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Recruitment of Europeans into ISIS

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Summary:

Europe, and most importantly, Western Europe has become a fertile ground for ISIS recruits. Western Muslim Europeans have been making the trip to Syria and Iraq, filling in the ranks of ISIS, and back. Western intelligence agencies are faced with multiple challenges: what is the level of threat those war hardened returned fighters represent to public safety? Can these returned jihadists become de-radicalized and re-enter the society, without killing anybody that does not agree with their ideology? The purpose of this study is to present to counter-terrorism policy makers, the reasons Western European Muslims born and converted become radicalized, by presenting the psychological factors that contribute to the radicalization of the Western European Youth, towards jihadism. Furthermore, by using the Freudian splitting of the Id, the Ego, and the Superego, it examines how Muslim extremists using tenants of the Muslim faith are influencing the psychic of the youth toward radicalization, as the only true expression of the Muslim faith. This study also examines, how fundamentalism impacts the minds of "believers" and castigates everybody else that is considered a "non-believer", while influencing the path of a young mind towards his or her becoming the defender of the Ummah, or the Muslim community at large. Finally, what lessons security agencies can learn and apply towards, before a youth becomes radicalized and then jihadist and makes the trip to ISIS fold, and after the return of the well grown jihadist by now, back to European society.

Key Words:

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BACKGROUND

Although Europeans have a history of fighting other insurgencies, **(1)** the recent experience of jihadist going to fight in Syria and then return, poses a serious challenge for the European governments and their security apparatuses. French Prime Minister(former) Manuel Walls "the country's security services are foiling terror plots and dismantling militant networks "every day"". **(2)** This sentiment was echoed by Peter Neuman, Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, (ICSR) at King's College in London, stating "new crime-terror nexus" was making radicalization harder to spot for European security services". **(3**) This "crime-terror nexus" originated by a call to "jihad" for recruiting, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam and his publishing *Fatwa* (religious legal ruling) for all the Muslims to come to the protection of the *Ummah*, the Muslim community**. (4)**

Since the 2011 beginning of the civil war in Syria and the ensuing chaos, the impression among Muslims is that the *Ummah* is in danger, and we have to rush to its defense. This cry for help has been reflected in the number of Muslim foreign fighters that have been rushing to Syria and Iraq, to defend" the *Ummah*, and to enlist in the most barbaric and nihilistic terrorist organization the world has ever known, ISIS, and its so called *Khalifa*, Caliphate. The last Caliphate was held by the Ottoman Sunni Turks, and the last Calif was Abdulmecid II, dissolved with the establishment of the Turkish Republic by Kemal Ataturk. (**5)** So, besides protecting the *Ummah*, now, ISIS is giving Muslims another opportunity to help create the new *Khalifa*, since Abu-Bakr Al Baghdadi claims his lineage from Muhammed **(6)**, and ISIS has occupied swaths of land in Iraq and Syria, the new Caliphate can be for real.

How many Europeans jihadists have been filling the ranks of ISIS and why? The Soufan Group in its updated report on *"Foreign Fighters in Syria"* enlists between "27,000 and 31,000 from at least 86 countries...of which 3,700 of the total 5,000+ European Union foreign fighter contingent come from just four countries, France, Belgium, Germany and United Kingdom". **(7)** In the second question Edwin Baker, Director of the International Counter-Terrorism Institute, distinguishes between the "Pull" factors and the "Push" factors. **(8)** The Pull factors are "Desire to do something good; Religious motivation; Establishment of the ideal state, under Sharia law, linked to the caliphate; Change in the Middle East. The prophecy that now is the end of old times and the beginning of the new under the Islamic State; Comradeship, friendship and the thrill of excitement. **(9)** The push factors are "Personal problems; failures in life; traumatic experiences; trouble with the authorities;

trouble at school; We also know that socioeconomic and sociopolitical situations or sociopolitical climate, as a possible explanation why people leave European countries, to fight for ISIS;" **(10)** Max Abrams, in his work, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy" writes: "large unassimilated, dislocated populations such as the Maghrebin in France; single, unemployed, Islamist men residing in comparatively secular Muslim countries such as in Pakistan". **(11)** In Germany, after Daniel Schidem, an Israeli Druze, visited Neukolln, a Palestinian neighborhood in Berlin, pointed: "Even though they were all born in Germany, not one said that he was German. They say that they are from all these villages that they no longer exist". **(12)** The self-imposed marginalization of the Muslim population can be witnessed across Western Europe, a condition which has created socio-economic anomalies reflected by the behaviors of the Muslim youth**. (10)**

