



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Irregular Migration Routes: Prevention and Resilience Tabletop Exercise, September 13-15, 2016, Durrës, Albania

INTRODUCTION

More than 85 senior counterterrorism professionals from the military, intelligence, law enforcement, private sector, and non-governmental organizations from over 30 countries gathered in Durrës, Albania to address the Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) phenomenon and the use of irregular migration routes. The conference entitled: "Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Irregular Migration Routes: Prevention and Resilience" explored policy issues related to the ongoing migration crisis, examined Albania's and the wider region's response, and explored future international counterterrorism (CT) and security-related cooperative efforts. The event was co-organized by the Partnership for Peace Consortium's (PfPC) Combating Terrorism Working Group (CTWG), Albania's Office of the Prime Minister, Albania's State Intelligence Service (SHISH), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Keynote speeches were provided by prominent Albanian government officials, as well as from senior members of the diplomatic, defense, CT, countering violent extremism (CVE), and religious communities, including Deputy Prime Minister Niko Peleshi, Ambassador Donald Lu (U.S. Ambassador to Albania), Ambassador Romana Vlahutin (Head of the EU Delegation to Albania), Mr. Robert Wilton (Acting Head, OSCE Presence in Albania), Mr. Blendi Klosi (Albania's Minister of Social Wellbeing and Youth), Mr. Gerti Janaqi (Director of Education Development, Ministry of Education and Sports), and Mr. Skender Brucaj (Chairman of the Albanian Muslim Community). The conference also showcased a multi-stakeholder tabletop exercise (TTX) which incorporated two emerging security challenges scenarios and facilitated discussions to promote the development of actionable policy and programmatic recommendations related to terrorist recruitment, radicalization, travel, and return. A strong contingent of religious leaders and youth representatives participated in the event to help bridge generational and interdisciplinary gaps and infuse fresh perspectives into security-related topics.

OVERVIEW

The CTWG has developed a series of tabletop exercises (TTXs) for use in defense curricula featuring moderated discussions and role playing scenarios. This model employs a case study methodology to help participants devise effective strategies, formulate policy recommendations, and develop programmatic responses for public and private sector leadership. The "Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Irregular Migration Routes: Prevention and Resilience" event incorporated a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing terrorism challenges. Participants included representatives from the diplomatic, policy, military, civil society, academic, religious, youth, intelligence, and law enforcement communities. The conference explored concepts related to broadened partnership efforts, comprehensive strategies, enhanced information-sharing, and strengthened defense and border security. The goal of the event was to propose a comprehensive set of policy recommendations and help develop capacities at local, national, and international levels. Two moderated, role-play task forces examined hypothetical scenarios derived from actual cases. The scenarios illuminated security-related challenges associated with the European Migration Crisis so that actionable policy responses could be developed by Albania and its regional partners to prevent, intervene against, and mitigate potential threats while identifying



areas for further collaboration. The aim of the TTX in Albania was to produce resilient positive narratives suggestions, policy recommendations, and further programmatic development areas.

Participants emphasized: 1) engaging with youth; 2) tailoring religious education to reflect culture and diversity; and 3) having religious leaders play a prominent role in addressing counter narratives. It was also recognized that community leaders play pivotal roles in raising awareness of the threat of social media and technology as a mobilization accelerator and in implementing programs to mitigate potential impacts and promote successful societal resilience. Finally, a meaningful 'whole-of-society discourse' calls on governments to ensure resources and programs are accessible and on faith leaders to think innovatively about possibilities for mutual collaboration.

To confront today's FTF threats, as well as address irregular migration route and potential violent extremism challenges, eight priority areas were identified: 1) developing inclusive and integrated local, national, and international CT and CVE strategies; 2) empowering youth, women, religious leaders, and civil society, generally, more broadly as CVE change agents and actors; 3) implementing strategic communications and countering – including via social media – violent extremist messages; 4) generating more positive alternatives for young people vulnerable to FTF recruitment; 5) improving law enforcement and security forces engagement with local communities; 6) amplifying influential religious voices and critical thinking skills; 7) preventing and addressing radicalization to violence in prisons; and 8) rehabilitating and reintegrating disengaged FTFs. Please see Annex A for a synthesized list of recommendations from the two case study task forces.

