the six suicide bombers involved373.

Background of suicide bomber
Fatlum Shalaku, also known by the name Abu Musa al-Britani, was a 20-year-old British citizen born in Kosovo to an Albanian family, and was raised in Ladbroke Grove in west London.374 Fatlum went to Holland Park School as a teenager, and was known as a popular student with a friendly personality. He was also known to enjoy sports and to have studied for his A-Levels. Fatlum however didn’t leave a large social media footprint, and deactivated his Facebook profile before leaving for Syria. Fatlum and his immediate family were not particularly religious; they lived a relatively secular lifestyle after experiencing communist rule in Kosovo.375 He lived in a diverse community in west London, in an area which included large Moroccan and Somali communities.

Fatlum’s suicide bombing came little more than two months after the death of his brother Flamur, who died fighting on the frontline in Iraq in March 2015. He and his brother were moved by the Syrian conflict, and in 2013 they told their parents that they are going to Turkey to engage in aid work to help the Syrian refugees there. However, they soon crossed the border into Syria and later into Iraq.

In London, Faltum was involved in the gang lifestyle and was thought to be a member of the Westside gang.376 He was also part of a circle of friends who had been radicalized – at least five students from his school travelled to Syria or Iraq to fight with Islamic State.377 He was also a very close friend of Mohammed Nasser, alternatively known as Hamza Parvez, who also fought for IS.

In the Shalaku family, Flamur was the first to be radicalized. In an almost overnight transformation, he started going to the mosque regularly whilst he gave up drinking and going out with women. However, with Fatlum the process was more gradual in nature, so may not have been as obvious.378 Friends and various members from the community believe that he was radicalized by an un-named recruiter in the area – later killed fighting in Syria – who turned many other local young men to the jihadist cause. These young men recruited others through messaging services such as Whatsapp. However, the dominant influence over Fatlum appeared to be coming from his brother Flamur; a friend stated: “If anyone influenced him it must have been his older brother. They were close and Fatlum looked up to him. He rediscovered his faith a year into his degree at uni.”379 Just two weeks before going to Syria, Fatlum was planning a holiday in Spain, had it not been for his older brother talking him out of it.

Community and family response to the attack
Fatlum was attending Ladbroke Grove’s Al-Manar mosque, a large mosque and an Islamic centre in west London that offers Quran and Hadith classes along with Arabic classes. Al-Manar mosque thrives from the generous donations of its attendants and also from UK government support. Several days after the death of Faltum, the imam of the mosque was reported quoting Ibn Taymieh, one of the Islam’s most forceful theologians that lived in the 13th century, and someone whom IS now revere. However, as more time has passed since the incidents involving Faltum and his brother, Al Manar mosque has become stricter on which Islamic scholars to quote during Friday’s Khutbas, and has started recording each and every Khutba. They also insist on not taking any political stance when talking about the sufferings of the Muslims in the Arab world; and not to mention the Syrian regime or any external or internal actors when talking about the war in Syria, so as to avoid the provoking of young men.
Al-Manar mosque was first opened in 2001 – Muslims from all walks of life use the mosque, and almost 1,200 worshippers regularly attend the Friday prayers and khutbahs. However, it is known that a significant number of IS fighters also used to pray there from time to time, including Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary, Hamza Parvez, Mohammed Nasser, Flamar Shalaku, Choukri Elkhiifi, Mohammed El-Araj, and Aine Davies.

Yet largely, it can be said that the worshippers who attend the mosque come from diverse Islamic strands and traditions; there is the traditional Islam that is brought in from Larache, Morocco, along with a mix of Maliki Fiqh (jurisprudence), scholarship and Sufi traditions. There is also the competing modernist Salafi tradition inspired by Muhammed ibn Abdul Wahab, a revivalist scholar of the eighteenth century. Members of the mosque management have also confirmed that, it is a mosque where both Shia and Sunnis are welcome, whilst even other lesser-known sects of Islam come to pray at the mosque, such as Ismailis.

Mohammed Rizwan Awan (Anbar, Iraq Attack, March 2016)

Description of the suicide attack
On 21 March 2016, in the Iraqi province of Anbar, a vehicle exploded targeting a gathering of Iraqi army troops at a checkpoint outside the Ain al-Assad air base. Mohammed Rizwan Awan was one of the five suicide bombers responsible for the attack, which left more than 30 soldiers killed and damaged 11 vehicles according to an IS statement. However, the Iraqi authorities have denied this number. The attack is considered to be one of the deadliest attacks carried out by a UK jihadist in Iraq.

Background of suicide bomber
Mohammed Rizwan Awan was 27-years-old at the time of the attack, and was from the Crosland Moor area of Huddersfield in northern England. Rizwan’s father Mohammed Idress, who now works as a bus driver but used to live and work in Saudi Arabia, moved to Britain in the 1960s, and for the majority of this time the family resided in Huddersfield. Rizwan worked as a call handler for British Gas in Leeds and was married to a girl named Sophie for two years prior to committing the suicide attack. He was a former student at Honley High School, and later studied at Bradford College. His family described him as a loving person, well educated, happily married with his wife and in secure employment.

Both Rizwan and his wife were born in the UK and left together in 2015 ostensibly to visit Mecca, yet their families have not heard from them since. After their departure, letters were found in their home stating that Mohammed did not plan to return to the UK and intended to settle in Saudi Arabia. He is believed to have entered Syria through Turkey, before joining IS in Iraq.

IS announced his deadly attack by releasing a picture of Rizwan holding an AK47 rifle, the picture included the caption: “Martyrdom of brother Abu Musa al-Britani, Allah accepts him, the striker on the Rafdi army.”

Community and family response to attack
Rizwan was the nephew of Shahida Awan, the former councillor in Borough in 2004; her husband stated that the family is “not angry”, but rather shocked at what Awan did. The local MP Barry Sheerman labelled the attack as “shocking news”, expressing disbelief that a man from Huddersfield committed a suicide bombing in Iraq, especially as Huddersfield does not have a reputation for radical mosques or preachers, which makes it difficult to understand how he became radicalised.
The father of Rizwan described his family as well-respected, peaceful and hardworking, and said that they had always encouraged their children into further education and employment, and to pursue respectable professions, which “makes the behaviour of Rizwan even more difficult to understand.” Rizwan’s family have also stated that he had showed no signs of radicalization before he disappeared in May 2015.

**Talha Asmal**
(Baiji, Iraq Attack, June 2015)

**Description of the suicide attack**
On 13 June 2015, four suicide bombers targeted the Iraqi military forces and the local headquarters of the Shia militia (Popular Mobilization Forces) in the Hajjaj area near an oil refinery south of Baiji, Iraq. The suicide bombers used four cars filled with explosives to carry out the attack. Talha Asmal was responsible for one of the explosions after detonating a car packed with explosives. The number of the casualties has not been officially confirmed, however a security source within the Iraqi government said that the total number of injured and dead military personnel and civilians stood at approximately 33. IS claimed responsibility for the attack and named Talha Asmal as one of the suicide bombers, with the others claimed to be from Germany, Kuwait, Palestine, Dagestan and Turkmenistan.

**Background of suicide bomber**
Talha Asmal, known by the name Abu Yusuf al-Britani, was a 17-year-old teenager at the time of the attack, making him the youngest suicide bomber from the UK. Asmal lived with his mother and father in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, before leaving home for Syria via Turkey. Prior to his departure, he was studying ICT and Business at Mirfield Free Grammar School. He had also frequently attended and prayed at the Zakaria Mosque in Dewsbury, since he was around 15 years-of-age.

Asmal travelled to Turkey in March of 2015 from Manchester Airport, and from there departed onwards to Syria with his friend Hassan Munshi, after he told his parents that he was going on a college trip during the Easter break. At some point over the next few weeks, he crossed through Syria and entered Iraq. Asmal was described by his teacher as a quiet, private, conscientious student and as a “typical teenager.”

**Influences on Asmal's decision to become a suicide bomber**
The family insisted in a statement after the attack, that their son was a victim of IS’s perverse ideology, stating: “It appears that Talha fell under the spell of individuals who continued to prey on his innocence and vulnerability, to the point where if the press reports are accurate, he was ordered to his death by so-called ISIS handlers and leaders too cowardly to do their own dirty work.”

**Community and family response to the attack**
After the release of an IS statement regarding the attack along with the publication of his photo on IS-linked social media accounts, his family released a statement describing Asmal as “a loving, kind, caring and affable teenager” and said that he was groomed through the internet: “Talha’s tender years and naivety were it seems exploited by persons unknown, who, hiding behind the anonymity of the world wide web, targeted and befriended Talha and engaged in a process of deliberate and calculated grooming of him.”

In the statement the family also said that they were “naturally utterly devastated and heartbroken by the unspeakable tragedy that now appears to have befallen us,” and that they condemn violent behaviour in all its forms. The family denied that Talha had displayed any indications of radicalism in the period leading up to his departure from the UK. They also urged other families who suspect that a family member is showing signs of radicalization and seek help and advice immediately.

The former MP for Dewesbury and a friend of the Asmal family, Shahid Malik, described the family as “a beautiful, caring, peace-loving and incredibly humble family”, and labelled Talha as a sweet-natured, helpful, respectful and friendly kid, stating it was extremely difficult to believe that Talha had carried out such an attack.
Description of the suicide attack

On 6 February 2014, a suicide attack was carried out by Abdul Waheed Majid at the gates of Aleppo Central Prison, which was under siege by al-Nusra and various other Islamic militias. The prison was allegedly being used as a ‘torture chamber’ for over 4,000 imprisoned rebels. The attack resulted in the release of hundreds of prisoners, and led to the breaking out of large-scale clashes between al-Nusra and Syrian government forces. The number of the casualties as a direct result of the attack has not been officially verified, however a YouTube channel affiliated with al-Nusra reported that 60 ‘Shabeeh’ (thugs/regime forces/military personnel) were killed during the attack. Additionally, the fierce clashes which occurred in the immediate aftermath of the suicide bombing resulted in the death of approximately 300 combatants from both sides – al-Nusra and the Syrian military.

Influences on decision to become a suicide bomber

The town of Crawley has had several incidents of jihadist involvement amongst its Muslim population, and a number of men from the town are known to have been part of the broad network of radical Islamist thinking.

Waheed used to pray at the local mosque in Crawley, and he had close relationships to members of the Islamic community centre. In 2012, the Islamic community centre and mosque started gathering aid and money to send to a Syrian refugee camp in Turkey. When Waheed first left the UK for the region in June 2013, he joined an aid convoy on its way to Turkey with several other men from Crawley. He stayed for six months in a Turkish refugee camp to provide help in reconstruction and improvement to the layout of the sanitation system there.

At the camp, Waheed listened to the stories of the Syrian refugees and shared the experiences with his family back in the UK – he was greatly moved and impacted by these events. At that time, al-Nusra and other Islamic militias had been imposing a siege since April 2013 on the central prison of Aleppo, in an attempt to free the prisoners incarcerated there. In early 2014 the release of 11,000 photos depicting torture victims who died in the Syrian government’s numerous security facilities were released.

The release of these images had a significant impact on Waheed while he was volunteering in neighbouring Turkey. His family members and members of the local mosque believed that these photos in particular, along with the terrifying stories he had heard from the Syrians inside the camp, triggered him to join al-Nusra and to carry out the suicide bombing with the aim of freeing prisoners.
Community and family response to attack

A few days after the al-Nusra video of Waheed was released, the police raided his home in Crawley after obtaining a search warrant under the UK’s anti-terrorism laws. Abdul Waheed’s brother, Hafeez, said that the effects were devastating to the family, as they were labelled by many in the community as terrorists. Waheed’s wife, Tahmina, lost her job as a cleaner in a local cinema after the news spread – she has also been abused in the street, received death threats, and someone also damaged her car while it was parked outside her house.

Many of Waheed’s friends and members of the Islamic Centre are stunned by the attack, and still don’t understand why he committed this act, especially given that he seemingly had everything he needed in life, such as a stable job, a wife and three children.

His son however, considers his father as a hero and refuses to believe the allegations that his father is a terrorist, and has refused to comment on the suicide bombing. The brother of Abdul Waheed also stated that "We feel that if he hadn’t got a beard, and was white and wearing a uniform with a crown on his arm with a regiment number, he would have been awarded the posthumous Victoria Cross. Instead Waheed is called a terrorist. How can that be? He gave his life to save people from that prison."

Background of suicide bomber

Hisham Folkard, 28 years-old, was also known by the name Abu Hurairah al-Britani, and grew up and lived in Leicester with his Kenyan Muslim mother. For most of his teenage years, he lived in a block of flats in the Highfields area of the city. Folkard’s father, Mike, is a white British devout Roman Catholic who works as a travel agent in Bahrain. Folkard’s relationship with his father was almost non-existent, and it was cut-off completely after he and his brother travelled to Yemen to study Islam with the approval of his mother. Hisham’s older brother, Omar is believed to have been killed fighting for al-Qaeda in Mali in 2012.

Hisham was one of two Britons who were captured by the Turkish government and released in a prisoner swap between the Turkish government and IS in 2014. The other was the named Shabazz Suleman. Folkard is known for posing in a photograph with a jar of Nutella to mock the CNN claim that IS lures women by using kittens and Nutella, and to 'show off' the lifestyle under the Islamic State rule.

Influences on Folkard’s decision to become a bomber

Little is known about Folkard in this regard, however what is known is that he lived in a broken home where his mother denied the two children access to their father, instead opting to send the brothers to Yemen in order to study Islam.

Community and family response to attack

When Hisham’s estranged father was asked about his son’s suicide attack, he remarked: “I’m not surprised. I see the stories about these boys on TV every week. Of course it is different [that its my son], but I hardly knew either of them. Their mother took them away, and when she let them go to Yemen to study Islam I cut them off completely.”

Description of the suicide attack

On 3 July 2016, a suicide bomber carried out an attack with a car targeting the Iraqi army in Baiji, Iraq, during the holy month Ramadan. The attack left 5 military personnel dead and another 15 injured. Iraqi army sources said that there were two suspected suicide bombers involved in the attack, one of which was interrupted, whilst the other was Hisham Folkard.