With unemployment hovering around 50% **(13)** among the Muslim youth it's no wonder why so many of them end up in prisons, where the indoctrination into *Salafist jihadist* ideology takes hold **(14)** and where ISIS recruiters lay in wait. And since younger generation is very adept in the use of the *Internet*, ISIS has proven to be a master in using social media for recruitment. **(15)** Crucial to recruitment process for eventual radicalization of the potential recruit is the three steps strategy recruiters are using: A) Isolation, embodied in the sense of the individual belonging to the group, first in the cyberspace and later in person, creating the need for secrecy to protect the group, and since the group is the important unit, then family and old friends (not sharing the same *"values"* *(mine)* are not important. B) Eliminating the individuality of the potential recruit in favor of the group, by shedding off any previous worldly appearance, and any connection with memories. Repeating the same message to the point the individual considers it as a standard communication tool. C) Introducing jihadist principles, by replacing morals and installing new values, representing jihadist ideology, thus altering pre-existing cognitive reaction and suggesting new reactions and call to action. **(16)** The recruitment strategy ISIS employees and the sense of group belonging creates a *new* social environment and a *new* social network which is very important for the emotional well-being of the potential recruit. Research has indicated the importance of social networks in recruiting future jihadists as terrorist prospects join an organization because some of their friends did, or family members, or were introduced by their circle of friends**. (17)** Although a lot of factors indicate that sociopolitical and economic as well as personal reasons are key facts for Europeans to join ISIS, still more research is needed to identify well-defined factors, circumstances or dynamics that will help us understand the phenomenon.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES

Attempting to provide an accurate psychoanalysis of the European fighters traveling to Iraq and Syria to fight for ISIS would be futile, as no theory or psychological analysis can provide a definitive answer. However, there are strong indicators that help us intrude into the psyche of the recruits bound for Iraq and Syria. The typical characteristics of a European ISIS fighter are that he is an immigrant youth that has been living at the margins of the society, in a socioeconomic environment that isolates him more from the mainstream society, he had encounters with the law, substance abuse, delinquency, and internal turmoil. **(18)** "Violence and criminality are often used to cope with poverty, a harsh home life, neighborhood chaos, and brutality". **(19)** Coulibali the terrorist in the Paris attack that killed a policeman and four others in a Kosher market, met Kouachi one of the brothers involved also in the Paris terrorist attack that killed 12 people, inside the prison when he was serving his third sentence for armed robbery. **(20)**

It can be stated that the passage from adolescence to adulthood is a very trying experience for a young person, **(21)** and far more trying for a Muslim that faces extraneous and harsh circumstances. The reaction would be a rebellion and a turn to something that will be punishable to the society that has created such an injustice. It becomes *us* vs. the evil *them*. At that point, he is looking for something bigger and more powerful than him, more powerful than his "enemies", that will come to his aid in advance, against his "enemies". And what can be more powerful than all the powers on earth? The idea of God. A powerful and mighty one, whose omnipotence is the saving grace for the Muslim faithful. So, the mind of a Muslim believer at that point performs, what the psychologists call *splitting,* a *defensive mechanism* whereas, the Muslim believer disperses any confusion about the nuances of his environment and he considers himself as all good by effectively demonizing all those who do not share in his opinions and values. **(22)**