PRESENTATION SUMMARIES

Mr. Richard Prosen, PfPC-CTWG Co-Chair, U.S. Department of State, welcomed participants and noted that conference participants would be able to apply their expertise in a unique, open, and interactive TTX and underscored that the innovative recommendations derived therefrom would be useful beyond event's conclusion for Albania and the wider region. Mr. Sander Lleshi, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Albania, commented on the art of cooperation and the critical role that religious communities have played in addressing the FTF challenge. He praised the collaborative efforts of the U.S. and the EU in helping develop, draft, and implement a coherent Albania CVE strategy.

Albania's Deputy Prime Minister Niko Peleshi delivered the conference's keynote address which provided the audience a comprehensive overview of current and future Albania CVE efforts, and stressed that current trends to promote religious harmony must be protected. DPM Peleshi highlighted a new government initiative intended to comprehensively approach violent extremism by establishing a national coordinator for countering violent extremism within Prime Minister Rama's Office and a Center against Violent Extremism (CVE). " DPM Peleshi also explained that Albania acts as a special model for collaboration due to its active search for global partners, geopolitical location, and religious harmony. He underscored: "we must compete with the terrorists' supply of [recruitment] with a new supply, in the form of education, discussion, sports, and art." DPM Peleshi stressed the need to offer youth viable futures, and noted that coherent strategies must emphasize female leaders' roles in preventing youth from potentially choosing extremist paths. DPM Peleshi concluded by recognizing recent positive regional cooperation efforts.



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U.S. Ambassador to Albania Donald Lu addressed conference participants and praised Western Balkan countries' recent success in arresting and prosecuting foreign terrorist fighters. Ambassador Lu stressed that it is critical that efforts to root out foreign terrorist fighters posing as refugees not violate the rights of legitimate refugees seeking safety and protection, while emphasizing the need for greater border protection and enhanced information-sharing. Ambassador Lu underlined the serious threat of ISIL/Da'esh, noting that sustained international collaboration is necessary to defeat Da'esh. "ISIS is not confined to Syria and Iraq. ISIS is not just an army. It is an ideology. And for that reason, it poses a serious threat to Europe and beyond. We do not know in what form these threats will materialize – as they have so tragically this year in France, in Belgium, and in Germany. But what we do know is that wherever threats come from, we are confident that if we work together, we will be ready to face them."

Ambassador Romana Vlahutin, Head of the EU Delegation to Tirana, insisted on the importance of greater cooperation between security and intelligence agencies. She argued that we need to better understand the appeal of violent extremism and extremist ideology. Ambassador Vlahutin noted that while the Western Balkans has, for centuries, served as a model of religious tolerance, we must take nothing for granted. Providing a comprehensive view on Albanian CVE efforts, Ambassador Vlahutin suggested Albania invest more effort in communicating the potential risks of radicalization, especially at a community-level.

Mr. Robert Wilton, Acting Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, noted that the fundamental basis for security is cooperation. He stressed how terrorism is defining the age in which we live: "it has reached our cities, harmed our citizens, and changed our views of the world." Mr. Wilton argued that a solution can only lie in multi-stakeholder approaches. Mr. Wilton remarked, "diversity allows us to build bridges towards coordinated preventative responses and brings us a step closer to sustainable solutions on raising awareness on radicalization and reintegration. It is a great opportunity to emphasize the need for us to share responsibility, trust each other, and work together." With respect to families and friends, it is their duty to report signs of radicalized behavior. Mr. Wilton commended Albanian CVE efforts, noting that diversity has been a particular national strength.

Mr. Skender Brucaj, Chairman, Albanian Muslim Community, insisted that CVE is a moral obligation for all but the spiritual crisis we face today is a threat for all. He also argued that engagement with our youth and the fulfillment of their aspirations are paramount elements of effective CVE strategies. Mr. Brucaj stressed that some, due to their social networks, join radical networks. He insisted on the importance of creating resilient national strategies to improve coordination and communication.

Mr. Maqsood Kruse, Executive Director for Hedayah, posited that a sense of global citizenship and culture of life is missing from the world. He commented on the success of the Hedayah Center (Abu Dhabi, UAE) in addressing the phenomena. Hedayah focuses on research and analysis, capacity-building and training, dialogue, and enhanced communications. Mr. Kruse argued for the importance of a viable counter narrative. He contended that, "we are failing to provide positive alternative messaging – there is more to life than just blowing yourself up."