This IS press release of the attack described Abu Hurairah al-Britani as a knight from the martyrdom knights, and announces casualties among the Rafdi army (referring to the Iraqi army) without specifying the number of those killed.
Description of the suicide attack

On 7 November 2014, a truck carrying eight tonnes of explosives was detonated in the outskirts of the northern Iraqi town of Baiji, killing a senior Iraqi police officer, Major General Faisal al-Zamili, and another three police officers at the scene. Another fifteen people were wounded. The victims of the attack were mostly Shia Muslims. The bombing was carried out by the Briton Kabir Ahmed.

Background of suicide bomber

Kabir Ahmed – 32 years-old from Derby – was a well-known Islamist extremist also known by the name Abu Sumayyah Al-Britani. Ahmed is a father of three and was married to a woman called Nashira Arif, before he left for Syria to join Jund Al-Sham in 2013. Ahmed was the second British suicide bomber to have detonated a device during the current upheaval in Iraq and Syria.

In February, 2012 Ahmed was jailed alongside two others (Ihjaz Ali and Razwan Javed) in the UK for gay hate crimes, after he was caught handing out leaflets calling for the execution of homosexuals. He was convicted in court of “distributing threatening written material to stir up hatred on the grounds of sexual orientatio” and was handed a 15-month prison sentence.

A family member said that Ahmed began to be influenced by extremist ideology after finishing his studies at the University of East London. The family first noticed that he was becoming radicalised after his return to Derby from university in London, when he started socialising in the East Midlands city with people from the al-Muhajiroun group, a banned British terrorist organisation. He used to pray in Jamia Hanifia mosque in the city’s Normanton Road, and developed close ties to the hate preacher Anjem Choudary, whom he used to refer to as a brother.

Ahmed then left the UK to go and fight what he called the ‘holy war’ in Syria, where he resided in Idlib in the country’s northwest. In an interview for “the ISIS show” podcast, he talked about the progression of the conflict and described fighting between the insurgents and the Syrian forces, saying that “We have been successful so far in pushing back the regime.”

He also admitted that he was at first scared when he arrived in Syria: “the first time I heard a bomb, I realised then that this is scary you know.” He also explained how he was involved in targeted assassination missions against what he called Shabiha.

Kabir boasted about life with IS and about fighting in Syria, saying it is “actually quite fun,” and that it is “better than that game ‘Call of Duty’.” He described life in IS stronghold areas as akin to living with total freedom saying: “For us to be here it is freedom. Total freedom. I can walk around with a Kalashnikov if I want to.”

He also explained how foreign fighters often burn their passports because they want to be dissociated from their previous nationalities, and instead think of themselves as citizens of only the Islamic State. He also said that this act is not exclusively practiced by foreign fighters (the ‘Muhajeeren’), but also by Syrians themselves. He added that “Our citizenship means nothing to us.”

When he was asked about his passport and whether he has burned it, he answered that “I don’t know where my passport is and I don’t know where it was and I didn’t really care about it”. Ahmed was informed by the UK home office that his citizenship was to be taken away from him, however he said he welcomed this as he wanted to disassociate himself from his British nationality.

He believed that the British media created fear amongst the public and sought to portray a negative image of the Muslims in the UK, and that the right-wing Christians provoked Muslims by entering their mosques, not just in the UK but also elsewhere in Europe. He believed that the political right-wing was pushing people to go to Sham, and that the right-wing elite would not accept Islam until Muslims accept all the western moral values (namely, democracy and secularism). The pushing-away of the Muslim youth will build up and explode according to Ahmed, a statement which he described as a warning.
When he was asked what had radicalised him, he answered: “It wasn’t the videos, it wasn’t the lectures, it wasn’t the books that I was reading. What radicalized me was the Government. He adds “what radicalized me the most was the American Government, the British Government, the European Governments, and what they were doing with our people in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Ahmed made the decision to leave for Syria while he was in prison, he said: “When you’re sitting in that cell for months and months the only thing you can think about is jihad, you start to think why don’t you go out and fight for your people who are being oppressed. How can I have a comfortable life while other Muslim brothers can’t find anything to eat just because they are from Ahl al Sunnah w al Jama’a.”

Ahmed admitted that he is on the ‘waiting list’ to be a suicide bomber, and wished that his name could be moved to top of the list, he also said the same thing in an interview broadcast by the BBC Panorama programme. He did not pledge allegiance to anyone, stating that instead he was fighting on the side of any group who stand up for the right of the Sunnis. Yet he stated that if a group is also fighting for democracy, then he is not interested in that fight.

When he was asked about his family, he said: “My family don’t know where I am and why I left, and I haven’t contacted them since I left, and I love them dearly…but we are here to rise the Islamic state and this is more important than my children and my wife.”

Kabir Ahmed was far from being an isolated individual or ‘lone wolf’ often associated with radicalization in Western societies. He seemed balanced and sociable according to his neighbour Aleem Sheid, 33, who said: “I socialised with him, we would talk about work, life, that sort of thing. We had certain family issues that were similar, like his mum and dad were separated like mine.”

The last time he called his family, his mother begged him to come back as his wife was pregnant with their third child. However, he told his mother that they will meet in heaven.

A family member said that when Ahmed was released from prison, he became a completely different man: “Something deep down in his heart changed him. His level of talk was different; he wouldn’t talk to women.”

His mother agreed that he seemed different after he returned home from prison.

Community and family response to attack
Kabir’s family are described as a moderate Muslim family and didn’t know that he had joined IS, as they were not contact with him after his departure in April 2014. Neighbours of Ahmed didn’t notice his supposed change of behaviour or any signs of radicalisation – he was described by them as a nice guy. The former mayor of Derby, Fareed Hussain, said that he had met with Ahmed a couple of times previously, but that it was “difficult to anticipate he would become a suicide bomber”. He said: “It is difficult to divert a person once they get on a track of this nature. They so staunchly believe in the views they hold, that they are right 100% and everyone else is wrong. It is difficult to have rational conversations.”

Aleem Sheid, a friend of Kabir, said: “Nobody is born bad, it’s people around you that make you behave bad [sic] and push you down a certain way. The million-pound question is where did he get radicalised? I don’t know - it’s the people who were around him.”

Remarking on Ahmed’s comments about his radicalisation on the radio show, Sheid said: “When I read that he had said about foreign policy, I just thought that must have been a script because he couldn’t speak like that. He was a follower, not a leader. You could ask him to do something and he would do it, he was that sort of guy.”

When the news emerged about the suicide attack, Kabir’s mother (Nasreen Akhtar, 53) was distressed by the news. “She was in a quandary over whether to accept the reports she has read and to mourn him, or whether to grasp at straws and hope that he is still alive,” according to Mr. Hussain. Some of her friends have said they believe that she has nothing to do with how Kabir turned out to be.

The UK Home Office commented on news of the bombing by saying that: “We are aware of reports of the death of a British national in Iraq and are looking into them.”

On the Twitter account of another jihadi – known as Abu Hussain al Britani – Ahmed was hailed for the attack.
The post said “My brother Abu Sumayah Britani (kashmiri) done a martyrdom op in Iraq killing a top Iraqi commander and many regime soldiers! ALLAHU AKBAR!”

He also said: “I’ve never met a brother that wanted Jannah (Heaven) more than Abu Sumayah! May Allah accept him and elevate his rank in Jannah!”

Regarding allegations suggesting that Kabir became radicalized at the University of East London (UEL), a spokesman for the university said that there was no possibility that Ahmed was radicalised there, and that he studied there between September 2003 and February 2004 only. He addes: “Here at UEL, we have an excellent record of multi-faith and multi-cultural harmony and equality and diversity. We continue to work closely with the authorities to make sure that radicalisation is neither tolerated nor allowed any room at UEL.”

One of the family members, who was impressed by the courage that Ahmed showed by detonating himself, said “I don’t know if it is right, or was he pleasing Allah? I wish I had known. I was thinking he must be brave, he must have a heart of stone.”

A question that keeps the family wondering however, is why was he allowed to leave the airport from the UK, and why the UK border police didn’t arrest him, as he was known to the authorities as a result of his previous conviction for hate crime.

The post said “My brother Abu Sumayah Britani (kashmiri) done a martyrdom op in Iraq killing a top Iraqi commander and many regime soldiers! ALLAHU AKBAR!”

He also said: “I’ve never met a brother that wanted Jannah (Heaven) more than Abu Sumayah! May Allah accept him and elevate his rank in Jannah!”

Regarding allegations suggesting that Kabir became radicalized at the University of East London (UEL), a spokesman for the university said that there was no possibility that Ahmed was radicalised there, and that he studied there between September 2003 and February 2004 only. He addes: “Here at UEL, we have an excellent record of multi-faith and multi-cultural harmony and equality and diversity. We continue to work closely with the authorities to make sure that radicalisation is neither tolerated nor allowed any room at UEL.”

One of the family members, who was impressed by the courage that Ahmed showed by detonating himself, said “I don’t know if it is right, or was he pleasing Allah? I wish I had known. I was thinking he must be brave, he must have a heart of stone.”

A question that keeps the family wondering however, is why was he allowed to leave the airport from the UK, and why the UK border police didn’t arrest him, as he was known to the authorities as a result of his previous conviction for hate crime.

**Description of the suicide attack**
In November 2014, a suicide attack was carried out with a car containing 1,800kg of explosives, targeting the Iraqi security forces. The attack was carried out in the strategic town Baiji and destroyed a significant number of tanks and artillery equipment. The attack, according to an Iraqi source, did not just aim to attack Iraqi security forces but also to blow up an oil pipeline that runs from Hawija to Baiji oil refinery. The initial aim was to secure the local territory controlled by IS through igniting the spilled oil on the water surface of Tigris.

**Profile of suicide bomber**
Abu Hajar al-Britani was the third British suicide bomber to have detonated a device during the current upheaval involving IS in Syria and Iraq. The picture of him was released by Salahuddin, IS’ media branch, and shows him wearing full military uniform, his face covered with a black balaclava whilst his gloved hand is raised with his index finger in a motion that signifies the oneness of god. The message accompanying the photo reads: “Brother Abu Hajar Al Baritani, from the UK, did a Martyrdom operation on the Safawy Army in Baiji, may Allah accept him.”

IS did not release any information with regard to his real identity or British name, referring only to his nationality.

**Abu Khalid al-Britani (Ramadi, Iraq Attack, October 2015)**

**Profile of suicide bomber**
Abu Hajar al-Britani was the third British suicide bomber to have detonated a device during the current upheaval involving IS in Syria and Iraq. The picture of him was released by Salahuddin, IS’ media branch, and shows him wearing full military uniform, his face covered with a black balaclava whilst his gloved hand is raised with his index finger in a motion that signifies the oneness of god. The message accompanying the photo reads: “Brother Abu Hajar Al Baritani, from the UK, did a Martyrdom operation on the Safawy Army in Baiji, may Allah accept him.”

IS did not release any information with regard to his real identity or British name, referring only to his nationality.

**Abu Khalid al-Britani (Ramadi, Iraq Attack, October 2015)**

**Description of the suicide attack**
On 22 October 2015, a twin IS suicide bombing was carried out against the headquarters of the Iraqi Army and the Popular Mobilization in Ramadi. Resulting in a death toll of 50 Iraqis, the first attack was carried out by the Briton Abu Khalid al Britani, whilst the second perpetrator was reportedly from Tunisia.

**Background of suicide bomber**
Abu Khalid al-Britani’s real identity, name and age have still not been revealed, however he was thought to be in his forties at the time of the attack. In origin, he was half Yemeni and half Somali.

Abu Maidah, another British IS fighter of Somali origin, described him as his ‘best friend’. They both met in a terrorist training camp before Abu Khalid had volunteered to fight in Iraq.
Abu Omar al-Britani
(Ramadi, Iraq Attack, October 2015)

Description of the suicide attack
In October 2015, a suicide attack was carried out near the city of Ramadi in Iraq. The attack was carried out after the Iraqi Special Forces launched a large offensive to take back Ramadi from IS. An IS press statement claimed that the attack was carried out by a British fighter known as Abu Omar al-Britani. The bombing resulted in the death and injury of 80 Iraqis.441

Background of suicide bomber
A picture of an IS fighter sitting behind an office desk in Anbar province, was claimed to be Abu Omar al-Britani and the caption reads: ‘the brother and the martyr Abu Omar al-Britani- may Allah accept him.” Little else is known about the background of Abu Omar al-Britani.

13.3 Syrian and Iraqi Suicide Bombers

Mohammad Daleel
(Ansbach Germany Attack, July 2014)

Description of the suicide attack
On 24 July 2016, a Syrian asylum seeker named Mohammad Daleel blew himself up outside a music festival in southern German town of Ansbach. Daleel detonated his device at a wine bar at approximately 22:00, killing himself and wounding up to 15 others. Daleel had earlier attempted to gain entry to the festival, which had around 2,500 visitors, but was refused as he did not have a ticket.442 This attack was the last in a series of four separate attacks across Germany within span of a week in July 2016, two of which were later claimed by IS.443

Background of suicide bomber
Mohammad Daleel, also known by the name Abu Yusuf al-Karrar, was 27 years old and from Aleppo, Syria. Daleel had fought for Jabhat al-Nusra at the beginning of the Syrian civil war, and used to construct explosive devices to be used against the Syrian government forces.444 Daleel often drifted from being part of one Islamic militia to the next, until he decided to create his own jihadist group.

According to a report published in IS’ weekly magazine, al-Nabaa, after his suicide attack, he left Syria in July 2013 to seek treatment after he was wounded by a mortar.445 Travelling across Europe, he entered Germany in 2014 and completed an asylum application there. However, his application was eventually rejected.

In Germany, Daleel began to making the bomb that was used in the attack and constructed it with small metal parts to increase the number of casualties;446 it took him three month to accomplish, according to al-Nabaa.447 Daleel initially developed his bomb-making skills whilst in Aleppo at his dad’s soap factory, where he was used to working with chemicals.448 IS described him in the report as a “soldier of Islamic State” and described his attack as a “martyrdom operation.”449 When the German police raided his home in Germany, storage devices, gasoline, chemicals and numerous other IED precursor materials were discovered.450

Influences on Daleel’s decision to become a suicide bomber
Mohammad Daleel was denied asylum in Germany, yet was given the leave to stay temporarily because of the situation in Syria, according to the Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Hermann.451 It is unclear whether the rejection of his application was due to knowledge of his activities in Syria or due to it being an incomplete or contradictory application. It has since been confirmed that he faced deportation to Bulgaria at the time of the attack, because he had submitted his initial asylum request in the eastern European country.

