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ADDRESSING THE DAESH THREAT IN THE CONTEXT OF CENTRAL ASIA

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KEY POINTS

- Despite the view of some security experts and regional analysts, Daesh represents a major and serious threat to the security and stability of Central Asia.

- The threat of Daesh elements may be categorized into three main groups:

    o Battle-hardened returnees,

    o Local supporters and followers in direct contact with Daesh,

    o Daesh-inspired local supporters in no direct contact with Daesh.

- To design an effective and preventive counter-terrorism strategy, it is essential to first and foremost focus all available administrative, financial and human resources on addressing the root causes of extremism, terrorism and global jihadism:

    o Resolving socio-political issues that are critical to the success and operational capabilities of violent extremists and terrorists,

    o Addressing socio-economic failures that create a conducive climate to the spread of violent extremism and terrorism.

- The nexus of extremism and terrorism is a constantly evolving phenomenon. In order to prevent and combat the actual threats posed by Daesh-type global jihadist networks, it is critical to constantly adjust and upgrade counter-terrorist tactics:

    o Terrorist groups increasingly use the Internet and other modern technologies for their purposes.

o Given the current nature of the threat posed by Daesh to the region (outsourcing foreign terrorist fighters and operational personnel), obstructing terrorist travel is a principal objective for the national law enforcement agencies.

o Publicly refuting Daesh ideology and political principles and raising public awareness regarding Daesh's atrocities and brutality is an essential ideological warfare tactic.

• An analysis of the activities performed by international organizations suggests that the specific factor of socialization into violence as one fueling the conflict in Afghanistan in combination with other drivers is not specifically addressed by the international donor community.

• A new stabilization strategy should be considered within a humanitarian effort that prioritizes breaking the self-reinforcing cycle of socialization into violence and increasing aid that focuses on education and new job opportunities for the local population.

INTRODUCTION

As never before, the threats and challenges linked to violent extremism and international terrorism, currently posed primarily by Daesh, the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as ISIS and IS, are increasingly becoming the major security issue around the globe. This includes the countries of the former Soviet Central Asia that have their own histories of confronting global jihadism, terrorism and militant Islamism. The enormous humanitarian catastrophe in the Levant region and the inability of the international community to effectively facilitate the resolution of the continuously expanding conflict in Syria and parts of Iraq continue to generate major security threats that manifest in appalling terrorist acts targeting primarily "soft" civilian targets worldwide. In October and November of this year alone, suicide and roadside bombings in Beirut[1] and Baghdad[2] sent shockwaves through the already divided ethnic and religious communities of Lebanon and Iraq, the Ankara bombings[3] revealed in a very tragic way the capabilities of Daesh terrorists in the border regions and hinterland of Turkey. The downing of the Russian airplane over the Sinai peninsula by a regional affiliate of Daesh known as "Wilayat Sinai"[4] continues to convulse Russian public and question the expediency of Russia's military mission in

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1   Shaheen, Kareem. "Isis claims responsibility as suicide bombers kill dozens in Beirut." The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/12/beirut-bombings-kill-at-least-20-lebanon/> (accessed 12 November 2015).

2   Zhao, Iris. "Why Don't We Care as Much About Beirut or Baghdad as We Do Paris?" Newsweek <http://europe.newsweek.com/why-dont-we-care-much-about-beirut-or-baghdad-we-do-paris-396196?rm=eu/> (accessed 19 November 2015).

3   Dearden, Lizzie. "Ankara terror attack 'ordered by Isis to cause political instability and delay elections', Turkish prosecutors say" <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ankara-terror-attack-ordered-by-isis-to-cause-political-instability-and-delay-elections-turkish-a6711766.html/> (accessed 22 November 2015).

4   Boyle, Darren. "Sinai plane crash WAS an act of terror, says Putin as he vows to hunt down bombers who downed jet 'in any part of planet'." Mail Online <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3321712/BREAKING-NEWS-Russia-says-Sinai-plane-disaster-act-terror-traces-explosives-debris-crash-site.html/> (accessed 20 November 2015).