Mr. Blendi Klosi, Albania's Minister of Social Wellbeing and Youth, briefed on recent developments



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undertaken in the field of professional education, including helping to mitigate youth unemployment rates, offering job opportunities, and providing hope for brighter futures.

Mr. Gerti Janaqi, Head of Institute of Education Development, Albania Ministry of Education and Sports, highlighted Albanian educational reform efforts, including the need for theology education in schools. He argued that civil society must be at the front of preserving democratic values through harmony, resilience, and diversity. This could be accomplished by reinforcing cultural diversity initiatives. He also praised religious tolerance in Albania and provided an overview of challenges facing the education environment in Albania, including lack of teacher qualifications. Teachers also need to emphasize integration. He also emphasized that: "this academic year we are starting to implement a pilot program in a limited number of schools in Tirana to be extended further in the education system throughout Albania. The program is aimed not just at conveying some basic knowledge on religions and religious cohabitation, but also at preparing our youth to reject extremism pressure." He concluded that educational programs must be based on 'strength of knowledge.'

Dr. Sajjan Gohel, Asia-Pacific Foundation, explained that understanding ISIL/Da'esh's pan-Islamic ideology is imperative to developing useful counter-narratives. Dr. Gohel argued there are numerous commonalities in FTFs and self-starters: thrill and adventure, misogyny, desire for violence, and ideological zeal. He stressed the importance of understanding and addressing the extremist Islamist literature. An anti-Islamic narrative has been developed by utilizing texts from Ibn Tamiyyah, Abdullah Azzam, and Anwar al-Awlaki as well as *The Management of Savagery*. Dr. Gohel presented several extremist attack case studies in which Da'esh made a 'call-to arms' after which self-starters then successfully carried out sometimes rapid and spontaneous attacks that do not require sophistication. Dr. Gohel concluded that we will likely see a rise in self-starter and female extremist events, and that we must ensure better police, security, and military service protection.

Mr. Helidon Bendo, Deputy Director, Albania State Intelligence Service, outlined Albania's CVE strategy and discussed the need for enhanced regional cooperation through tested and verified means to produce resilient CVE approaches. He commented on successful measures taken to reduce violence in the region, but stressed that Da'esh has moved from a regional to a global phenomenon and carried out successful attacks targeting tourism in Europe. Cooperation and intelligence sharing is crucial to face common challenges posed by global terrorism.

Mr. Genc Merepeza, General Director of Border Service, Albania State Police, emphasized the positive results regarding enhanced border checks, controls, and surveillance, noting that such measures have exposed FTF routes in the Western Balkans. Mr. Merepeza thanked U.S. efforts in helping train border police. He asserted that though there is exchange of information, it still remains a problem that limits international and national efforts. He concluded with a call for increased joint land and sea patrols in the region.



CONCLUSION AND WAY AHEAD

In sum, more than 85 participants from national and local governments, civil society, the private sector, and multilateral bodies successfully tested a synergistic, whole-of-society, multi-stakeholder TTX module to address and respond to FTF, CVE, and irregular migration route challenges. The TTX developed robust analytical and practical insights into efforts that address the full spectrum of international security threats related to violent extremism and irregular migration challenges. The conference also disseminated good international practice in an effort to promote high-quality, professional education, training, exercise, and evaluation responses for NATO partner defense institutions and security studies institutes, CTWG members, conference participants, NATO, the OSCE, and other international entities. A detailed report of the event's recommendations (Annex A) and a PfPC-CTWG Policy Paper "*The Challenges of Foreign Terrorists Fighters: A Regional Perspective*," (Annex B) are attached. The TTX module is available for targeted implementation in interested countries and local communities, as part of a broader, international capacity-building effort to help address security challenges.

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ANNEX A: ACTION-ORIENTED RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Communications

Prepare teachers for identifying signs of radicalization and provide comprehensive training: Essential that teachers are sufficiently trained by government-funded NGO initiatives in order to identify signs of radicalization in school and during extra-curricular activities. Training needs to be conducted on a regular basis to ensure best practices and current dialogue are addressed.

Engage youth in research and innovation: The majority of individuals becoming radicalized and joining extremist groups are young adults. Essential that youth are incorporated as part of the solution. Youth are crucial to countering radical narratives. If youth are engaged in research and exposing falsehoods, they will be less likely to become radicalized.