Daleel was also considered mentally unstable and had attempted to take his own life on more than one occasion.452 It is possible that the rejection of his asylum
claim and increasing desperation therefore may have contributed a further negative impact to his state of mental health, and played a role in his decision to launch the attack.

Daleel had previously declared his support for IS, evidence of which was found in a video on his phone, along with numerous other videos containing Salafist content. The IS-linked media organization Amaq News Agency claimed that he had acted “in response to calls to target nations in the coalition.” Daleel had also attempted to return to Syria in 2014 from Europe to join IS, but he was unable to reach the country and therefore decided to instead target ‘crusaders’ in their own countries, as recommended by IS.

In the video of Daleel that was released after the attack, he says that his attack was as a response to Western foreign policy in the Middle East, stating in his words: “In response to the crimes carried out by the coalition in collaboration with Germany of bombing and killing of men, women and children [...] I announce the martyrdom operation in Ansbach in the county of Bavaria.”

He goes on to tell the German people that they “won’t be able to sleep peacefully anymore”, and says that there would be even larger attacks as long as Germany keeps fighting the Islamic state. He also defends the Islamic State, saying that they did not start this war, and that instead “it is your aircraft that are shelling Muslims indiscriminately.”. To his family, he said that they would meet in heaven, and asks God to accept him as a martyr.

This picture from Al Naba newspaper describes the suicide attack as the first martyrdom operation in Germany, and it explains Mohammad’s will to commit this act by saying: “it’s not possible for someone who knew monotheism to be able to live peacefully among polytheists, and also a person who knew Jihad can’t be away from circles of it.

In the video of Daleel that was released after the attack, he says that his attack was as a response to Western foreign policy in the Middle East, stating in his words:

Description of the suicide attack
On 28 December 2015, a suicide bombing took place in the neighbourhood of Zahara – a Syrian government stronghold – in the city of Homs, which is home to an Alawite majority. A SANA news agency report on the attack described how the bomber activated his suicide belt after first setting off a car bomb at the side of a main road, in an attempt to draw large crowds of people to the scene. He then targeting passers-by and emergency services gathering at the scene of the first explosion. Six people were reported to have been killed, and another 37 injured.

Background of suicide bomber
Abu Bilal was a media consultant with a major presence on social media, and was generally introduced in videos or articles as a member of the Revolutionary Council in Homs. Some media outlets reported him as a commander, but this seems to be a misunderstanding – Abu Bilal never claimed to be any more than a media spokesperson for the fighters in Homs or for those trapped in the Old City.

Before the Syrian uprising in 2011, when he was 23 years-old, he was an IT specialist, which most likely means something along the lines of a computer repairman. He grew up in his family home in Bab Dreib, a neighbourhood of Homs's extensive Old City. When protests first rocked Syria’s political scene as part of the wider ‘Arab Spring’ movement in 2011, Abu Bilal was among those marching for freedom and calling for the fall of the regime. He soon became a prominent voice on the ground, providing updates on events in the city to journalists based both inside and outside of Syria.
At some point during mid-2012 – just before the first available video of him was filmed – he stopped appearing in front of the Independence Flag used by the FSA, and replaced it with a white tawhid flag emblazoned with the Muslim declaration of faith. These flags are commonly associated with Islamist groups, and according to Abu Bilal he was later blacklisted by Al Jazeera as a result.

He was also associated with Hezbut Tahrir, an international Islamism organisation. Over the course of the siege of Homs, he gave several long-form interviews to HiT affiliates, and the first extant video of him is not a standard media appearance but a speech given by video link to Hezbut Tahrir’s conference, entitled ‘The Syrian Revolution for the Islamic State’ (Mahrajān ath-Thawra ash-Shāmiyya min ajji Dawlat al-Islām), where he declared that “our revolution will bring back all the glory of the Umma, from East to West!”

In late 2012, he described the war in Syria as jihād – a war which is “more and more pure a revolution between the right (haqq) and disbelief (kufr) and not solely for dignity or liberty.” At the same time, he still identified solidly with the FSA, and denied any division between the mujāhidīn and the revolutionaries in general.

While his family fled to Lebanon, Abu Bilal stayed in Homs in the besieged Old City, where clashes between the Free Syrian Army and the regime had intensified, leaving the Old City in a stranglehold. In the last six months of the siege – with IS, Ahrar al-Sham and the Nusra Front all on the rise – he began to publicly issue messages asking for these three groups to stop fighting one another and unite in order to fight the regime, praising their ‘genuine’ dedication to the cause. After the evacuation of the Old City of Homs in 2014, Abu Bilal stopped reporting and disappeared from the scene, just like many others from Old City of Homs.

Shortly after that, Abu Bilal pledged allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi through an announcement on his Facebook page, and said he considered anyone who fights against the Islamic State as a “flagrant Kafer.” He then re-emerged as a full-fledged IS media correspondent, reporting on the battle for the ancient city of Palmyra. After the Syrian presidential elections he became more sectarian than ever, and when the Charlie Hebdo attacks took place in Paris in January 2015, he praised those who carried out the attack and described it as a “blessed operation” that revenged the Muslims of the world.

Abu Bilal quickly turned into a valuable asset to IS as a result of his well-developed and extensive media contacts, and was rewarded with grants and marriage assistance normally only provided to foreign fighters.

**Influences on decision to become a suicide bomber**

Abu Bilal was not alone among the veterans of Homs in leaving the besieged city and joining Islamic State. Pro-IS (or more accurately pro-Jihadi Salafist) views became increasingly common in Homs as the siege dragged on, especially as disillusionment with the FSA and the broader opposition forces began to set in. His increasingly stark, conspiratorial view of the world, his desperation and strong desire for revenge were far from unique. Apparently, the siege affected him greatly, with a close friend of his, Jalal al-Talawy remarking: “He wasn’t an extremist or a fanatic. But his whole attitude changed during the siege.” Abu Bilal became increasingly embittered with the ‘international community’, the leadership of the FSA and the official opposition (“these foreign agents who sit in hotels and take the money which belongs to the martyrs and speak in the name of the Syrian people”). Being from Homs – a site of particular sectarian clashes in the early period of the siege – his sectarian feelings towards Alawites grew more and more intense as he became convinced that there was a regime plan to wipe out the non-Alawites from Homs city, which he called “a war of sectarian extermination”.

Abu Bilal, similar to many other revolutionaries, felt betrayed by the lack of supplies reaching Homs. In mid-2013 he leaked a document to the al-Ghad news channel which supposedly provided proof that Salim Idris had received a huge sum of money to provide Homs with supplies, but had not passed any of the money on to be used for the purpose intended. This theme recurs again and again in relation to the situation in Homs, with many fighters asking why have the FSA had not sent heavy weapons (asliḥa saqīla or naw’iyya) and other essential supplies. In an impassioned video from inside a mosque struck by the regime’s MiG planes in 2012, Abu Bilal shouts into the camera: “For six months we haven’t seen the coalition do anything for these people under siege – they haven’t sent us bread, they haven’t sent us heavy weapons – and they’re coming at us in MiG’s…there are some 800 families, do they want to exterminate us? When are the opposition going to stop sitting around overseas [not doing anything]?”

An answer comes in another interview, where he exclaims: “The international community… have made
all Syria into a hell, because they don’t want to discuss with you and they don’t want to put in place our foreign agenda, which is the [security of] the Israeli border and protection of minorities, as they call it... Sorry, but Sunnis are being killed and slaughtered in the hundreds, but the Nusayri Alawites who kill hundreds of us every day, we’re not allowed to kill them?"

One word recurs constantly in all Abu Bilal’s interviews – *khazlān*, meaning ‘abandonment’. On several different occasions, he makes increasingly desperate condemnations of the FSA battalions in Rif Homs who had failed to break the siege, and also of the leadership, whom he said claimed to be supplying them but had instead left them to die of hunger and lack of ammunition. Repeatedly, he rues the fact that Homs had been abandoned “by those closest before those further away” (al-qarīb qabl al-ba’īd), and says that the revolutionaries have fragmented into hundreds of tiny brigades willing to sell out for donor money.

After some of the rebels left the siege as part of the first negotiated withdrawal, he poured contempt on those who abandoned their “religion and their dignity... for the worldly life [ḥayāt ad-dunyā, i.e. as opposed to ‘the life to come’] and some cigarettes.” When the siege was finally brought to an end through a negotiated withdrawal of the opposition from the Old City, Abu Bilal released one final video before boarding the buses out of Homs, promising that he would return to liberate his home with his “blood and body parts.”

Abu Bilal’s sectarianism was clearly pronounced, and he frequently spoke about wanting to hurt Alawites in revenge for their violence against the Sunnis. Therefore, the choice of his target makes sense. However, the exact process by which Abu Bilal himself came to be chosen for and accepted carrying out the suicide mission remains unclear. One contact said that Abu Bilal had stressed his desire to achieve martyrdom, and Zahra seems to be a personally relevant target, raising the question of whether therefore he himself was pushing to be allowed to carry out the attack.

Community and family response to attack
The circumstances of Abu Bilal’s death are murky at best and reflect a general lack of information from inside IS-held territory and from other Syrian activists. Initial reports suggested he had been killed by an airstrike in Palmyra. However, IS released an official statement claiming that he was the perpetrator of the suicide bombing in Zahra. Friends and acquaintances who continued to follow his activities confirmed that as far as they were aware, he had carried out a suicide bombing. Abu Bilal’s death was greeted with surprise and an outpouring of condolences on social media, mostly from those opposed to Islamic State. “May God forgive him,” said one commenter; “in spite of what happened later he was one of the heroes of Homs,” said another.

13.4 Transcripts of the wills of Syrian and Iraqi Suicide Bombers
This section provides details on the identity of suicide bombers who have detonated themselves in Iraq and Syria, and outlines full transcripts of the wills and final recorded statements of 12 Syrian and 6 Iraqi suicide bombers. Their statements, often recorded in the days immediately before their suicide missions, were released by their affiliated groups in the form of online videos posted in the aftermath of the suicide attacks.

13.4.1 SYRIAN SUICIDE BOMBERS
1. ABU YAQOUB AL SHAMI
Nationality: Syrian
Affiliation: Jaish Al Fateh
Operation date: August 2016
Attack location: Al Ramousah, Aleppo
Related videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmDCj2u4jBw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxLo5AJ0kJU

Description included in the video
The will of Abu Yaqoub Al Shami, a short while before he embarked with his explosive car to break the siege on Aleppo. He targeted rawafidh in Ramousah.

Content of will
Abu Yaqoub Al Shami carried out his operation in Al Ramousah, Aleppo, in August 2016, and is affiliated with Jaish Al Fateh. In the video, he states: “I call on my Jihadi brothers to unite their fight and their word. We only fight to bring victory to this relation and to the word of There is no god but Allah I. undertook this deed, because it is for establishing Sharia in the land of Aleppo and the land of Al Sham, to unify the fight, to clean the corrupts in Aleppo and Al Sham. I call on my brothers to persist, persist on this path, this road by Allah is the righteous path, and the path of the prophet, and his companions after him.”
2. ABU DUJANAH WALEEED AL OUSAIRI
Nationality: Saudi
Affiliation: Al Nusra Front or IS (different sources that indicate IS and al-Nusra)
Attack location: Jisr Al shoghour
Operation date: May 2013
Related video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUm_6JyWQMs

Description included in the video
The suicide bomber targeted a military barracks used by the Syrian army. The whole barracks was destroyed and almost 100 soldiers were killed.

Content of will
Abu Dujanah Waleed Al Ousairi, a Saudi suicide bomber, is either affiliated with Islamic State or Al Nusra, according to different sources. He carried out his attack in Jisr al-Shoghour, Syria, in May 2013. In his will, he states: “All the praises be to God, the Lord of the Worlds and on our prophet peace be upon him. Today we will avenge our families in Banyas, we will cut the heads of those Alawites, I ask Allah the almighty to enable me to kill them… this is the first revenge operation and Inshallah there will be an operation after the other. I ask Allah the almighty to give us the strength to persist together, and as for our jihadi brothers in Al Sham and all over the world, by Allah remain and persist on this path, the jihad path, the honourable path, do not fail. By Allah, the youth will bring victory to the nation, oh youth of the nation, those who are absent from jihad, go on to Jihad. And to those who are blessed with having arrived to the land of Jihad, persist and be patient and merciful with your brothers, and I ask Allah to bring you goodness with you and gather us with you in Heaven, and gather us together as beloved brothers, and bring us together on the platforms of light.”

3. ABU ALFAROUQ ALSHAM
Nationality: Syrian
Affiliation: Islamic State
Attack location: exact location unspecified, but the video states the attack was carried out in the “northern countryside of the Islamic State.”
Attack date: unspecified
Related videos: https://dawaalhaq.com/post/54917

Content of will
Abu Alfarouq Alshami, a disabled suicide bomber affiliated with IS, was featured in the IS propaganda production “The seekers of life”, which was released it on 19 October 2016, two days after the battle for Mosul began.

In the film, Alshami says: “Praise be to Allah, lord of the world, the brother in the vehicle’s centre, praise be to Allah, arrange this matter, my car will be automatic, I will drive it by hand, I can’t use my legs because of my injury, thus I will use my hands. My message to the enemy of Allah, did you think that my injury will stop me from Jihad in the name of Allah? We have brothers who are thirsty for your blood and they are in same situation as me, they are disabled but are eager to meet you, enemies of Allah, with explosive cars. I don’t rest, I say what the lions say… I am the son of the Islamic state, if the mountains collapse I will not. We only carried out this work out of following the steps of the companions of the prophets, peace be upon him, following the steps Omar Bin Al Jamuh, who entered heaven with his limping leg.”

In the propaganda production, it was stated that he carried out his attack against Sahawat Al Riddah in the northern countryside of the Islamic State. The word Sahawat Al Riddah, indicate Sunni sects that are infidels according to IS ideology.