Syria. Finally, the horrific November Paris attacks[5], the deadliest attacks in France since the end of WWII, have re-traumatized the entire European continent and compelled the French authorities to raise the national terror alert system Vigipirate, declare a national state of emergency and temporarily re-impose border controls just months after the Charlie Hebdo shootings which had been perpetrated by French-born local supporters of the terrorist group Ansar Al-Sharia, an affiliate of Al-Qaeda in Yemen.[6]

The majority of these horrendous atrocities were perpetrated or believed to be perpetrated by Daesh, a Wahhabi/Salafi global jihadist extremist militant group. Until recently Daesh has operated mainly in Syria and Iraq, now also occur in Western Europe and other parts of the Western world, where security services traditionally enjoy access to the most advanced technological capabilities and major financial resources. The majority of security analysts[7] and regional experts[8] are increasingly concerned. They are concentrating on counter-terrorism in the former Soviet space, particularly Central Asia[9] where intelligence agencies are often underfinanced, lack adequate regional collaboration, competent personnel, as well as the necessary technical and other equipment.[10]

And the concerns of these regional and security analysts stem not

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5   Wilkinson, Michael. "Paris attacks mastermind returned to scene of Bataclan as police attempted rescue." The Telegraph <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/12013227/Manhunt-for-Salah-Abdeslam-as-Brussels-on-high-alert-after-Paris-attacks-Tuesday-live.html/> (accessed 20 November 2015).

6   Alexander, Caroline. "Al-Qaeda in Yemen Claims Charlie Hebdo Attack to Punish France." BloombergBusiness <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-14/yemen-s-top-al-qaeda-leader-claims-charlie-hebdo-attack/> (accessed 18 November 2015).

7   Stancati, Margherita and Hodge, Nathan. "Islamic State Ally Emerges As Threat to Afghanistan, Central Asia." The Wall Street Journal <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-ally-emerges-as-threat-to-afghanistan-central-asia-1439919456/> (accessed 22 November 2015).

8   Shankar, Sneha. "ISIS Threat To Central Asia Has Increased, Russia's Intelligence Chief Warns: Report" International Business Times <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-threat-central-asia-has-increased-russias-intelligence-chief-warns-report-2159955/> (accessed 21 November 2015).

9   Lang, Jozef. "The Radical Islamic Militants of Central Asia." Center for Eastern Studies, (2013) 28-30. <http://aei.pitt.edu/58014/1/report_the-radical-islamic-militants.pdf/> (accessed 15 November 2015).

10   Kollins, Kathleen. Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

only from the inability of the international community to resolve or even contain the ongoing calamity in Syria, which has transformed into the ultimate operational space and global command center for global jihadists and religious extremists from around the globe. Or alternatively from the overall geopolitical context in which the major global counter-terrorism actors, Russia, the United States and the European Union, due to the deadlock over the Ukraine crisis, have arrived at an extremely untimely decision to halt all major military and intelligence collaboration, particularly in the area of counter-terrorism.[11] But from the fact that Daesh, a highly-organized, tech-savvy and financially sustainable politico-military organization capable of carrying out major terrorist acts worldwide, as well as effectively engaging in conventional warfare with the use of sophisticated battlefield tactics against well-equipped regular armies[12] and highly-organized Hezbollah-type paramilitary groups[13], is skillfully inspiring, indoctrinating, increasingly through the use of the Internet as well as other modern technologies[14], and recruiting Muslim and non-Muslim recruits from Central Asia. And the main issue is that such individuals, often, do not only travel to various war zones, join Daesh and other militant religious extremist groups, but also threaten to return to their countries of origin with the purpose of promoting

11   Bovt, Georgy. "West and Russia Must Cooperate on More Than Terrorism (Op-Ed)." The Moscow Times. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/west-and-russia-must-cooperate-on-more-than-terrorism-op-ed/548777.html/> (accessed 16 November 2015).