Effective communication with youth is essential for societal cohesion: If members of youth have a stable social environment they will not look for an alternative. Programs should be established that facilitate mentoring by positive, strong role models. Critical role models as credible alternatives are paramount, including sport stars, and local/national actors and celebrities.

Train local religious leaders to ensure religious interpretations and messages resonate with the local community's culture and the current generation's interests: The Muslim community should collaborate with Ministries of Education to train local clerics regarding how Islam is perceived locally and contextually and then develop religious programs accordingly. The means for communicating religious interpretations also needs to be sensitive to current local events and cultural trends and engage youth such that extremist religious leaders are not afforded opportunities to fill potential gaps.

Organize religious events outside of Islam's traditional Friday prayer: Muslim communities should host events outside of traditional Friday prayers to engage youth looking for something different, and provide less space for radical organizations to spread violent views. These events can serve as fora to safely and openly discuss some non-traditional interpretations, so that youth are exposed to religious diversity in fresh, innovative ways and understand there are many different views of religion. They also provide opportunities to more closely monitor and engage at-risk individuals.

Popularize counter-narratives that expose true ideologies of radical narratives: Religious leaders should recognize that lives are in danger and come together to openly debate what true Islam is by going to the source and defining the spirit of the faith. Religious leaders can exchange success stories and lessons learned to be more convincing in their own community and win the narrative battle. Disturbing realities of radicalism must be clearly exposed, such as the fact that Da'esh kills fellow Muslims and manipulates religious text. Need to popularize positive narratives.

Develop counter-narratives against misogyny and sexism: Strong counter-narratives should be developed and enforced in schools and extra-curricular activities to allow children to grow up in a more equal and egalitarian society. These efforts should be complemented with affirmative action to help place women in leadership roles and positions.



Incentivize youth to get involved in politics, sports and other outlets for self-expression through affordable, appealing and creative programs: Work with Youth Leadership to design affordable, appealing, and creative programs to address youth's sense of powerlessness and provide outlets for self-expression. Grassroots political activity could be explicitly tied to university scholarships, volunteering and research could be linked to travel opportunities, or celebrities could sponsor sports teams or artistic clubs and make guest appearances to encourage youth to participate.

Create safe spaces for women to meet and voice concerns over potential radicalisation, which could be organized on a recurring basis at the community level: Families have significant power in these situations, given their close proximity and emotional connection to at-risk individuals. NGOs can mobilize women to share their experiences and raise awareness of radicalization risks, such as isolation. Goal is to nurture a sense of community where women can speak openly and develop preventative measures together. Women without Borders are equipping women with tools to help them understand their fears and discuss sensitive topics with children in an open way.

Change narrative campaigns: 'Not in God's Name' 'My Jihad': Role models play an important role in building and maintaining societal cohesion and resilience. Special consideration should be given to engaging role models and equipping them with the resources needed to aid susceptible youths and to prevent acts of violent extremism.

Establish social support structures: Governments must ensure they are communicating with all levels of society by institutionalizing robust, consistent, open, and transparent engagement among local communities, municipal, and government agencies. Social support structures should maximize coverage by engaging communities, schools, and religious institutions and can serve as useful platforms for community members to bring grievances to the attention of government representatives.

Design tailored communications to raise awareness on the early warning signs of radicalization: Dedicated government departments and NGOs should use real-life case studies to design tailored communications on various indicators of radicalization to violence. This communications strategy should cover multiple platforms and mediums, such as online government fact-sheets, infographics, and mobile apps. The content should clearly convey how to recognize radicalization, engage at-risk individuals, and seek help.

Policy Recommendations

Governments must distinguish between CT (intervention-based hard power) and CVE (prevention-focused soft power) initiatives: Differentiation between potential FTFs and those who may be in the process of radicalizing to violence is important for security services or law enforcement to determine whether 'hard intervention' or 'soft intervention' is needed. Differentiation allows individuals to exit the radicalization to violence cycle with less consequence.

Re-examine community policing structure to better reflect a community's diversity, unique history, and cultural context: Traditionally, police departments are sterile, unwelcoming offices. Governments should work with local communities to re-examine, and if necessary, re-design community policing



structures. Moldova's multi-agency human trafficking center took its staff out of uniform, as the uniforms were intimidating for people with traumatic histories, and added plants and fresh paint to make the center more welcoming. Provide specialized training for front-line staff to engage with psychologically fragile people. Early warning of potential problems supports early interventions.