4. OMAR AL JAZRAWI
Nationality: unspecified
Affiliation: Jund Al Aqsa
Attack location: Hama, Syria
Attack date: August 2015
Related video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKJSMyKYfc4

Content of will
Omar Al Jazrawi was affiliated with Jund Al Aqsa, and carried out his operation in Hama, Syria, in August 2015. In his will, he states: “This is the path to the Houria, ten meters from here, 72 Houria, pray for us so that we can reach them, and open the road for our brothers, praise be to Allah who blessed me with this path, I call to be pious to Allah in secret and in candor, by Allah persist on this path, be patient and don’t fight among yourselves so you fail, we only fight to bring victory to Allah’s word and establish the Sharia, to respond to the call of our retained brothers and sisters in the prisons of the tyrants. I would tell my parents no to not be sad as I am going to heaven as wide as the skies and earth, and I ask Allah to accept me, as well as you, amongst the martyrs. And to gather me, as well as you, in the heavens of bliss, and at last don’t forget me from your
prayers and I ask Allah to unite the jihadists fight on the unity word.”

**Description included in the video**
“The checkpoint of is the last defence line for the city, and there are tens of soldiers and many vehicles after the checkpoints.” According to the video, the most important results of this suicide bombing are the following: Breaking the last defence line of the city.

Killing no less than 50 soldiers of the Syrian army
Destroying a number of vehicles and weapons

### 5. Abu Mus’ab Al Jazrawi

- **Age:** 19
- **Nationality:** unspecified
- **Affiliation:** Jund Al Aqsa
- **Attack location:** Sahl Al Ghab, Hama, Syria
- **Attack date:** April 2016

**Description included in the video**
The video begins by quoting Bin Laden, whilst introducing the suicide bomber. It says he decided to “migrate” Al sham to defend his Muslim brothers and sisters, and shortly after he arrived he insisted on carrying out a suicide bombing targeting the regime.

**Content of will**
Abu Mus’ab Al Jazrawi carried out his operation in Khirbet Al Naqous, Sahl Al Ghab, in the Hama countryside during April 2016, and is affiliated with Jund Al Aqsa. He states in his will: “My Muslim nation we only sacrifice our souls to bring victory to the religion of Allah and to defend our honour. How many children died and women widowed while the traitor world leaders are watching and listening and haven’t done a thing. Don’t you even consider us as your enemies, terrorists, killers or corrupts, by my God we are your sons and you are our families, but our enemies are eager to divide us.”

### 6. SHAMEL ALANSARI

- **Nationality:** Syrian
- **Affiliation:** Al Nusra front
- **Operation location:** Al Ghouta, near Damascus
- **Operation date:** unspecified

**Related videos:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEFdIRujaKU
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wn2Csx2jYo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxeNNdMijEE

**Content of will**
Shamel Alansari was affiliated with Al Nusra front, and carried out his attack in Tameko factory, in Al Ghouta, in the countryside surrounding Damascus. The following transcript is of an interview conducted with him on video, along his will:

**Presenter:** “Beloved brother in God, tell us how you joined Al-Nusra Front?”

**Alansari:** “In the name of Allah almighty, Praise be to Allah, sincerest prayers be upon the prophet and his companions all. Know beloved brother, God may bring success to us both, that God endowed our Muslim nation with blessed revolutions in many countries and even in Syria, and then I asked myself: ‘What has forced people to such thing? And what do people want from such revolutions?’ I found one answer: It is to fight the enemies of Allah and tyrants who ruled people and wreaked havoc on Earth, then people had to commit to Jihad. I started looking among fighting groups about who are on my side and who carry my ideology, I found Al-Nusra Front to be calling on people to the same ideology which is enforcing laws of Allah on Earth, and enforce what his prophet practised and said, so I hurried and joined Al-Nusra Front under their banner.”

**Presenter:** “How did you choose the route to martyrdom operations, despite that it is a new thing for the Syrian people and it is denounced by the majority”.

**Alansari:** “Yes brother, you are right by Allah, they were denounced. The Syrian people were heedless that was known only to Allah. Thank Allah they are now accepted. When I joined Al-Nusra Front and became one of their members, I went along with an Emir to one of the bases. I went into the base and found a serenity, they were like the rest of the fighting brothers, they are just more into obedience of Allah and his worship, thanks to Allah. They are people who have a unique status with Allah, what caused me to have more liking for them is their sincere love to each other in the name of Allah. Their status is their eagerness towards Allah, they long for Allah and only Allah knows their status. How they sacrifice themselves cheaply for Allah. The brother sees how when a martyr gets into his car, there are tons of explosives, or tens of tons, in one instance there was twenty. So, you see the status of the brother among the explosives, but he’s in a serenity that only Allah knows its secret. What is the status of this man! It is a relationship with Allah that has been established. Thanks to Allah, their best
qualities was serenity, a one whose secret is only known by Allah. I saw this that I am talking about with my own eyes, when I hit the road with my car, I was the same like them, thanks to Allah, I rushed to ask for the Emir, I enrolled my name and joined."

Another section of video shows the suicide bomber talking, while he is in his explosive-filled car, the night before his operation:

"This is what we could prepare for you, to rip your body apart, and these are our horses, tied waiting for you. God willing, tomorrow morning we will have our meeting with you, God may reward you. By Allah, and with his permission, Allah may accept our brother Asem, he only had one and half ton. For me, I have seven tons, Allahu Akbar. With Allah's permission, I'll blast them into pieces. By Allah, and with his permission, this ash is backup which will be like fire for them God's willing. I ask Allah to make this filming. By Allah, I would not like there to be too much filming, but I did not record my martyrdom until I saw how my brothers before me, you see one brother in his vehicle like I am here now, and he is smiling as if he doesn't care, why not, if he is going to meet Allah, we ask Allah to accept us."

Another section of the interview is then shown, which is outlined below:

**Presenter:** "How do you feel while you are heading towards your goal, and what happens then?"

**Alansari:** "If I told you I was going to Allah who is going to lead me to the right path, a man who is going to meet Allah, what will his status be, he will be like someone who is longing to Allah."

**Presenter:** "We ask Allah to accept it from you."

**Alansari:** "When I hit the road towards my target, I lived an ideology between fear and hope, I fear that if I stay in this world that I will not worship Allah properly as he ordered. I have a firm belief that I am going to Allah who will lead me to the right path. I think Allah will accept from me if I delivered for him, with his permission. This is the status of those who did it before me, and this is my status with Allah's permission, and this will be the status of those who will come after me, I am describing this to you. When I was hitting my target, I was very certain that Allah will give me steadiness in these moments; he is the one who promised us victory and steadiness. Allah says: Remember thy Lord inspired the angels (with the message): 'I am with you: give firmness to the Believers: I will instil terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them'."

"With Allah's support when I hit my target, I will be hit with the serenity that I described to you. By Allah, I felt a serenity that only Allah knows how it feels like and I had luck and success endowed by Allah. He is the one who promised us victory and steadiness. When tyrants and infidels saw a bomb with the 'There is no God but Allah' flag, they got scared and escaped to their destiny. Those who were initially at the forefront of the building fled and hid behind the building. They thought they would survive, but they didn't know that Allah destined me to reach the same building and park my car there and to reach those who hid behind the building as Allah promised us victory, we slit their necks with Allah's support. Those who fled were 14 people, I swear to Allah that they died and all those who were behind the building died too. With Allah's support, I could park the car and open the door of the car calmly and with serenity I took the path of my brothers and the car explosion was remotely executed."

"To my brothers, you are, by Allah, more loved to us than ourselves, and we will, by Allah, sacrifice ourselves cheaply. We are persistent and I ask Allah to accept it from you and I ask you piety and embracing Allah by obedience to him, Allah says: '(45) O ye who believe! When ye meet a force, be firm, and call Allah in remembrance much (and often); that ye may prosper'."

"God promised us that if we carry out these five things, he will make us give us victory and thanks to Allah we saw victory with our eyes. I ask God to give steadiness to my brothers and to accept their Jihad, and perseverance."

7. **ABU ISLAM AL SHAMI**

Nationality: Syrian
Affiliation: Al Nusra
Attack location: Al-Qusayr, Homs
Attack date: unspecified
Related Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhzdsNOAYZE

**Content of will**

Abu Islam Al Shami was affiliated with Al Nusra, and carried out his attack in Al-Qusayr, Homs, in Syria. He
says in his will: “Glory be to Allah, when I made the decision to carry out a martyrdom operation, which Allah endowed us with, I wanted to ask the Emir to give me a 5-tonne car. Glory be to Allah, Allah instead was generous to me as he endowed me with 20 tons. Thanks to Allah.”

As part of his will he sends a message to the Nusayris in the city of Homs: “We tell them, by Allah if we could fill for you more of these explosives, we would have.”

A person asks the suicide bomber: “You load 20 tons of explosives and you detonate yourself, how is that?” He replies: “By Allah, and glory be to Allah, I will say it in a few words: I hurried to you my God, so you are happy. Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in his cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur’an: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.

As for my first will, it is for my mother and father, I tell them that by Allah I know for certain that me being away from you all these years has an impact on your hearts, and I ask Allah almighty to compensate you with heaven, be patient and pious as much as you can, and we meet in heaven God’s willing. My second will is for Mujahedeen in the ground of Jihad, God says: ‘O ye who believe! If ye will aid (the cause of) Allah, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly’. I ask you and ask myself embracing Allah’s piety. We will, by Allah, win through our obedience to Allah, so be pious and don’t be lenient and don’t halt until you erect Allah’s laws. By Allah, we are born for this purpose.”

In the next part of the recording, the suicide bomber speaks shortly before carrying out the operation.

A person asks the suicide bomber: “Abu Islam, these are the last moments of you being with us in this world, do you have a word from your heart for your brothers?” He replies: “By Allah, there is great sadness in leaving you, leaving the brothers, but longing to Allah is greater. Honestly guys, longing for Allah is greater than anything, I swear by Allah almighty, to the extent that your heart flies from happiness. I swear by Allah almighty, and there is no power but in god, I ask you Allah’s piety. God willing, we will win only by obeying Allah, be pious as much as you can and we meet in heaven God willing. I ask my brothers in the ground of Jihad and Muslims in general to not halt and not be lenient until Allah’s laws are erected on Earth. By Allah almighty we were created for this purpose. Allah says: ‘And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me’. We were created for this purpose. God willing, they don’t halt or be lenient until they erect Allah’s laws, few years away by Allah, few years.”

The suicide bomber also sends a message to his parents: “Embrace Allah’s piety as you can, and stick to patience, Allah almighty says, it is good news for everyone who lost their son to martyrdom. A cheer from God, he says: ‘Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account.’ It means automatically when you are patient with your son, that your son is doing Jihad, then automatically there is no judgement, God willing. ‘Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account.’ God willing, embrace Allah’s piety as you can, and stick to patience and prayer and we meet in heaven, God’s willing.

A person then asks the suicide bomber: “You know of course that the load of your car is 20 tons, you are the first to do this, this is generosity from God to you, if there was more, would you like more?” He replies: “I would love more, much more. By Allah almighty, guys I talk to myself for a while and say, Allah and Glory be to Allah says: ‘make a wish, worshipper.’ I reply with one thing: I want your satisfaction my God, by Allah more beautiful than heaven, more beautiful than nymphs, more beautiful than everything. Imagine Allah, Glory be to Allah, tells you to wish something, and you say: heaven?”

8. ABU FOUZ AL ANSARI
Affiliation: Al Nusra front
Attack location: Al Yarmouk, Damascus
Attack date: August 2013
Related videos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lRAhc83XaEM

Note: this area in damascus is an area heavily populated by civilians, although in the video they say they are targeting Shabiha hiding places.

Content of will
Abu Fouz Al Ansari was affiliated with Al Nusra front, and carried out his attack in Al Yarmouk camp in Damascus, in August 2013. He says in his will: “Praise be to Allah who brought honour to the monotheists and humiliate the infidels and the polytheists, he brought
honour to himself and to his prophet and to the believers, and he promised horrid torture to those who are seeking it with other than him. I write my will from Al Sham, the land of dignity and jihad. I write my will and I am eager to meet Allah and certain of his promise. To the sons of the nations who are absent from Jihad and from bringing victory to the religion, fear Allah and help you sisters who are being raped, fear Allah in the blood that are being spilled day and night in the land of Al Sham. Did you forget what Allah almighty said? If you do not go forth, he will punish you with a painful punishment and will replace you with another people and you will not harm Him at all And Allah is over all things competent.

9. ABU OUN AL SHAMALI
Affiliation: Al Nusra front
Attack location: Aleppo, Syria
Attack date: January 2013
Related video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rttXXvyKFEk

Content of will
Abu Oun Al Shamali was affiliated with Al Nusra front, and carried out his operation in the French hospital in Aleppo, in January 2013. He states in his will: “Praise be to Allah, lord of the world, prayers and peace be upon the most honourable prophet, praise be to Allah who showed us this and we wouldn’t have with him. Praise be to Allah who made us go out of the darkness to the light, the path we are on is the happiness path, the goodness path. Allah remove, with this path, distress and sadness. This is what the prophet told us. I call on my jihadi brothers to be honest and sincere, to communicate with honesty and sincerity and to strengthen each other. Persisting on this path is honourable I swear by Allah. Cheer my brothers, the victory is near, I swear by Allah, the nation is coming into victory and goodness. I call on you, my brothers, by Allah, to carry out martyrdom operations, by Allah it’s the fastest and closest path to heaven, and the strongest spite against the enemies of Allah, we shall bring them human missiles. It is enough for us that we have the prophet’s hadith: “those who are on the front line and don’t look back until they are killed, those who will be in the highest rooms of heaven” By Allah this hadith is talking about the martyrdom operation, and those who carry them out are in the highest rooms in heaven. They are honest and are on this road and I ask Allah to give them strength and persistence.”