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the human personality contains three parts, the id, the ego, and the superego, and the three of them guide decision making and human behavior. **(23)** The id is geared towards immediate gratification, the ego emanates from the id and serves as the controller of the id's impulses, and the superego is the keeper of all moral values that were parentally taught or society established. **(24)** The Muslim believer's effort to mentally, transform himself to an all good person, creates confusion, according to late Psychologist Ruth Stein: "...the proximity of superego and id makes for possible reversals, in which the superego or the ego ideal, acts as ruthlessly and wantonly whereby ascetic renunciation of instinct and desire becomes the motive force for cathartic violence that becomes justified and sanctified by the ego ideal. **(25)** Therefore, splitting and the purity of "us" versus the evil of "them" is the root of the fundamentalist psychic organization...In extreme cases hatred of the non-believer is used to justify violence." **(26)** The hatred of *us* vs. *them* mentality is augmented by the fundamentalists of the Muslim faith, that add two extra requirements as tenants of their faith as Frank Summers in his work "Fundamentalism, Psychoanalysis, and Psychoanalytic Theories emphasizes, writes: "(1) Muslims should restrict

themselves to literal interpretations of sacred texts, and 2) secular law should be replaced with Islamic law." **(27) (**sharia**,** *mine***)**

A basic Fundamentalism has played a key role in the Muslim belief system. For the Islamic fundamentalist, the hatred of others (non-believers) against his belief system does not depend on the feelings of the others towards him, but of the failure of the others to be united to his belief system. **(28)** For the true believer, an uncompromising ideology, based on his all good self, emanates and engulfs his personality, leading him to phantasies and images of grandiose and adventures beyond shutting out hermetically, reality. This leads to another pathological disorder called *narcistic personality disorder*, involving "a pervasive grandiosity, an extreme desire for attention, a sense of entitlement, a willingness to exploit or mistreat others, an excessive need for admiration and a lack of empathy" **(29)** Jessica Sterns in writing her book, "Terror in the Name of God; Why Religious Militants Kill", interviewed a number of terrorists , where she observed that "the world is simplified into good and evil, they feel "spiritually intoxicated". The "apocalyptic violence" on behalf of their spiritual calling, committed as if in a trance, is addictive, the ultimate high." **(30)** Joe Navarro, a 25year former FBI agent in counter-terrorism, writes in his book 'Hunting for terrorists. A look at the Psychopathology of Terror" writes that the basis of every terrorist is an uncompromising ideology, which combined with a "narcistic infallibility" hallucinates them of feeling omnipotent and invulnerable. **(31)** With religious fundamentalism, accompanied by the pathological narcistic feelings of righteousness, and the continuous and the uncompromising belief that the "others" are wrong, comes a metamorphosis into radicalization, when the Muslim fundamentalist makes his beliefs action. During the radicalization process and the eventual isolation from mainstream, and that includes former social environment, family and friends, the radicalized individual is seeking like-minded individuals to connect and socialize.

And it is rather an actuality that future jihadist fighters for ISIS join, some kind of social networks. Edwin Bakker in a comparative study of 28 jihadi networks involved in European terrorism concluded that although these networks differ in their operations, age, location, "However, within networks there is homogeneity. Members of the network often are about the same age and come from the same places. This may be explained by the way these networks are formed, which often is through social affiliation. Many consist of people that are related to each other through kinship or friendship". **(32)** Characteristics of the people that join the jihadi networks are in their plurality single males, born and raised in Europe, they are coming from a low socioeconomic background, many of them have altercations with the law, **(33)** and they feel alienated in a place they are supposed to call home. The existence of the group, and its psychological make-up, derives its strength from the participants in the group sharing the same race, nationality or religion. **(34)**