National CVE strategies must address corruption, and protect civil liberties/privacy: Civil rights and civil liberties legislation should be promoted along with strong CT and CVE legislation and measures. Promoting respect for civil rights and civil liberties and sustaining appropriate attention to discriminatory matters creates a welcoming environment for immigrant and minority communities. Strong civil rights and civil liberties legislation proves that governments are committed to securing the nation while preserving individual liberty, fairness, and equality under the law.

Enforce meaningful child protection laws: Safeguarding children must be a top priority for parents, teachers, and ultimately the government. Local leaders must ensure the effectiveness of protection programs and promote child welfare. Governments should introduce, support, and engage with local boards, meetings, and health bodies.

Train Imams on new media tools to counter the violent narrative: Imams serve as an effective counterbalance to more established authority figures (law enforcement, intelligence communities). It is essential for imams to understand and counter the online violent messages that extremist groups are spreading. NGOs should play a central role in training religious leaders to engage with new media concepts and utilizing youth leaders to assist with program development and implementation.

Provide government oversight of new schools, mosques and overseas scholarships that open in a country: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should provide more oversight of religious schools and scholarships that are opening up in a country to ensure they align with state interests. Similarly, national authorities should verify any mosques opened on private land for Friday prayer. Checklist items include genuine religious tolerance, gender equality, community engagement, and non-violence. The Ministry of Education should provide oversight of curricula in religious schools in cooperation with the official religious communities in Albania.

Introduce theological study into the mainstream education system with balanced and engaging curricula covering different world religions: With insufficient religious coverage in the mainstream education system, students may seek out parallel structures away from their home, family, and community to pursue deeper theological studies. Governments and religious communities should also offer mainstream opportunities for people to pursue advanced theological studies, to prevent students from seeking out unregulated, independent, or foreign programs in isolation from their community. When faith is not addressed in mainstream education, young adults risk not being taught comparative ways of thinking or having a familiarity with an open, tolerant spirit of debate. Vetting and training of individuals authorized to teach these courses are crucially important.

Develop a "radicalization index" composed of quantitative and qualitative indicators to identify at-risk regions, monitor developments over time, and measure program effectiveness: Government statistics departments should work with CT officials, academia, and professional consultants to design a



composite "radicalization index" based on a combination of political, social, economic, and community indicators collected through both desktop and field research. Kazakhstan has developed an index of regional radicalization based on indicators including unemployment rate, average salary, and number of local businesses operating. Based on this index, governments can measure, monitor, and compare at-risk regions and measure CVE program effectiveness over time.

Conduct in-depth investigations and risk assessments; provide viable alternatives: Government authorities should task law enforcement to assess extremist madrassas, religious schools, or programs to understand why people are attracted to extremist messages. States should then conduct risk assessments and carefully consider all viable alternatives, noting that punitive measures risk pushing religious teaching underground or overseas – where it is more difficult to monitor.

Foreign universities should immediately inform host country's Ministry of Education or Embassy when a student is expelled for extremism: While personal data sharing can be a challenge across countries, schools should be required to inform a student's host country if he/she is expelled on charges of extremism – especially if there's been contact with a known terrorist recruiter. Individuals can then be monitored and potentially enrolled in de-radicalization programs upon return.

Provide ways for youth to provide constructive assistance to those affected by conflict and instability: Governments should recognize their citizens' desire to help others who are suffering in conflict zones and should provide safe and legitimate means to provide support and stay involved. It is a compelling counter-narrative for governments to provide such opportunities and demonstrate they are taking concrete action to help communities in need (such as civilians in Syria). Governments should also make it clear that participating in foreign conflicts outside of state-sanctioned activities is illegal.

Create a terrorist finance office to track suspicious transactions and disrupt illicit activities: To strengthen current regulation to disrupt international criminal networks and resources, create new legal measures and build law enforcement capabilities to disrupt criminals and counter terrorists. Countries should have unique and clearly defined combating terrorist finance entities that monitor and disrupts illicit domestic and international monetary activities, transactions, and flows. Albania's General Directorate on the Prevention of Money Laundering (DPPP) and the Ministry of Finance's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) serve these roles and address terrorist financing issues. These units are effective, relevant, and cooperative in the fight against terrorism.