10. ABU ALQA’AQA AL SHAMALI
Affiliation: Al Nusra front
Operation location: Sahl Al Ghab, Hama, Syria
Operation date: January 2013
Will and the operation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRV6RX7vGJc

Content of will
Abu Alqa’aqa Al Shamali carried out his operation also in Sahl Al Ghab, in the Hama countryside, in January 2013, and is affiliated with Al Nusra Front. He says in his will: “These are the missiles or bashar and his ilk, they are bombing the vulnerable Muslims in Alsham. My will to my loving mother and to my dear father, if you get my martyrdom news, inshallah, be patient and don’t be sad, cheer and chant Allahu Akbar, and thank Allah that made your descendants a devoted son to his religion and wounded nation. Oh youth of Islam, here is the heaven opened its doors and is calling for you, come oh Allah servants, come to me oh servants of Allah, Allah the almighty said: ‘O ye who believe! what is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling heavily to the earth? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.’ Oh youth of Islam, Oh youth of Islam, come to the best of all deeds after believing in Allah Almighty, the prophet peace be upon him was asked about the best of all deeds, he said faith in Allah, faith in Allah and his prophet, he said then Jihad in his name, he said then an accepted Hajj. Oh Allah, take from my blood so you can be satisfied, I pray for Allah that he makes my body a volcano to burn the bodies of the Al Nusayris and the apostates ‘Murtadein’, Oh Allah don’t let there be a grave for my body. Oh Allah make me a martyr and raise my stand to be next to the prophets, and peace be upon our master Muhammad.”

11. ABU MOUSAAB
Affiliation: unspecified
Attack location: unspecified location in Syria
Attack date: unspecified
Related videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dWOh8mkZ3k

Content of will
Abu Mousaab, who carried out his attack at an unknown location in Syria, says in his will: “By Allah, be strong be strong, beware of deception and comfort, beware for your firm belief to weaken. All what you see of propaganda of military tanks, if your intentions are sincere you
will win the survival of the God of all, by Allah it’s a great winning, either winning of martyrdom. Not America, not Bashar will take the Khilafat, the Khilafat was promised to us by who? By the most honest Mohammad peace be upon him, we shall take despite their will. I call on you by Allah if you get my calling, let your swords be spilling of your enemies blood before the nightfall. Stand the stand of a one man. There is no goodness in a living where our honour is being violated and out brother’s dignity is being stepped on, and we are ruled by the cross servants, Allahu Akbar. Be sincere in your prayers to your brother. God’s willing angels are the most sincere and they answer your prayers. By Allah almighty, for God’s sake I ask you to maintain cooperation with each other, for God’s sake. The most important thing is to resolve any conflicts amongst you, you know what I mean when I say resolve conflicts and deal with each other brothers. I mean, it is the maximum patience when you are patient with your brother harming you, if you do that Allah may not accept your Jihad, but may accept your patience with your brother. By Allah, brothers, Allah may bring you luck, Allah may accept you. I was wishing to carry on my operation when the Americans come, I would have loved to carry out my operation against the Americans, to avenge Sheikh Oussama, we shall avenge you Sheikh. Allah willing we will cut the necks of the infidels, a pinch, I will only feel a pinch, this is what the prophet, peace be upon him, told us, the martyr feels only a pinch, whether he is Istishhadi or fighter, Allah willing we will not feel anything but a pinch. I am eager to be with Allah, Allah knows, how eager I am to be with him and next to his prophet, peace be upon him.”

12. ABU DUJANAH AL SHAMI
Affiliation: Al Nusra front
Operation location: Aleppo
Operation date: July 2016
Related video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ewn8QgHXE4

Content of will
Abu Dujanah Al Shami was affiliated with Al Nusra, and carried out his attack in Almallah, Aleppo in July 2016. He says in his will: “The purpose of the martyrdom operation I am carrying out today, is in the Almallah area and Alzeka block which the army (referring to the Syrian regime army) recently progressed to, there are rawafidh (Shia) and pigs there... my massage to the rawafidh in the Almallah area, we prepared explosive cars for you to detry your shrines, we will humiliate you and turn you into pieces. My message to my brothers in Jihad, to be patient on the path of jihad. By Allah it’s a hard path, but it’s rewarded from Allah the lord of the world, I advise you to contemplate the martyrdom operations because it’s the harshest and strongest on the enemies of the religion, and it is the closest path to Allah the almighty.”

13.4.2 IRAQI SUICIDE BOMBERS
1. ABU TALHA AL-HOULAIBI
Nationality: unspecified
Affiliation: Islamic State
Attack date: July 2014
Attack location: Nanva, Mosul
Related videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lt-FGVZAhE

Content of will
Abu Talha Al-Houlaibi was affiliated with IS, and carried out his attack in Mosul in July 2014. In his will, he states: “I call on my brothers to accept the Jihad path, many people say that Jihadis live in fear and don’t get married, they say Jihad is killing and it has no life, Jihadis get married, they eat, they drink and live the most beautiful life. The prophet peace be upon him says: ‘’you should carry on jihad, it’s one of the doors to heaven, Allah will make distress go away with this path. We are all human we all fear explosions. The prophet told us that the martyrdom only feel an ant bite. The martyrdom operation is the best way to spite the religion’s enemies, it puts fear in their hearts. The Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham survived and is expanding and persisting, we say to the enemy of religion in the West as well as Arabs; tyrants or Arabs and the foreigners that the Islamic state which is Islam is persisting, and we say to spiteful scholars die in your anger, IS will stay, do you guess that either IS or Islam is reliant on platforms or discloses or spreading the word of Islam. It won’t last without fatalities. Unless Muslims sacrifice themselves. Therefore, the prophet and his companions sacrificed their lives and money to raise the honour of Islam. Blessed is the one who took the path of Jihad, the closest path to heaven. A man won’t fear when he embarks on the righteous path because it puts peace and serenity in his heart.”

2. ABU OMAR AL SHAMI
Affiliation: Islamic State
Attack location: Al Ramadi, Iraq
Attack date: July 2016
Related videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuNPPsi3pTA
Content of will
Abu Omar Al Shami was affiliated with IS, and carried out his attack in Al Ramadi, Iraq, in July 2016. He says in his will: “We ask Allah to make us sincere, we ask him to make us devoted to him This deed is only for Allah, it doesn’t have any aim for reputation or for nationalism, my deed is only for the glorified and exalted, be to say to me: ‘I approve of you’. I only have one wish and that is for Allah glorified and exalted for him to smile for what I am doing.”

3. RABYEI AL MUHAJER
Affiliation: Islamic State
Attack date: December 2013
Attack location: Al Anbar, Iraq
Related videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P381dTLjsAE

Content of will
Rabyei Al Muhajer was affiliated with IS, and carried out his attack in Al Anbar. He says is his will: "By Allah, oh rawafidh, the Sunnis shall never leave you alone, the descendants of the prophet's companions shall never leave you alone, the sons of the prophet's companions shall never leave you alone, by Allah, we shall come to you with martyrdom operations, we shall come to you with suppressors, we shall come to you with improvised explosive devices, we shall never leave you alone, by Allah we will avenge all those who cursed, and those shall never be safe from the hands of the jihadist.”

He says being asked what he would like to say to his Jihadist brothers: “I call on my Jihadi brothers to devout to Allah, this my first and last advice to them, devoutness to Allah.”

When asked ‘What do you say to the youth of the nation who are absent from jihad in the name of Allah?’, he replies: “To the youth of the nation, to those who accepted and were humiliated by the infidels and Rawafidh, I tell you that Islam will only get stronger if they fight it.”

4. ABU QASOURA AL MUHAJIR
Affiliation: Islamic State
Attack date: December 2013
Attack location: Al Anbar, Iraq.
Relevant videos:
https://archive.org/details/rsaaaelMlahm13

Content of will
Abu Qasoura Al Muhajir was affiliated with IS, and carried out his attack in Al Anbar, in December 2013. He states in his will: "We are only carrying out this work to bring victory to the religion and to Allah. To avenge Allah and his prophet and the Prophet's companions from those spiteful apostates, from those filthy rawafidh, those who spoke ill in the honour of the prophet's companions May Allah be pleased with them. By Allah we will avenge them, we shall avenge them in a way that they shall never forget."

5. SAIF AL ISLAM AL IRAQI
Affiliation: Islamic State
Attack date: October 2016
Attack location: Al Mosul, Iraq
Related video:
https://cloud.mail.ru/public/Lm8j/ekoSxaVY8

Content of will
Saif Al Islam Al Iraqi was affiliated with IS, and carried out his attack in Al Mosul, Iraq in October 2016. He says in his will: “My message to those who are absent from jihad, I target this message to you, why don’t you walk to your state, you must carry out jihad and martyrdom operations, these are calamitous and spiteful on Rawafidh. My message to my mother and father, if they receive the news of my martyrdom to be happy and chant Allahu Akbar and praise Allah to this bliss that came to them.”

6. ABU OMAR AL IRAQI AND SA’AD AL IRAQI
Affiliation: Islamic State
Attack date: October 2016
Attack location: Al Mosul, Iraq
Related video:
https://cloud.mail.ru/public/Lm8j/ekoSxaVY8

Description included in the video
The production presents the bombers involved in numerous suicide operations, however, only two of them speak during the production. The production also features a disabled fighter, and stresses in this context that nothing can stop the Jihadis from fighting and sacrificing their lives. As we have found, this isn’t the first time that IS stress this point, as in a production examined, they featured a disabled suicide bomber and focused on his operation in Syria.
Content of will
Abu Omar Al Iraqi and Sa’ad Al Iraqi were both affiliated with ISIS, and carried out their suicide operations in Al Mosul, Iraq in October 2016. In the video, they state: “Didn’t you know, oh crusaders, that we have hundreds of thousands of the descendants of Haram, Abdulla and Omeri, don’t you see how they are advancing to death fearlessly, laughing, and death is escaping them, so they chase it until they reach it, they chase to death to write history again, they are saying with their blood; here is the heaven, here is the jihad market, here is the Islam house, here is the Khilafat house, here is the devotion, here is dignity, and there isn’t dignity for Muslims but here. Can those be defeated? No I swear by the God of Muhammad peace be upon him.”

13.5 Yemeni suicide bombers

ABU HATIM (AQAP)
As described by a fellow fighter in Inspire’s issue 6, Abu Hatim was “A man dedicated to the religion of Allah; pious, devout, optimistic, a lover of the kitâb of Allah, and intimately involved in asking Allah for shahâda.”

He left school against his parents wishes claiming, “How do I answer Allah regarding sitting with women!” He had heard about the stories of the mujahidin in Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan and at the age of 18 he joined the Jihad. He attended the training camps and was praised as intelligent, fast learner and with the skills of a commander. He would lay at night staring at the sky and cry for the paradise awaiting him.

A year later he was pictured in one of Al Qaeda’s videos “Rad al-`Udwân” (Repulsion of Aggression) as a fighter, but his main objective was Martyrdom, rejecting any gains in this world. According to the story told in inspire, he was granted martyrdom in Hudaydah, killing 4 people.

ABU RAWI AS-SWAY’ARI (AQAP)
The story of Abu Rawi is told in Inspire’s issue 13. He spent 4 years in a Saudi Prison according to the magazine, due to his beliefs. Once released from jail, he joined the mujahideen in the Arabian Peninsula. The story tells us he had lost 4 of his sons as martyrs, one of them by an American drone attack in Hadramawt.

Three years later, he registered himself in the martyrdom-seeker list, only 2 weeks after the death of one of his sons. The Amir had asked him not to, since it would be too much for his wife to handle, but Abu Rawi had made up his mind.

On June 26, 2014 a multiple attack was carried out at a Military Intelligence building connected to the american drone program. A suicide bomber detonated a car bomb at the entrance of the base, another bomber detonated his device at the airport and the third one at the communications center. The driver was Abu Rawi As-Sway’ari.

ABU HANIFA AL-HOLLANDI (IS)
Abu Hanifa al-Hollandi’s real name has not been disclosed, but his nom de guerre suggests the Netherlands as his country of origin. He was identified as the suicide bomber who carried out the attack on the Presidential Palace in January 2016, killing 6 and injuring 11. A video later distributed by IS named “Crush your enemies” features Abu Hanifa before and during the attack. Even though he does not offer any personal reasons for his martyrdom, he calls on all Muslims, including Europeans, and especially in the Netherlands, to do Hijra, or emigrate to the Islamic State.

OTHER YEMENI SUICIDE BOMBERS
On January 17, 2016, Abu al-Qa’qaa’ al-Adani detonated his car bomb outside the residence of the police chief, General Shalal Shaea. The video shows, as with Abu Hanifa, the last words of the perpetrator and the images of his martyrdom.

On March 25, 2016, three suicide bombers targeted checkpoints around Aden. One of the bombers, Soheib al-Wiqari, in the video says: “..to rule the land with the laws of Allah…we are willing to put our blood and our lives on the line in order to see God’s rule on Earth.”

Abu Hamza al-Shabuani says in his declaration: “I bid you, my brothers, in suicide missions, for i swear they heal your chests and shove the infidels into the pits of hells.”
Abu Aisa al-Ansari, who detonated his bomb at the entrance of a military training camp on February 2016, says: "I bid you...by Allah i am proud...the "suicide operation" is the easiest way to heaven".

And finally the narrator, addressing the brothers in Yemen, states: "...know that we are not in need of a large number of soldiers nor a large number of weapons, all we need is men who are genuine, true and commited to Allah."

13.6 Tunisian suicide bombers
This section details the profile of Tunisian suicide bombers: where they came from, what their social and religious background was, why they were radicalised and how they joined Islamist armed groups.

Background
Our research shows that most Tunisian suicide bombers were aged between 18 and 35 at the time of their suicide operation. They hail mainly from marginalised areas south of Tunis, such as Ettadhamen, Douar Hicher, Manouba and Ezzahrouni. They also come from cities, towns and villages elsewhere in the country, including Bizerte, Sousse, Kairouan, Kasserine, Ben Guarden, Gafsa, Sidi bou Zid, Tatouine and Ramada.

A consistent pattern is quickly identifiable. Families are usually not aware of their sons’ involvement in jihadist activities, until one day they receive a call from them once they have arrived in Syria. Before their radicalisation and recruitment by jihadi armed groups, suicide bombers led seemingly ‘normal’ lives according to people who knew them. Many families express shock after learning that their sons have gone to Syria or that they carried out suicide attacks.

Like many other Tunisian fighters, suicide bombers do not tell their families their intention of joining al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic State and other armed groups, or that they plan to carry out a suicide attack. Some families of suicide bombers, foreign fighters or ex-combatants have set up organisations related to their cause, such as the Rescue Association of the Tunisian Ex-combatants Trapped abroad (RATTA). RATTA advocates for policies to prevent people from joining Islamic State and other armed Islamists groups abroad, while also seeking rehabilitation for former jihadists.