12   Kepel Gilles, Balanche Fabrice and Olivier Decottignies. "Policy Analysis Discussion: After Paris French Voices on the Challenge of ISIS, Syria, Iraq, and Islamist Terrorism. "The Washington Institute <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/after-paris-french-voices-on-the-challenge-of-isis-syria-iraq-and-islamist/> (accessed 24 November 2015).

13   Cockburn, Patrick. "Campaign against Isis: Is there any hope for military success?" The Independent <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/campaign-against-isis-is-there-any-hope-for-military-success-a6747396.html/> (accessed 19 November 2015).

14   Engel, Pamela. "ISIS has mastered a crucial recruiting tactic no terrorist group has ever conquered." Business Insider <http://uk.businessinsider.com/isis-is-revolutionizing-international-terrorism-2015-5?r=US&IR=T/> (accessed 16 November 2015).

global jihadism[15], terrorism and militant Islamism among their fellow countrymen[16], and disintegrating the existing political and socio-economic order.[17]

The key objective and underlying theme of this Central Asia Policy Brief is to present, anatomize and elucidate the primary security threats and challenges posed by Daesh-type international terrorist networks and their supporters and followers within the Central Asian region. It also aims to identify, analyze and suggest areas for improvement in the sphere of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization, including both long-term strategic and short-term tactical recommendations. The Brief consists of four parts:

I.   Introduction
II. Anatomizing threats posed by international terrorist organizations
     a. Syrian returnees
     b. Local terrorist cells in contact with Daesh
     c. Lone-wolf terrorism
III. Providing strategic and tactical recommendations in the area of counter-terrorism
     a. Addressing conditions conducive to violent extremism and terrorism
     b. Providing tactical recommendations
IV. Conclusion

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15   Dettoni, Jacoppo. "Interview: ISIS in Central Asia". The Diplomat <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/interview-isis-in-central-asia//> (accessed 11 November 2015).

16   Dyner Anna, Legiec Arkadiusz and Rekawek Kacper. "Ready to Go? ISIS and Its Presumed Expansion into Central Asia." The Polish Institute of International Affairs, no. 19 (2015): 9-11. <https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=20020/> (accessed 11 November 2015).

17   Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing. "Syria Calling: Radicalization in Central Asia" International Crisis Group, Policy Briefing no. 72 (2015): <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/central-asia/b072-syria-calling-radicalisation-in-central-asia.pdf/> (accessed 10 November 2015).

ANATOMIZING THREATS POSED BY INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

a. Syrian returnees

According to the official information released by the Collective Security Treaty Organization[18] and the law enforcement agencies of some of the five Central Asian states[19], approximately 1500 radicalized citizens of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have travelled to take part in the ongoing Syrian conflict on the side of the Daesh and Jabhat an-Nusra terrorist groups and other anti-Assad elements.[20] The same information also provides that the majority of the foreign terrorist fighters from the region were indoctrinated through the local madrassa and namazkana networks within their countries of origin, but also increasingly through various social media platforms and other Internet-based resources. The estimations of the Central Asian fighters in Syria and Iraq, however, vary substantially according to various sources. The International Crisis

Photo courtesy of the Guardian

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18 Collective Security Treaty Organization. "CSTO Secretary-General: CSTO has taken into consideration the threat posed by the Taliban" <http://www.odkb-csto.org/presscenter/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=5528/> (accessed 11 November 2015).

19 Interior Ministry of the Kyrgyz Republic. "IM Press center: Results of the activities of the Interior Ministry for the two months of 2015" <http://mvd.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4372%3A----------2--2015-&catid=71%3Anews&Itemid=522&lang=kg/> (accessed 20 November 2015).

20 National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan. "Security in the CIS space" <http://knb.kz/ru/archive/article.htm?id=10376986@egNews/> (accessed 15 November 2015).