Programmatic Development Areas

Encourage youth education and peer-to-peer program development: The young generation remains a primary target for radicalization, especially as they are in the process of identity formation. No one understands a generation better than that generation themselves. Local police forces and NGOs should facilitate awareness classes among youth in particularly vulnerable communities. Peers should be empowered to identify and respond to warning signs of radicalization, while consequently building a trusting relationship in local communities with government authorities.

Provide vocational training and apprenticeships for youth societal engagement: To disrupt paths to



violent extremism, it is important to offer off-ramps in the form of healthy alternatives. One of the best alternatives is a sustainable job that produces consistent income. The government should work with schools and religious institutions to establish vocational training and apprenticeship services to help students and community members prepare job applications, interviews, and prerequisite qualifications. These services can establish trusted partners interested in offering professional development opportunities for youth in society and contribute to private-sector led economic growth.

Establish community & law enforcement outreach officers to bridge information and information-sharing gaps: Law enforcement should build trusting relationship with local communities by bridging gaps between *information* and *information-sharing*. Public outreach officers, who are trained and responsible for maintaining healthy relationships with mosques, imams, schools, government officials, neighborhoods, and communities, should be established within each law enforcement agency.

Regulate and monitor religious NGOs: To hold religious institutions accountable for healthy and public safety-oriented practices, public outreach officials should regulate and monitor NGOs. Discouraging certain partnerships, discrediting extremist narratives, and ensuring institutions do not become hotspots for violent religious rhetoric help boost community resilience and address potential CVE issues early on.

Develop a coherent third party safe space/hotline at CVE center: Family members or friends find it difficult to report loved ones to law enforcement officials due to fear of legal consequences. Trusted prevention hotlines provide vulnerable individuals help they need before cognitive radicalization transpires into violent extremism. Trained and licensed psychologists/social workers should provide support so a person's identity can be protected while trained interventionists can, through properly vetted and established protocols, decide when a person should be referred to an offline mental health facility, a local organization, or to the proper authorities (if they are in imminent danger to themselves or others in the community).

Develop online content management platforms: A technology platform should be created that allows CVE centers to engage with fence sitters. The program's design might be an enterprise-level internet platform with a social media ecosystem, anchored by a website with a high level of cyber security. The platform can then house and manage the marketing functions of counter-narrative campaigns, social media applications, call centers, and databases. The messaging part of this endeavor should be non-attributed, and there should be a clear wall between its functions and those of the call center. The site stores only information which individuals have freely provided and want saved.

Establish system that people can trust to report radicalization, based on balance between global best practice and local country conditions: Governments should protect people from the risks associated with disclosing sensitive information and ensure privacy and safety rights are protected. This is especially the case for religious leaders, who face challenges stemming from perceptions of cooperating with the national authorities or media outlets.

Create exclusive counter-narrative content in partnership with NGOs and the government: Content management platforms should store and distribute personal testimonies from ISIL/Da'esh defectors and their family members. Other counter narratives range from emotional high-quality clips to anecdotal



interviews and logical explanations.

Promote internet safety training programs for parents and teachers: Social media fluency is necessary to understand and prevent the effectiveness of extremist organizations on the internet. Government training programs should be offered to parents, teachers, and imams to raise awareness regarding how the new social media can be abused to promote violent extremism. Some questions parents and teachers should consider: what resources do violent extremists have to infiltrate conversations; how can extremists use trending topics/hashtags/language to appeal to students/children; what content does youth crave; what online groups are they joining; and how are they communicating?

Conduct inclusive counter-radicalization efforts in prisons: Programs for training and developing imams to access prisoners to help guide their post-sentence life are vitally needed. There must also be social services (i.e., psychologists) support for at-risk prisoners.

Design a staged de-radicalization program, in collaboration with criminal justice and mental health professionals: Security services should work with criminal justice and mental health professionals to design staged de-radicalization programs based on best practice (stages include pre-conviction intervention, prison programming, and re-integration). "Formers" who have reformed and renounced violence, or people forced to engage in violence against their will, could become valuable partners and de-radicalization assets.

Create robust societal reintegration programs to minimize the possibility to re-offending: Once individuals have committed crimes associated with violent extremism, a check-in rhythm should be developed to help that individual reintegrate into society by way of an adequate job, consistent relationships, and healthy habits. As part of their prison sentence, former criminals or convicted violent extremists should be mandated to follow specific programs that include volunteering, sustaining jobs, and becoming an active and constructive member in the community.