Recruitment
According to available information, activities related to recruitment and radicalisation often takes place in prisons, universities (e.g. Manouba University of Tunis), Salafist Mosques not controlled by the government - which are often in villages – and via online recruitment (e.g. through social network groups, twitter accounts and Facebook pages).

13.6.1 CASE STUDIES
Overview
This section presents key findings collected from primary information sources during the research mission to Tunis. It includes information on the areas where the two suicide bombers came from, as well as material taken from interviews with their friends and/or neighbours. It also provides an overview of the situation of Tunisian ex-combatants who are currently in prison and reports on interviews conducted with their families. Interviews were conducted on the basis of an agreed questionnaire aimed at unveiling the suicide bombers’/ex-combatants’ personalities, background, lifestyle and affiliation before and after their path to radicalisation and jihadism.

As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.

13.6.2 CASE STUDY 1: HOUSSEMABDELLI
Description of the suicide attack
On 24 November 2015, a bus carrying Tunisian presidential guards was blown up by a suicide bomber in Avenue Mohammed V, one of the busiest streets in the capital, Tunis. Twelve people were killed and a further 20 were wounded. The following day, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.

On 24 November 2015, a bus carrying Tunisian presidential guards was blown up by a suicide bomber in Avenue Mohammed V, one of the busiest streets in the capital, Tunis. Twelve people were killed and a further 20 were wounded. The following day, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.

Like many other Tunisian fighters, suicide bombers do not tell their families their intention of joining al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic State and other armed groups, or that they plan to carry out a suicide attack. Some families of suicide bombers, foreign fighters or ex-combatants have set up organisations related to their cause, such as the Rescue Association of the Tunisian Trapped abroad (RATTA). RATTA advocates for policies to prevent people from joining Islamic State and other armed Islamists groups abroad, while also seeking rehabilitation for former jihadists.

Recruitment
According to available information, activities related to recruitment and radicalisation often takes place in prisons, universities (e.g. Manouba University of Tunis), Salafist Mosques not controlled by the government - which are often in villages – and via online recruitment (e.g. through social network groups, twitter accounts and Facebook pages).

13.6.1 CASE STUDIES
Overview
This section presents key findings collected from primary information sources during the research mission to Tunis. It includes information on the areas where the two suicide bombers came from, as well as material taken from interviews with their friends and/or neighbours. It also provides an overview of the situation of Tunisian ex-combatants who are currently in prison and reports on interviews conducted with their families. Interviews were conducted on the basis of an agreed questionnaire aimed at unveiling the suicide bombers’/ex-combatants’ personalities, background, lifestyle and affiliation before and after their path to radicalisation and jihadism.

As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.

13.6.2 CASE STUDY 1: HOUSSEMABDELLI
Description of the suicide attack
On 24 November 2015, a bus carrying Tunisian presidential guards was blown up by a suicide bomber in Avenue Mohammed V, one of the busiest streets in the capital, Tunis. Twelve people were killed and a further 20 were wounded. The following day, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.

On 24 November 2015, a bus carrying Tunisian presidential guards was blown up by a suicide bomber in Avenue Mohammed V, one of the busiest streets in the capital, Tunis. Twelve people were killed and a further 20 were wounded. The following day, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.

Like many other Tunisian fighters, suicide bombers do not tell their families their intention of joining al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic State and other armed groups, or that they plan to carry out a suicide attack. Some families of suicide bombers, foreign fighters or ex-combatants have set up organisations related to their cause, such as the Rescue Association of the Tunisian Trapped abroad (RATTA). RATTA advocates for policies to prevent people from joining Islamic State and other armed Islamists groups abroad, while also seeking rehabilitation for former jihadists.

Recruitment
According to available information, activities related to recruitment and radicalisation often takes place in prisons, universities (e.g. Manouba University of Tunis), Salafist Mosques not controlled by the government - which are often in villages – and via online recruitment (e.g. through social network groups, twitter accounts and Facebook pages).

13.6.1 CASE STUDIES
Overview
This section presents key findings collected from primary information sources during the research mission to Tunis. It includes information on the areas where the two suicide bombers came from, as well as material taken from interviews with their friends and/or neighbours. It also provides an overview of the situation of Tunisian ex-combatants who are currently in prison and reports on interviews conducted with their families. Interviews were conducted on the basis of an agreed questionnaire aimed at unveiling the suicide bombers’/ex-combatants’ personalities, background, lifestyle and affiliation before and after their path to radicalisation and jihadism.

As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.

13.6.2 CASE STUDY 1: HOUSSEMABDELLI
Description of the suicide attack
On 24 November 2015, a bus carrying Tunisian presidential guards was blown up by a suicide bomber in Avenue Mohammed V, one of the busiest streets in the capital, Tunis. Twelve people were killed and a further 20 were wounded. The following day, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. As a general rule, topics related to jihadism and suicide bombers are not openly spoken about. During the mission, particularly in the areas where jihadists come from, locals were extremely suspicious and they were uncomfortable giving information about suicide bombers. They were concerned about the possibility of detention or police repression for giving information to foreigners. Fixers were generally able to convince people to give testimonies, but they would still often change their minds many times before committing to collaboration. There was a high level of paranoia over possible Salafist infiltration of the police, or about retaliation from the Ministry of the Interior or police.
The bus attack was the first suicide attack to successfully strike Tunisia’s capital. Two previous terrorist attacks in 2015, carried out at the Bardo Museum in Tunis and the Imperial Marhaba hotel in Sousse, were mainly directed at foreign tourists. By contrast, Abdelli’s suicide attack targeted Tunisians, and in particular state security personnel. According to Prime Minister Habib Essid, the attack represented an evolution in the behaviour of terrorists, as it attacked a symbol of the state in the heart of the city. After the attack, Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi declared a state of emergency, initially set to last for 30 days, but which remained in force until the end of the year.

Background of suicide bomber

The information in this section is based on interviews carried out in the neighbourhood of Ettadhamen, in Manouba, Tunis. A friend, an ex-girlfriend and a neighbour of the suicide bomber were interviewed.

Houssam Adbelli (whose full name is Houssam ben Hedi Ben Miled Abdelli) was 28 years-old at the time of the suicide attack. He was a street-seller in a working-class neighbourhood in Ettadhamen, where he was born into a poor family. Aida, a neighbour of Abdelli’s family, said she used to play with Abdelli when he was a child, along with several other kids in the area. She said she never noticed anything strange about his behaviour, and repeatedly described him as ‘normal’. He smiled a lot, although came across as slightly shy; he was also the best football players in the neighbourhood. One thing Aida particularly noted was his family’s socio-economic status – they were poorer than most and Abdelli seemed particularly concerned about it. Aida also used to visit Houssam’s family from time to time, describing them as ‘normal’ and as ‘good people’.

Abdelli was the second of three sons and he was not religious during his childhood or teenage years. In fact, none of his family went to the mosque regularly. Before being radicalised, Abdelli rarely prayed. His sister was quite liberal for a female from the neighbourhood – she used to go out late at night and she did not wear a veil.

The suicide bomber’s friend, Munam, a local criminal involved in the drug trade, said Abdelli’s family had no idea he was involved in criminality, nor that Abdelli was regularly (almost daily) smoking hashish with his friends. “His mother still thinks her son was an angel,” Munam said. Everyone said that even if the family knew something about his jihadist activities, they would not talk about it. Munam met Abdelli after he left school at 19. At that time, he was a nice guy, always smiling and joking. Munam also said Abdelli was well known in the area for being a good football player. He enjoyed life and liked flirting with the opposite sex. His friend said Abdelli left school because he felt uncomfortable with his clothing – he wanted to have fancy clothes like some of the other pupils, but he or his family could not afford them. “He felt somehow inferior to the others,” Munam said.
Abdelli did not have a girlfriend. He used to go out with many women ("easy women", he said), but was shy when he had to speak to someone he really liked. According to his friend, he did not really know how to talk to women or how to have a relationship.

After he left school, Abdelli started working as a street seller. He sold *hindi* or *chilli* plants, depending on the season. Occasionally, he also sold clothes. He used to tout his wares in front of the well-known Guffran mosque, which is where Munam and Abdelli met for the first time. His friend said that Salafists approached Abdelli and invited him to join daily prayers. At that time, in 2011-2012, Salafists were everywhere as a result of the lack of restrictions after the overthrow of the previous regime, and mosques were allowed to operate virtually uncontrolled. Abdelli was still drinking and smoking hashish, but he also started to pray regularly, signalling the beginning of a shift in behaviour.

Before he became radicalised, Abdelli was struggling to find a better job, as is the case with many young Tunisian jihadist recruits. Shortly after quitting his studies, he started to steal and soon entered the local 'crime' circle, which had close links to drug trafficking. He was a binge drinker, and his friend said he used to meet him in a bar every day. However, he was not violent; he liked jokes and enjoyed hanging out with friends and women, whilst football was his biggest passion. His largest problem was unemployment, and the sense that improving his life was impossible, his friend said.

Aida, his neighbour, used to have friendly chats with Abdelli. He would say to her "Hi *Duda*, how are you doing?" and would talk for a while. But then his behaviour changed quickly – "from one day to another, he has been brainwashed," she said. She could not say exactly when it happened, but it was sometime after the revolution. By 2013, he would not talk to her like he did before.

Aida smokes, does not pray and dresses quite freely, so she knew Abdelli was judging her, as many of the Salafists did in the aftermath of the revolution. In fact, Abdelli soon started avoiding all his friends who were not religious. He would call them *kuffar* (non-believer) because they were smoking and drinking. He also started to put pressure on his family, especially his sister for the way she dressed. His friend reported that Abdelli radically changed his attitudes towards females – he had soon stopped checking out women in the street – "It is *haram, haram,*" he would say. He instead wanted to have a serious relationship with a young woman and to get married, *inshallah.*

During the mission to Tunis, the AOAV researcher met his ex-girlfriend, Sara, who gave an account of her relationship with the suicide bomber. Sara is a young woman from Ettadhamen. At the time of the interview, she did not exhibit signs of religiosity – in fact, she was not veiled and was smoking in public.

"I started to date Abdelli when he first asked me out. At the beginning, I was intrigued by him, but our relationship did not last very long. He was too serious about it since the first day. He soon asked me to get engaged in the mosque El Guffran in front of his trusted imam, but I refused. I knew another five girls from the neighbourhood who end up in Syria, following their husbands after getting engaged in that mosque. I did not trust his intentions so I decided not so see him anymore," Sara said.

Abdelli seemed to be deeply charmed by the imams’ speeches, particularly certain sermons held by a famous imam called Ninja. According to the information gathered, Salafist recruiters are specialists in targeting and indoctrinating young men – they appear to be well versed in how to approach them and convince them to die as suicide bombers.

Some in the neighbourhood knew that Salafists helped Abdelli with money from time to time. They also gave presents to his family for the Eve of Eid (for example, they bought his family an *hallush*). His friend Munam also believes Abdelli started to receive larger amounts of money, but he did not know exactly how much. By 2014, Abdelli had grown a beard and would avoid talking to any of his former friends.

In August 2015, Abdelli was arrested on suspicion of having terrorist links, but was released shortly afterwards by the judicial authorities alongside a group of other suspects. Ministry of the Interior Security Chief Rafik Chelli issued a statement to a local radio station, stating the suspects were set free due to a lack of evidence against them.

In mid-2015, before the eventual attack took place, Abdelli disappeared for two to three months. Some say he was in Syria, but they do not know for sure. When he came back, he would not tell his friends where he had been. He just said that he had been praying a lot; that God had asked him to take it very seriously.
According to a friend who was interviewed by the media, Abdelli appeared to be disturbed a few days before the bombing, who said he was mostly talking about life-after-death and heaven. Abdelli did not want to die, his friends said – suggesting that he must have been brainwashed by Salafists with stories about heaven and paradise.

Influences on the decision to become a suicide bomber
It became clear from the research and interviews conducted with Abdelli’s friends and family in Tunis, that combination of factors interacted to contribute towards his radicalization, and to his decision to become a suicide bomber. These factors are not exclusively limited to, but certainly include the following:

- Youth/immaturity
- Unemployment and financial issues
- Frustration with his personal economic and social condition, and the wider context of this
- Criminality and problems with the police, particularly the authorities’ perception of residents from particular neighbourhoods and backgrounds.
- Extremist behaviours, e.g. experimentation with drugs and alcohol
- A lack of alternatives lifestyles or opportunities
- Weak personality, someone who may have been easily influenced by others

Community and family response to the attack
Shock, fear and shame were the main reactions of the suicide bomber’s family and the wider local community. After the attack, police came to his family’s house – some family members were arrested and monitored under suspicion of having helped orchestrate the suicide bombing. They were later found to be innocent, as is often the case in such scenarios. Abdelli’s involvement in the suicide attack however remains a source of shame for the family, who do not want to talk about the topic and are trying to forget what happened, with Abdelli’s neighbour remarking that the “Families of terrorists pay hard consequences for their sons’ actions. They are often interrogated by the police and they remain stigmatised within the community.”

A very good friend of Abdelli, who was a presidential guard, died in the attack. People were especially shocked to hear that Abdelli could target the presidential guards’ bus knowing that friend was present that day. They believe someone ‘strong’ is behind the attack, and that they must have coerced Abdelli forcefully to commit the abhorrent deed, which he would not have become involved with otherwise.

After the attack, people were scared of talking about the situation, particularly his family members. They moved to another area in Mnihla, but they are now residing back in Ettadhamen. They could not escape the feeling of fear that follows them wherever they go.

Recruitment procedures at El Guffran mosque
The interviews gave some insight into the recruitment procedures employed at El Guffran Mosque in Ettadhamen. These are likely to be standard procedures used in other mosques controlled by Salafists within Tunisia.

During the mission, the AOAV researcher visited the outside of the mosque, which is located in Intilaqa, the area of Ettadhamen in which the suicide bomber’s family lives. Access to the mosque is not visible from the main road, as the main entrance point is located at the bottom of a street crowded with street sellers and vendors. However, many of the sellers appeared to be fake. One man stood at the main entrance to the mosque, surrounded by other men who appeared to be guardians, and therefore it was not possible to approach the mosque without being noticed. During the short visit, the researcher could not see any women in the mosque from her position outside on the street.