Group, for example, suggested that the information provided by the national intelligence agencies was somewhat "conservative" and, in fact, the ranks of Daesh-type jihadist networks in Syria and Iraq could include as many as 4,000 Central Asian recruits[21], including both active combatants and operational personnel. The recruits are primarily ethnic Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but also Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Turkmens and Uighurs, often with their families, including minor children. The ICG report and other sources also note that while the majority of the recruits arrive directly from their countries of origin, an increasing number of the fighters, before travelling to Syria and Iraq, undergo the process of radicalization and indoctrination outside of their countries of origin, often as migrant workers in Russia and Turkey and other countries or as students pursuing religious studies in the Middle East and South Asia.[22]

The primary security threat posed by Daesh to the region is, obviously, the battle-hardened Central Asian veterans of the Syrian conflict. Such individuals, who have acquired direct military experience and operational terrorist capabilities, often return to their countries of origin with the purpose of conducting subversive activities and spreading the ideas of violent extremism and religious fundamentalism among their fellow countrymen. The reality of the threat or at least the intent to destabilize Central Asia, conversely to the opinions of sceptics of the potential of global jihadism in the region, has already been confirmed by a series of recently released propaganda videos featuring Daesh's Central Asian commanders and regular operatives propagating the ideology and objectives of Daesh in Central Asia while addressing their fellow countrymen in their native languages.[23] The most recent examples include a video message uploaded on the

21   Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing. "Syria Calling: Radicalization in Central Asia" International Crisis Group, Policy Briefing no. 72 (2015) p.3.
22   Turovsky, Daniil. "How Isis is recruiting migrant workers in Moscow to join the fighting in Syria", The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/05/isis-russia-syria-islamic-extremism/> (accessed 10 November 2015).
23   Orozbekova Cholpon "Central Asia and the ISIS Phantom", The Diplomat <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/central-asia-and-the-isis-phantom> (accessed 18 November 2015).

popular video-sharing media platform YouTube that features Gulmurod Khalimov, an infamous ethnic Tajik Daesh fighter and a former commander of a Tajik elite police force unit.[24] Khalimov in the video openly instigates interfaith hatred and violence and calls upon the people of Tajikistan to destroy the existing political system. Another similar video message, which addressed the people of Kyrgyzstan, features an unidentified ethnic Kyrgyz Daesh foreign terrorist fighter, who praises the territorial expansion of Daesh and calls upon the Muslim population of Kyrgyzstan to immigrate to the territories under the control of Daesh and participate in what he describes as a "holy war".[25]

The political message and content of the videos primarily target young, dissatisfied and idealistic Central Asians who are frustrated by the continuous political, socio-economic and administrative failures of their governments. Potential recruits often suffer from identity-crises and other identity-related issues, feel marginalized and segregated by their respective societies and/or ethnic communities, as well as unable to enjoy freedom of religion according to their respective religious demands and seek a more radical and/or militant alternative to the current political and socio-economic status quo.

Photo courtesy of the Counter-Jihad Report

Photo courtesy of Kloop.kg

The most recent and most notorious example of the threat posed by the returnees from the Syrian conflict was demonstrated during the horrendous November 2015 Paris attacks which turned out to

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24 Solovyov, Dmitry. "Commander of elite Tajik police force defects to Islamic State" Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/28/us-mideast-crisis-tajikistan-idUSKBN0OD1AP20150528#YFXh1yD8upYy7HPl.97> (accessed 15 November 2015).