ANNEX B: THE CHALLENGES OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE
BY SAJJAN GOHEL & VLADO AZINOVIC

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Overall, it is believed that from the end of 2012 until the beginning of 2016 up to 1.000 individuals from Western Balkans countries have travelled to and stayed in Syria and Iraq. The numbers typically include those who are currently believed to be there, those who have returned home, as well as those who are believed to have died. The data often includes women, children, and elderly – all non-combatants. Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and Macedonia provided the bulk of the Western Balkans contingents in Syria and Iraq. The departures of the Western Balkans' citizens to Syria and Iraq continued throughout 2015, but at a slower pace. The trend almost completely stopped by early 2016. Except for a few cases of the extradition from detention in Turkey, returns from Syria and Iraq ceased almost completely in 2015. Both departures and returns were probably reduced as a result of intensified regional and international efforts aimed at the criminal prosecution of aspiring fighters and returnees from Syria and Iraq. This reduction could also be attributed to developments in areas of conflict, which are now more difficult to enter and leave from. Compared to contingents from other countries, the Western Balkans detachment in Syria and Iraq is older (on average men were 31, while women were 30 years of age on the date of their entry to Syria) and include more women (27% to 36%, among Kosovars and Bosnians, respectively), which is almost double the European average. Consequently, the non-combatants (women and children) make up far more (up to 55%) of the Western Balkans contingent than is true of other foreign contingents in Syria and Iraq. These specific traits could be attributed to Islamic State for Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh) rhetoric and calls to followers to perform *hijra* (migration). In response to this call and based on their own understanding of developments in Syria and Iraq, entire families – sometimes three generations, are migrating from the Western Balkans; many have no intention of ever returning.

IDEOLOGY, STRATEGY & REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In order to fully understand the implications of the ISIL threat, and to assess the challenges arising from the growth of ISIL and its franchises, ISIL's ideology and overall strategy need to be clearly understood. Behind the violence that ISIL perpetrates is an ideological message that directs recruitment, strategy, and tactics. ISIL's ideology and plan of action is based on the treatise *The Management of Savagery*, by the anonymous ideologue known as Abu Bakr Naji, which is a conceptual doctrine that enables operations to be conducted with unity of purpose without constant direction. Through harnessing the power of new media platforms, ISIL has conducted a campaign where its leaders issue messages that have been designed to elicit psychological reactions and communicate direct political messages to a global audience. The end goal is to inflict significant political, economic, and social consequences.

The Management of Savagery outlines a two-step mission with the overarching goal of 'dislodging the regions from the control of the regimes of the apostasy.' First, in the 'stage of the power of vexation and exhaustion', the jihadists, in this case ISIL, must exhaust the 'choice' state and overthrow the governing authorities, creating 'savagery and chaos' in order to force the society to 'suffer from the absence of security.' Second, the 'stage of the administration of savagery' prescribes 'management' of



the regions of savagery, which, if successful, will enable them to fill the power vacuum and ultimately facilitate their consolidation of control throughout the conquered territories. Considering ISIL's adherence to Naji's prescription to 'vex and exhaust' the apostate regions and create 'administrations of savagery' in order for its movement to both centralize and consolidate its grip on the Muslim world, it appears that ISIL is plotting the cultural and civilizational annihilation of both Islamic and non-Islamic nations. When it comes to its "management of savagery" approach, ISIL most likely designates the Western Balkans as a "non-priority" region. Presumably, the territory is viewed as suitable for the rest and recuperation or recruitment of new fighters and their transfer to or from Western Europe, as well as for the acquisition of weapons, ammunition, and explosives. Therefore, ISIL does not seem to be encouraging Paris- or Brussels-style attacks in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), of an indiscriminate nature and directed against civilians, but rather limited strikes against selected targets (such as police and military forces as symbols of secular states, as well as foreign embassies or diplomats). Current security threats to the region emanate mostly from returned foreign fighters and from radicalized or ideologically inspired individuals who have tried and failed to travel to Syria and Iraq.