The mosque has been run by Salafists since the 2011 Tunisian revolution. It is the place where most young men in the neighbourhood are approached by Salafist groups, who now have greater potential to hold influence over many disenfranchised young people in the local community.

According to our research, Salafists first focus on identifying their target. They do not try to approach everyone, only those who meet their specific standards and who may be especially susceptible to influence, (for example, those who are young, unemployed, have a weak personality and are not controlled by their families – as was the case with Houssam Abdelli). They then make an approach, offering money to gain their target’s trust. Not a large amount, in the first instance, but still a significant amount for a young man of the area (usually around 200 to 300 hundred dinars). This encourages them to remain close to the mosque and to come back regularly to attend prayers.
The person charged with recruitment then becomes a sort of mentor, a daily presence in the life of the future suicide bomber. It seems that the relationship between the mentor, an older Salafi man, and the new recruit is strengthened through long dialogues designed to show the younger man the ‘right’ path. The mentor, either alone or with a group, goes to see his target every day, particularly highlighting his weaknesses, such as his social status, the stigmatisation he experiences, and the lack of money and support from the state. The older man stresses how the intended recruit’s family needs financial support. The mentor shows himself to be generous, and usually comes across as willing to support and protect them. This process of building trust is accompanied by regular prayers and long, repeated readings of the Quran, in which the mentor gives strict interpretations of the hadiths. Increasingly, the reading process mainly focuses on hadiths related to jihad, and soon evolves into training and action.

13.6.3 CASE STUDY 2: SABR EL-AYARI
Description of the suicide attack
On 19 June 2013, 23-year-old Tunisian Saber el-Ayari woke early in the morning in Baghdad, Iraq, for the prayer of al-fajr. He prayed using verses of the Quran centred on the concept of jihad, to strengthen his will and faith (through the belief that Prayer strengthens human weakness) before carrying out his suicide mission. Before he carried out the attack, Ayari wrote a letter saying goodbye to his family, and encouraged his brothers to join the jihad as he had. He also explained the motivation for the actions he planned to carry out, which lay in the strict interpretations of sharia found in the Quran. Later that same day, he blew himself up at a Shia military barracks in Baghdad, killing 19 soldiers.

Background of the suicide bomber
Sabr was born and raised in Dubrazville, a poor neighbourhood of El Ouardia, in the suburbs of Tunis. Locals sometimes call it the ‘Chicago of Tunisia’ due to its infamously high rate of criminality.

During the research mission to Tunisia, a number of people were interviewed, including a journalist specialising in terrorism issues in Dubrazville, the suicide bomber’s neighbour and also one of his father’s friends.

According to the information gathered, Ayari’s family did not own their apartment, and were paying rent to live in housing which can be described as modest. “For families like this, feeding their kids is a big challenge,” said Munir, a neighbour of Ayari’s family. “Parents look forward to their economic independence, and often the kids feel they are just a weight for their parents as they don’t earn money.” After Ayari’s older brother had left school, he soon became a well-known criminal in Dubrazville. Ayari himself however took a different path when he was approached by a group of Salafists, whose influence in the area had increased significantly in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.

According to collected testimonies, Ayari had not previously been considered as religious. He did not pray regularly and he drank beer with his friends from time to time. His neighbour, Munir, describes him as smart. He said Ayari was not a trouble maker like his older brother and he did not want to steal. He had a girlfriend at school, but was not thinking about getting engaged yet. Munir described him as a “normal guy”.

After completing his studies Ayari started to look for odd jobs in Dubrazville, but struggled to find anything stable. Munir says the Salafists offered Ayari some money. “You give those guys 20-30 dinars and they would be ready to kill their father for that,” said another man from the local neighbourhood. Ayari began to pray regularly and started to hang out with a group of Salafists in the mosque – from this point onwards, he progressively became radicalised and started displaying significant changes in behaviour. From time to time he went missing from Dubrazville, but nobody knew where he went.

Like others before him, Ayari seems to have followed specific steps and phases that characterise the path to becoming a suicide bomber. First, he was identified, targeted by extremists and invited to join individual and collective prayers. During this phase, he would pray regularly at the mosque and feel devoted to his faith. “This is a strong and reassuring feeling for someone who has never been close to religion before, and is a determinant phase in the path towards becoming a suicide bomber,” explains Mejri, a journalist who specialises in religious extremism in El Ouardia. Next, he was indoctrinated into believing in the ideals of jihad, holy martyrdom and sacrifice for the greater good. During this phase, Ayari tended to isolate himself from his family and friends. He could not reconcile his current self with his past life, his childhood, or his familial roots.

“In case of doubt or hesitation, the Salafist recruiters would be able to provide any sort of explanation using the sources of the Quran. They can answer all questions,”

The motivation for the actions he planned to carry out, which lay in the strict interpretations of sharia found in the Quran.
said Salah, a man from the neighbourhood whose brother had left for Syria. “But they don’t take their words from God; they don’t know nothing about Islam, but they have a specific expertise of convincing and turning young people.”

After a period of relative isolation, Ayari started to prepare his departure. He did not say goodbye to family or friends before he left Tunisia. In early 2013, Ayari’s mother received a call from him, during which he told her that he had gone to Libya to fight the good cause. He asked his mother to convince his brother to follow the same path.

Ayari would never return home, carrying out his suicide attack in Baghdad a few months later. It is not clear whether his family knew that he had travelled onwards to Iraq from Libya. Like other suicide bombers, he went to Libya for training before the attack. A friend of his father said he could not believe that Ayari really wanted to die or to kill other people. Walid Mejri, a journalist investigating the phenomenon of suicide bombers in Tunisia, said the path to becoming a suicide bomber is composed of specific phases, which are outlined below. This case study seems to fit this conceptualisation particularly well.

### Phases of radicalization

1. **Identification of target**

In the first phase, the target is observed, identified and approached by recruiters. Even though the official criteria for targets are not known and may vary depending on individual cases, they are largely deductible from profiles that have been analysed. This phase usually lasts around 2-3 months and is mainly characterised by encouraging prayer and a strong, renewed faith in God (Allah).

2. **Indoctrination and radicalisation**

In this phase, the new recruit undergoes intense and daily (sometimes more than once per day) sessions of indoctrination. In some cases, the mentor is responsible for carrying out the indoctrination themselves, whereas in others it occurs through social networks and jihadist chatrooms. During this phase, the recruiter radicalises the target’s Islamic beliefs. The recruit may become obsessed with the idea of living in a land of kuffar (non-believers) where sharia law is not the rule of the land. Ideas around sacrifice for jihad become clearer and more prominent in their personal outlook. Throughout this stage, the recruit’s perception of others, including friends and family, will often change significantly, and is mainly based on the extent of their belonging to the kafir/non-kafir world. This phase paves the way towards becoming progressively more and more isolated from others.

3. **Separation and isolation**

During this phase, the young recruit is largely isolated from his family and environment. Separation aims to minimise external influences that could undermine the recruit’s decision to become a suicide bomber. His mentor now dominates and manipulates his mind, pushing the recruit to focus on otherworldly dimensions: such as life after the attack, and the Prophet Mohammad at the time of his hijra from Mecca to Medina. Terrorism expert Mazen Sharif describes this phase of transition towards a different identity as a new space-temporal reality. In this dimension, real life is left behind whilst the recruit’s existing (soon to become ‘previous’) identity transforms into a new inner self.

Psychological and technical trainings, being assigned a mission and registering a goodbye message are the last stages before the suicide bombing takes place.

### Motivations to commit the suicide attack

Again, whilst Ayari’s motivations to carry out the attack are multiple and complex, several key contributing factors can be identified. This set of factors is remarkably similar to the factors identified in many other cases involving the recruitment of suicide bombers, including the previous case study on Houssam Adbelli. Ayari’s motivations to carry out the attack include: concerns over money, issues regarding finances and employment, a lack of alternative economic opportunities and a lack of alternatives to leading a life of criminality in his neighbourhood.

The fact that Ayari appears to have been indoctrinated relatively quickly, is another important factor suggesting that those with a weak or easily-influenced personality are often targeted by recruiters, and may be more easily led down the path towards becoming a jihadi suicide bomber.

### Family and community reaction

Shame and horror were the immediate reactions within the suicide bomber’s immediate family and the wider local community. However, the family refuses to consider Ayari as a terrorist, instead remembering him as a Shaheed (martyr). The community as a whole seemed to want to forget what had happened.
13.6.4 CASE STUDY 3: SOUSSE

The following case study is based on interviews with families of ex-combatants from the governorate of Sousse, located approximately 140km from the capital, Tunis. In contrast to the economically-underdeveloped and socially deprived Tunis suburbs of Ettadhamen and Dubrazville mentioned in the previous two cases, Sousse is a famous and thriving coastal town, which benefitted greatly as a result of many years of investment in hotels and the tourism industry under former president Ben Ali.

During the mission, the AOAV researcher interviewed families of ex-combatants from Hammam Sousse, located in the northern part of the town. The socio-economic status of families living in this area is generally middle- to high-income, with low rates of criminality and drug trafficking. Nevertheless, a significant number of Salafists came to the suburbs of Sousse in the aftermath of the revolution. Sometime around the end of 2011 or the start of 2012, approximately one year after the revolution which had deposed the previous regime, a group of 13 young Tunisian teenagers left their homes in Hammam Sousse to join the jihad in Syria. Their families have been awaiting their return ever since. During interviews conducted by the AOAV researcher, the mothers of the ex-combatants were very emotional. They cried while holding pictures of their sons.

Nura, Mohammed’s mother, said her son was handsome and smiled a lot. He was not religious – in fact, he did not even pray. She felt that everyone in the neighbourhood liked him. “He’s not a terrorist nor an extremist. He did not know what he was doing. They must have told him some stories on Syria and they convinced him to go,” she said. “But that was Assad propaganda, and they are now keeping him in prison.”

Mohammed’s mother insisted on showing me pictures of her son before he disappeared. She also wanted to show me pictures of her daughter, who was wearing shorts. “Before, he was happy with his sister wearing shorts and short skirts,” she lamented. “We don’t know what they did to his brain, but he’s innocent.”

The Riadh Palm Hotel in Sousse, where the first suicide bomber attack after the revolution took place.
Mohammed’s mother paints a rosy picture of her son’s childhood. He was a good student and was said to be gentle and friendly, whilst he loved playing football and had a lot of success with girls. She does not understand why he left. She says he had everything he needed – he lived in a big house and was studying in the famous Beaux Arts Institute of Sousse, and he wanted to go to university after completing his studies there. His family was not rich, but nonetheless he wore expensive clothes.

Mohammed’s mother noticed that before he left he was saving money. At the time, she thought he was being smart and didn’t want to waste money (as he did not smoke nor drink). In reality however, he was likely putting money aside in order to go to Syria. Nura said she remembers that the day before he left, and remembers that he was laughing with his sister in the living room. “He did not know what he was doing,” she maintains.

Thanks to the support of the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad (RATTA), Nura, together with other families, went to Syria in 2014 and was able to see her son in prison. Tunisian authorities are reported to be negotiating the return of 48 young Tunisians who are currently in prison in Syria. However, negotiations are stuck and no notable progress has been made, making it appear the government is not making much effort to secure their release.

Sami Kamel, who was 21 at the time of his disappearance, was part of the same group of young Tunisians who left Hammam Sousse to travel to Syria. He was also studying at the Beaux Arts Institute of Sousse. “It is clear that the Tunisian authorities do not want these young people back. Their mothers will tell you that their sons are angels, but the idea of jihad is still in their mind and they won’t change it,” said Mohsen, Kamel’s uncle. “I miss my nephew, but I don’t want him to come back. I am scared for my sons and for my community. These people are like a virus for us.”

Mohsen cannot understand the ways in which Kamel had changed. As a child, he was no different from the others – he liked watching cartoons and playing with his cousins and friends. “He used to spend long hours in our house. He was like a second son to us. He would never refuse a kiss or a cuddle,” Mohsen said.

Kamel appeared very happy to be studying at Beaux Arts. He insisted on being enrolled there and he was a good student. He also enjoyed socialising, and often went out drinking beer with friends and liked flirting with women, although he did not have a girlfriend. Before 2011, he did not even pray. However, his attitudes seemed to change very quickly.

He started to pray regularly, five times a day at the neighbourhood mosque. “After two to three months he became another person,” Mohsen said. His said his nephew had stopped talking to his friends and he accused his family members of being kuffar (non-believers). “We started arguing very often. He was telling his sister, my wife, that she made a big mistake to get married to a kafir like me. I did not want him any more in my house. I was scared he could have a bad influence on my son, who was only 3 at that time,” he added.

Kamel’s relationship with his family worsened, and he began to treat them with disdain. “His father was hospitalised for a long period. He never went to visit him, because he was just a kafir.” Mohsen said. In the summer of 2011, Kamel and other young men from the neighbourhood met every night in front of the shop of a famous Salafi man, who had been in prison when Ben Ali was in power. They often stayed late and talked about religion together. Mohsen is adamant that the older man was their mentor, and that he must have organised their trip to Syria.

Mohsen remembers that in the months leading up to Kamel’s sudden departure for Syria, he frequently talked about the importance of jihad. Osama bin Laden became an idol for him, and Kamel could not stop watching videos of him on Youtube. According to Mohsen, it is very difficult and almost impossible to identify a specific group of Salafists or a particular imam as being behind the departures. “Those groups keep moving from one place to another to recruit more young people and to avoid to be noticed by the police,” Mohsen said.

One day, towards the end of 2011, Kamel told his mother he was going to Tunis to attend special classes, and asked his father for 200 dinars. His family thought he was saving money because he was being smart. “God only knows how long he was planning to go to Syria,” said Mohsen. After Kamel had initially been gone for a few days, he called his mother and said he was in fact in Libya, not in Tunis as he had told them. He only spoke regularly to his mother and sister, but not to the kuffar men of his family. “I was listening to their calls. He did not say anything about the training he was receiving.
He was just saying that God asked him to do what he was doing,” Mohsen explained.