The social network is originally formulated by members of the group feeling the need for sharing, safety, common interests and defending it from common threats. That is placing everybody body else in the "outgroup" which is defined as "a social group with which an individual does not identify." **(35)** The existence of the social network gives to the membership an *ideal* and a *value*, installing in the minds of the participants that they are espousing something bigger than

themselves, something higher. In 1776, the American colonies were in the most prosperous times, "and the highest standards of living, in the world. Frustrated not over economics but "sacred rights", they were willing to sacrifice "our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor" against the world's mightiest empire". **(36)** Therefore, a *defensive mechanism* is created around the social group within which the members of the group create their own reality and their own fantasies in order to defend aggressively against perceived or real outside threats. **(37)** This defensive mechanism is extended to the protection of the *ummah*, the Muslim community worldwide. Nothing else matters, nothing else exists. The justification for the jihadist's existence is the elimination of all those that threaten the existence of the Muslim community. Therefore, his own life found reason for existing. He has a purpose, and he responds to higher calling. After all, the radical imam in prison, his co-inspirational fellow jail-mates, and his social conducts, are his new family. Their life is the only one that needs protection, because it is their purity in obeying Allah, and his Prophet Muhammed, that will cleanse the world from its sins. It is a worthy purpose living and dying for it.

Radical imams, prisons, mosques teaching *Salafi* jihadist ideology, social networks are contributing into radicalization of the Muslim fundamentalist making him a prime recruit for the ranks of ISIS, or Jabhat al-Nusra, or Boko Haram, or any other jihadi nihilistic terrorist organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTER-TERRORISM POLICY MAKERS

The European Union, and the international community, is facing a daunting task. Prevent radicalized men and women for joining ISIS and also, safeguarding the communities once these jihadists, now with war fighting skills, or different ones have returned and embedded with the rest of the population. Therefore, our recommendations are as follows, beginning with the prevention front:

i. Create a joint council with local Muslim community leaders, to eradicate discrimination and create career opportunities for young Muslims, and entrance into a mainstream society. Along with that create a crisis intervention team, interceding when a youth is in danger of being radicalized. Make responsible Muslim community leaders in guiding the youth towards mainstream values. Make sure that they are aware that *sharia* IS NOT an issue for negotiation;

ii. For defected ISIS fighters, exchange their prison sentence with their testimony about atrocities committed by ISIS. Augment efforts by groups like "Raqqa is being slaughtered silently" that shows lines of people for bread, in life under ISIS;

iii. Project relentlessly in social media videos from the destruction of ISIS by the coalition fighting it, subliminally messaging the projection, with messages that will generate doubt in the mind of an ISIS candidate, that IT IS NOT worthy fighting for it;

iv. Do not allow radical imams in prisons to come in conduct with young Muslim inmates. Encourage visits to prison by moderate imams;

v. Exchange databases of young people traveling to Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Jordan, with western and Israeli intelligence agencies;

vi. Work closely with social media, Tweeter, Facebook, etc to police their accounts and take down jihadist propaganda;

vii. Continue relentlessly, the bombing and the use of special forces, hunting ISIS targets;

viii. Disseminate widely, ISIS kills Muslims.

For returned jihadist fighters:

(1) Exchange data bases for returned fighters with western intelligence agencies. Triage the returnees to establish level of involvement with ISIS and depending on their involvement, jail them, or place them in supervised rehabilitation, with job opportunities, programs;

(2) Involve the "disappointed" returnees, after vetting, into community ant-ISIS propaganda programs, and where appropriate turn them in the state's "eyes and ears" in the community;

(3) The hardened returnees, persecute them to the most extent of the law.

Research in the field still tries to *definitely* answer the questions of how, who, and why becomes a European jihadist recruit. More research is needed to answer these topics. In the meantime, we must employ measures countering the propaganda and recruitment of ISIS, and every other nihilistic terrorist organization.

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RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- *Returning Western foreign fighters: The case of Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia*. This study examines the plight of western intelligence agencies about the large number of Western foreign fighters present in Syria. The fear is that these fighters will return radicalized, battle hardened and with extensive radical networks that might encourage them to commit a terrorist attack in the home country.

- *France foiling terror plots 'daily'*. This is an interview of the former French Prime Minister Manuel Walls to BBC about the continuing arrests of jihadists and the toll it has imposed on France's security services.

- *Isis recruiting violent criminals and gang members across Europe in dangerous new 'crime-terror nexus'*. This article in the "Independent" newspaper examines the criminal background of ISIS fighters.