MOTIVATIONS & RECRUITMENT TRENDS

While a unique profile of the typical Western Balkans foreign fighter remains elusive, there are commonalities that can be understood as patterns, primarily: 1) links to diasporas in the EU (particularly in Austria and Germany), and 2) pre-departure criminality. Other common features include poor education, unemployment, dysfunctional or broken families, and mental health issues. Motives for migration to Syria and Iraq include a mixture of personal drivers alongside overarching ideological incentives. Typically, people who have departed have escaped something – unhappy marriages, domestic violence, debt, criminal prosecution, alcohol, and drug abuse – or have sought something, such as a spouse, an adventure, or belonging and purpose in life; and, at the same time, they have complied with what they see as a divine order. Once centered in traditional Salafi strongholds in remote areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania, radicalization and recruitment for departures to Syria and Iraq has gradually, but rather visibly, moved into new and less formal communities and congregations that have mushroomed over the last couple of years in and around major cities. The trend is especially apparent in BiH where many suburban areas around Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla, Travnik, and Bihać are now harboring Salafi settlements. Networks of small businesses, community centers, and charities are facilitating this relocation effort, with a number of "pop-up" mosques providing spiritual guidance.

The individual cases of radicalization and recruitment are occurring by and large within closed circles of family and friends, during social gatherings that typically take place in the privacy of people's homes. These gatherings amount to "illegal" or "parallel" mosques, or "para-jamaats," as the official Islamic Communities in the region have labeled them, and are now considered by many as hotbeds of radicalization and recruitment in BiH, but also in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia. In addition to the establishment of a parallel religious community, these groups are gradually setting up parallel structures in other vital areas, such as in education, social services and healthcare, thus filling the gaps left, in many instances, by the failing state and by public services plagued by incompetence, corruption, and nepotism. The radicalization process typically begins through an initiation with a "human touch," meaning a personal interaction with a figure of authority. It is then followed by peer-to-peer



interaction, often in congregation with like-minded individuals, where a very specific worldview is reinforced through group dynamics. The role of social media in individual cases of radicalization in the Western Balkans appears to be only tertiary in importance, serving as a force multiplier.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

- ❖ ISIL's greatest strength is its illusion of power, which, in being an illusion, also serves as its most vulnerable weakness. In recent months, ISIL has seen a number of key strongholds in Syria and Iraq threatened by Kurdish and Iraqi forces. The terrorist group's land mass has been steadily shrinking and retracting. ISIL have also been hit by strained revenue, their fighters fleeing and infighting, whilst a U.S.-led coalition continues bombing on their strategic positions.
- ❖ However, in response to suffering a series of setbacks and seeing large swathes of their territory coming under threat, ISIL will likely become more desperate and increase their levels of brutality by attempting to plot more attacks in the West which would be designed to show their followers that their power is firmly intact as well as to promote fear. This was sadly witnessed with the 2016 Ramadan attacks in the United States, France, Turkey, Bangladesh, and Iraq.
- ❖ As a concurrent rung to the U.S.-led coalition's air strikes campaign against ISIL, there is a need to formulate a plan to puncture and deflate ISIL's 'media halo' by identifying the ample holes within its populist appeal. Understanding the agenda of ISIL's propaganda for recruitment and radicalization is essential in order to develop a successful counter-narrative.
- ❖ Clever spin is not needed to portray ISIL as un-Islamic and expose its half-truths. Articulating the truth is powerful enough. Yet the problem is that there are no sustained efforts to show the truth of how the ISIL death cult is un-Islamic. It is an often overlooked fact the primary victims of ISIL's onslaught have been ordinary Iraqi and Syrian civilians. Many potential ISIL followers are naïve that the group's 'savagery and chaos' makes them murderers of innocent Muslims instead of martyrs.
- ❖ Whether there are attacks in the West or the Western Balkans, ISIL is not principally driven by an adherence to theology. Rather, it is motivated by its hunger for total political power, by which it flexes religion as both a tool of attraction for recruits and as a factor of legitimization to divinely sanction its abhorrent acts of mass murder and mutilation.
- ❖ Given the ongoing crackdown on para-*jamaats* by state authorities instigated by official Islamic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania, a possible retaliatory attack against cannot be excluded. Moderation, or middle-path Islam, has for centuries been the cornerstone of the belief system, identity, and way of life of Muslims in the Western Balkans. This tradition and secular states that enable and safeguard it could also be further undermined and targeted by ISIL-inspired groups and individuals.

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