Kamel’s group was arrested soon after arriving in Syria. In total, 48 young Tunisians are registered as being held in Syrian prisons. “These Tunisians are lost for us,” Mohsen said. “They were meant to be the future of this nation, but it’s now better if they remain where they are.” Other interviewees from Sousse echoed this view, stating their belief that ex-combatants never really give up the idea of jihad. One interviewee, Soufian, from Kalaa Kabira, knows a few ex-combatants from his village. “If they are back, it’s only because they are harmed and they can’t fight any more. The ideas of jihad and martyrdom still remain in their head. Forget about changing it,” he said.

Soufian explains that for those who leave, going back to Tunisia is not really an option. Firstly, he said that they thought of Tunisia as a kafir state where sharia is not practiced, and they would not want to come back to living within kafir borders. Secondly, he said they know that once they arrive back in Tunisia, they will likely end up in prison. However, Soufian said that some of them do manage to return and live a normal life, but even amongst those who come back, “the idea of jihad will never leave their minds.”

The below images are of Tunisian families asking for the return of their sons kept in Syrian prisons during a conference press. The event was organized with the support of the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped abroad (RATTA).

13.6.5 CASE STUDY 4: EZZARHA

In this case study, which focuses on a Tunisian Jihadi from the town of Ezzarha, the names of the individuals were withhold. The jihadi is referred to as ‘M’, and his brother (with whom the interview was conducted by the AOAV researcher) is identified as ‘H’

‘H’ lost his younger brother ‘M’ three years ago. However, he does not know how he died, only knows that M gave his life for Islamic State. Before talking about his brother, H said that the Tunisian state does little for its youth. According to H, who often engages in social activities designed to help young people, the problem of extremism does not only affect poor young people with no access to education. “Sons of parliamentary members and famous Tunisian millionaires also disappeared from their homes to join the jihad in Syria,” he explained. “Extremism is not only a socio-economic issue. It is indeed a problem of youth.”

H and his brother were born to a middle-class family in Ezzahra, a coastal town located on the southern outskirts of Tunis, in the governorate of Ben Arous. H said his younger brother M was a very shy child, but that he was normal in other respects. He was, however, shorter than his four brothers. They used to call him ‘little shrimp’, but he laughed about it.

In his first year of primary school, M was described as extremely shy towards other pupils, but he results at school were impressive – he came top of his class nine years in a row. Then, in 2007, his performance at school suddenly dropped off, after he started to hang out with
a group of older students at his high school. According to H, they were all close to the Salafi Wahhabi movement at the Ezahra mosque. At that time, Islamist groups and especially Salafists were extremely discrete, as they were very wary of government repression and could not operate with total freedom. Nonetheless, they remained active in the area. “That groups of guys had a terrible influence on my brother,” H said. “They kept telling him that studying school programs was haram (forbidden) and that a good Muslim only has to read the Quran.”

In 2008, 27 young Tunisians – including M – were arrested on suspicion of being affiliated to al-Qaeda. However, thanks to family connections within the Ministry of the Interior, M was released from Bouchoucha prison shortly after his arrest. “After this experience, my brother stopped praying and went back to a normal routine. He went back to studies and to his old friends, he went out at night and he stopped praying,” said H. “We thought he was safe, but that was an illusion.”

Like many other students, he prayed before passing the final exams of Bac in 2011-2012. Across the same time period during which M was finishing his studies, thanks to the new Troika government’s amnesty, many Salafists were released from prison, including M’s former group of friends whom he had previously been arrested with on suspicion of terrorism. “We did our best to convince him not to join that group anymore,” H said in a very emotional tone. “But he did not want to listen to us. I could see in his eyes he already took his decision.”

In 2013, together with other Salafist friends, M went to Syria. He only survived a few months.

H showed a picture of his brother while he was calling his family from Skype, in which M was holding a Daesh flag. During his training in Raqqa, M learnt how to fight and wear an explosive belt.

“Despite it all, he looked happy,” H said. “Sometimes he looked nostalgic, but he never wanted to come back home.”

13.6.6 TUNISIA: FINAL OBSERVATIONS
We can conclude that the evolving phenomenon of suicide bombers represents a new reality in the panorama of terrorist activities in Tunisia. For some young Tunisians it even appears that becoming a suicide bomber is now considered, worryingly, as a valid alternative to unemployment.

In most cases, new recruits become suicide bombers without receiving training for fighting. In other cases, however, the decision to volunteer for a suicide mission may occur at a later stage, and may come after several years of involvement in jihad.

All cases observed through AOAV’s research in Tunisia, demonstrate that suicide bombers and extremists were on the whole not particularly religious before becoming radicalized. One notable habit of these individuals prior to their period of radicalization and recruitment, was that they were often binging on drink and drugs.

Despite such observations and the presence of significant commonalities amongst multiple cases, however, we conclude that it is hard to outline a general socio-economic profile of Tunisian suicide bombers. While most recruits come from poor and marginalised communities with high rates of criminality and unemployment, some examples of successful jihadi recruitment also occurred in wealthy and educated areas.
Children have been also used repeatedly as proxy suicide bombers. In 2008, the NY Times reported that the Iraqi security forces had raided a house in Mosul where they found six Iraqi boys, ages 15 to 18 preparing to become suicide bombers*. In 2014, the BBC reported on how the Taliban who are grooming child suicide bombers in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Similarly, it has been reported that one in every five suicide bombers used by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, were children. Of these, 75% were girls.


17 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15

16 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15

15 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15


13 A proxy bomber is a person being used to carry or wear an SIED unwillingly, either by impeded mental capacity or by coercion. The use of proxy bombers was a tactic used extensively by the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, and later by the Colombian FARC in the 2000s. More recently, proxy suicide bombers have been used in Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Such attacks should not be considered suicide bombings, given that suicide is voluntary whereas as many proxy bombers are not voluntarily killing themselves.

In 2008, remote-controlled explosives were strapped to two women in Baghdad who had Down’s syndrome. The bombs were remotely detonated in two Friday morning markets, killing at least 73 people and wounding nearly 150.

In 2012, a report from the BBC claimed that the FSA was using war prisoners to become proxy bombers without their knowledge. They would trick them into believing that they were part of a prisoner swap, and that they had to drive a truck to an army check-point, at which point the perpetrators would detonate the explosives remotely.

**End Notes**


2 For notes on AOAV’s Explosive Violence Monitor see, https://aoav.org.uk/explosiveviolence/methodology/

3 WTI IED Lexicon 2012.

4 From the NIV Bible, Judges 16:26-30.

5 http://bit.ly/2gJzqWL

6 https://archive.org/details/dynamitestories00maxi

7 http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/20thcentury/articles/nomorhan.aspx and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qV6J3cLQJ4


10 Suicide Attack Database, Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST), December 2015, http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/

11 Hicks, Madelyn Hsiao-Rei; Dardagan, Hamit; Bagnall, Peter M.; Spagat, Michael, Sloboda, John A. ‘Casualties in civilians in the Middle Eastern, African, and European Regions Show Minimal Signs of Tactic Migration’ – Terrorism Explosive Device Analytical Center (FBI) 2015-11-17. https://info.publicintellegence.net/FBI-TEDAC-SuicideVests.pdf

12 Suicide Vest and Belt Improvised Explosive Device Tactics in the Middle Eastern, African, and European Regions Show Minimal Signs of Tactic Migration” – Terrorism Explosive Device


15 A proxy bomber is a person being used to carry or wear an SIED unwillingly, either by impeded mental capacity or by coercion. The use of proxy bombers was a tactic used extensively by the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, and later by the Colombian FARC in the 2000s. More recently, proxy suicide bombers have been used in Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Such attacks should not be considered suicide bombings, given that suicide is voluntary whereas as many proxy bombers are not voluntarily killing themselves.

In 2008, remote-controlled explosives were strapped to two women in Baghdad who had Down’s syndrome. The bombs were remotely detonated in two Friday morning markets, killing at least 73 people and wounding nearly 150.

In 2012, a report from the BBC claimed that the FSA was using war prisoners to become proxy bombers without their knowledge. They would trick them into believing that they were part of a prisoner swap, and that they had to drive a truck to an army check-point, at which point the perpetrators would detonate the explosives remotely.

Children have been also used repeatedly as proxy suicide bombers. In 2008, the NY Times reported that the Iraqi security forces had raided a house in Mosul where they found six Iraqi boys, ages 15 to 18 preparing to become suicide bombers*. In 2014, the BBC reported on how the Taliban who are grooming child suicide bombers in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Similarly, it has been reported that one in every five suicide bombers used by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, were children. Of these, 75% were girls.


17 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15

16 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15

15 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15


13 A proxy bomber is a person being used to carry or wear an SIED unwillingly, either by impeded mental capacity or by coercion. The use of proxy bombers was a tactic used extensively by the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, and later by the Colombian FARC in the 2000s. More recently, proxy suicide bombers have been used in Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Such attacks should not be considered suicide bombings, given that suicide is voluntary whereas as many proxy bombers are not voluntarily killing themselves.

In 2008, remote-controlled explosives were strapped to two women in Baghdad who had Down’s syndrome. The bombs were remotely detonated in two Friday morning markets, killing at least 73 people and wounding nearly 150.

In 2012, a report from the BBC claimed that the FSA was using war prisoners to become proxy bombers without their knowledge. They would trick them into believing that they were part of a prisoner swap, and that they had to drive a truck to an army check-point, at which point the perpetrators would detonate the explosives remotely.

Children have been also used repeatedly as proxy suicide bombers. In 2008, the NY Times reported that the Iraqi security forces had raided a house in Mosul where they found six Iraqi boys, ages 15 to 18 preparing to become suicide bombers*. In 2014, the BBC reported on how the Taliban who are grooming child suicide bombers in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Similarly, it has been reported that one in every five suicide bombers used by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, were children. Of these, 75% were girls.


17 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15

16 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15

15 For more information on proxy bombers, see end note 15


13 A proxy bomber is a person being used to carry or wear an SIED unwillingly, either by impeded mental capacity or by coercion. The use of proxy bombers was a tactic used extensively by the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, and later by the Colombian FARC in the 2000s. More recently, proxy suicide bombers have been used in Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Such attacks should not be considered suicide bombings, given that suicide is voluntary whereas as many proxy bombers are not voluntarily killing themselves.

In 2008, remote-controlled explosives were strapped to two women in Baghdad who had Down’s syndrome. The bombs were remotely detonated in two Friday morning markets, killing at least 73 people and wounding nearly 150.

In 2012, a report from the BBC claimed that the FSA was using war prisoners to become proxy bombers without their knowledge. They would trick them into believing that they were part of a prisoner swap, and that they had to drive a truck to an army check-point, at which point the perpetrators would detonate the explosives remotely.
33 Michael C. Horowitz, “Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism,” in International Organization (64, no. 1), International Organization Foundation, 2010
34 Michael C. Horowitz, “Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism,” in International Organization (64, no. 1), International Organization Foundation, 2010
36 Michael C. Horowitz, “Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism,” in International Organization (64, no. 1), International Organization Foundation, 2010
43 Abu-Amr, Ziad “Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza”; published in 1994 by Indiana University Press
90 Stats article. ‘Suicide Bombings by Countries in 2015’ (accessed 22/08/2016).
Maliki school or Fiqh: is one of the four major religious schools of law within the Sunni Islam. Founded by Malik Ibn Anas and relies heavily on Quran and Hadith as primary sources.

The Rafid: literally means rejectors or rejectionists and it is usually used by salafist to refer to Shia because they reject Abu bakr, Uthman and Omar as a successor of the prophet Muhammad and as the rightful khilafas.

Maliki school or Fiqh: is one of the four major religious schools of law within the Sunni Islam. Founded by Malik Ibn Anas and relies heavily on Quran and Hadith as primary sources.

Jannah: heaven.

Al Ansar: is the term that was used for the local inhabitants of Al-Madina who took the Islamic Prophet Muhammad and as the rightful khalifas.

Ordinary Yorkshire lad, 17 becomes Britain’s youngest suicide bomber

Al-Madina who took the Islamic Prophet Muhammad and as the rightful khalifas.

Anjem Choudary: a British lawyer turned preacher is considered one of the most notorious hate preachers living in Britain and is known for supporting the Islamic State.

Anjem Choudary: a British lawyer turned preacher is considered one of the most notorious hate preachers living in Britain and is known for supporting the Islamic State.

The RAFI: literally means rejectors or rejectionists and it is usually used by the salafist to refer to Shia and Alawite because they reject Abu bakr, Uthman and Omar as a successor of the prophet Muhammad and as the rightful khilafas.

http://www.almaaayn.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/


http://www.iraqnewsagency.com/?p=142857&lang=ar

http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2015/jun/15/fears-grow-for-friend-of-Dewsbury-boy-believed-to-be-latest-ISIS-suicide-bomber


http://www.iraqpressagency.com/?p=142857&lang=ar


http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26452992

AOAV interview with a member of Crawley Islamic Center.

AOAV research.

The RAFI: literally means rejectors or rejectionists and it is usually used by the salafist to refer to Shia and Alawite because they reject Abu bakr, Uthman and Omar as a successor of the prophet Muhammad and as the rightful khilafas.

http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/british-suicide-bomber-kills-five-police-officers-in-Iraq-whqzqfzd

http://www.veteranstoday.com/2016/03/13/isis-and-turkey-exchange150-militants/


The RAFI: literally means rejectors or rejectionists and it is usually used by the salafist to refer to Shia and Alawite because they reject Abu bakr, Uthman and Omar as a successor of the prophet Muhammad and as the rightful khilafas.


http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-29974766


UNDERSTANDING THE RISING CULT OF THE SUICIDE BOMBER

442 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36880758
444 https://arabic.sputniknews.com/world/201607271019754592/
445 https://justpaste.it/xf12
447 https://justpaste.it/xf12
449 https://justpaste.it/xf12
452 https://justpaste.it/xf12
453 ID card details available.
454 [9] See Inkyfada Report (in Arabic) https://inkyfada.com/2015/12/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9%D9%8F-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%91%D9%84%D8%AA/
455 The video of Daleel released by the Islamic state: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXEzjl6y_L4
456 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXEzjl6y_L4
457 http://syriasy.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/blog-post_5166.html
458 Islamic State suicide bomber hits Tunisia https://www.facebook.com/ReutersTV/videos/1206328609393906/
459 http://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security-idUSKBN0TE0OF20151125
460 Last year of high school in the French school system.