- *Ottoman Caliphate*. A brief Historical presentation of the Caliphate.

- *The Believer: How an introvert with a passion for religion and soccer became Abu-Bakr al Baghdadi leader of the Islamic State*. This study examines in detail the life and rise of the ISIS terrorist leader Abu-Bakr Al Baghdadi.

- *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*. This study examines the number and the countries of foreign fighters that have gone to fight for ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

- *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Comparing Theory and Practice Course*. This is taken from an online course, administered by the International Counter-Terrorism Institute, University of Leiden, Holland, detailing the theory and practice of terrorism and counter-terrorism.

- *What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy*. This study examines the 'strategic' model of what the terrorist trying to achieve from their misadventure.

- *The Spread of Islamikaze Terrorism in Europe: The Third Islamic Invasion*. This book deals with radical Islam's attempts to establish a foothold on the European continent, through legal and illegal immigration, by taking advantage of the Western liberal democratic governments, laws and regulations.

- *European Muslims: Caught between Local Integration Challenges and Global Terrorism Discourses*. This study examines why the Muslim youth is recruited in the ranks of ISIS.

- *4 Reasons why Europeans join ISIS. While many refugees come into Europe, some are going the other way*. This article analyzes the reasons why young Muslims abandon the only home they have ever know, Europe, to go and fight for ISIS.

- *How Does ISIS Recruit, Exactly? Its Techniques Are Ruthless, Terrifying, And Efficient*. This article presents and analyzes the techniques ISIS is using to recruit youth for filling its ranks.

- *Social Movements: An Introduction.* This study analyzes the social movements and their influence in creating social networks, a very important cohesive sum of individuals that can provide a support environment for recruiting terrorists.
- *Immigration and Post-Adolescent Psychology of Young Terrorists.* This article analyzes from a psychological perspective the reasons of why eight Europeans from a small town in Norway, decided to become terrorists and fight and die, some of them in Syria.
- *Charlie Hebdo attackers: born, raised and radicalized in Paris.* This article presents in detail the life and upbringings of the Kouachi brothers, actors of the worst terrorist attack in Paris in 50 years, and their affiliation with the terrorist Coulibali, who killed in another terrorist attack 4 people in a Kosher shop, in Paris, France, the same day.
- *Self-Deception II: Splitting. Human beings are not rational but rationalizing animals*. This article presents *splitting* as a psychological 'defensive mechanism', so an individual can diffuse anxiety in rationalizing their actions.
- *Freud And Beyond.* This book presents Freud's psychoanalysis, delving into explanations of id, ego and superego, from a contemporary psychoanalytic thinking.
- *Summers, F. (2006, April). Fundamentalism, Psychoanalysis, and Psychoanalytic Theories. Psychoanalytic Review, 93*(2). This study presents a psychoanalytic interpretation of fundamentalism and the dynamics of fundamentalist psychology.
- *Manne, A. (2015, June 8). Narcissism and terrorism: how the personality disorder leads to deadly violence.* This article analyzes the psychological profile of five terrorists: Sydney siege gunman Man Haron Monis, Germanwings pilot Andreas Lubitz, Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik, and Isis killers Mohammed Emwazi and Jake Bilardi.
- *Navarro, J. (2013). Hunting for terrorists. A look at the Psychopathology of Terror.* This book gives a basic understanding of the nature of terrorism and also it presents a practical guide for fighting terrorism to counter-terrorism agencies.
- *Bakker, E. (2006, December). Jihadi terrorists in Europe*. This study examines the 'modus operandi' of the jihadist terrorist, who are they, where are they coming from, what is their basic ideology, and their beliefs, their ideologies, and their recruitment process.
- *What is the ingroup bias. (2016, August 30).* This article examines the biases and the dynamics that develop among the group members and the others.
- In his book, *Foreign fighters: Transnational identity in civil conflicts*, Dr. David Malet gives a historical account of foreign fighters, including the Texas Revolution (1835-36), the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), the Israeli War of Independence (1948-49), and the Afghanistan War (1978-1992).