25 Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Syrian War Draws Central Asians" The Wall Street Journal <http://www.wsj.com/articles/syrian-war-draws-central-asians-1446122699> (accessed 12 November 2015).

be the deadliest attacks in France since the end of WWII, and in Europe since the Madrid bombings in March 2014 [26]. The highly-organized and synchronized terrorist acts, including coordinated mass shootings, suicide bombings and mass hostage taking, killed over 130 and injured over 350 civilians. The attacks were per-petrated by local terrorist cells in cooperation with veterans of the Syrian conflict and under direct coordination of Daesh. The main organizer of the attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, also known as Abu Omar al-Baljiki, a Belgian citizen, was confirmed by the French intelligence services as a battle-hardened returnee from the Syrian conflict and had a long history of radicalism, extremism, militancy and terrorism prior to his joining Daesh in 2013.[27]

According to various counter-terrorism experts[28], including a lead-ing security researcher from the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment Thomas Hegghammer, a substantial proportion of foreign terrorist fighters (approximately 1 out of 9 jihadists), if not neutralized in their operational spaces (e.g. Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Syria, etc.), or rehabilitated by their respective national authorities, often cause serious security issues upon return to their countries of origin.[29] Potential security issues posed by such in-dividuals include, for example, active propagation of extremism, radicalism and terrorism, as well as organization of local clandes-tine extremist and terrorist networks and often in cooperation with other returnees from the same or other war zones. With regards to the Central Asian region, which has already outsourced as many as 4000 mainly foot-soldiers, even a few dozen expe-rienced and battle-hardened returnees, especially if coordinated

26 Zalan, Eszter. "Belgium charges man in Paris attacks, maintains lockdown" EU Observer <https://euobserver.com/political/131230> (accessed 24 November 2015).

27 Graham A., David. "The Mysterious Life and Death of Abdelhamid Abaaoud" The Atlantic <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/who-was-abdelhamid-abaaoud-isis-paris/416739/> (accessed 20 November 2015).

28 Herik, L. J. van den and Nico Schrijver. Counter-terrorism strategies in a fragmented international legal order: meeting the challenges. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

29 Hegghammer, Thomas. "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting" American Political Science Review, (2013): 8-11. <http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Should_I_stay_or_should_I_go.pdf> (accessed 12 November 2015).

by a joint plan of actions, may pose a major security challenge to the national law enforcement agencies. Especially if one considers the porousness of the national borders, the geographic proximity of the region, heightened terrorist activity worldwide and, most importantly, the questionable capabilities of the national intelligence services. The latter point has been confirmed by Artur Medetbekov, a former head of the State Committee on National Security of Kyrgyzstan, and Tokon Mamytov[30], a former Kyrgyz deputy prime minister responsible for the security block, both of whom asserted that the region's local law enforcement agencies responsible for counter-terrorism suffer from a systemic lack of competent experts, adequate financing and necessary technical and other equipment.[31]

b. Local terrorist cells in contact with Daesh

While the "returnees" represent the most obvious and direct security threat, local supporters and Daesh-inspired followers within the region pose, arguably, an even greater yet more subtle challenge to the national intelligence and law enforcement agencies, especially given the structural nature of such clandestine cell structures and their modus operandi. The security challenge posed by the "local" Daesh supporters, excluding groups that express overt support and loyalty to Daesh, for example the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, may be categorized into two main groups: a) Local Daesh followers in direct contact and potentially under the direct command and coordination of Daesh, and b) Local Daesh supporters that are inspired by the ideology, yet are in no direct contact with Daesh, are outside of its command structure and receive no material assistance from the group.

Examples of the threat posed by the local followers in direct contact with and potentially under the direct coordination of Daesh-type global jihadist networks include the Charlie Hebdo shooting

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30   Akipress.org. "We lag behind terrorists". <http://kg.akipress.org/news:627762> (accessed 1 December 2015).

31   Kloop.kg. "Coffee Break: Artur Medetbekov on terrorism and extremism in Kyrgyzstan" <http://kloop.kg/blog/2013/05/21/kofe-brejk-terrorizm-i-ekstremizm-v-ky-rgy-zstane-video> (accessed 23 November 2015).

when local extremists, the Kouachi brothers,[32] French nationals who had a history of violent extremism, support of and contact with Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen, killed 11 people and injured 11 others in the office of the French satirical newspaper.[33] The terrorist act revealed in a very tragic way the major capabilities of Al-Qaeda's affiliates and their local followers not only in France but in Western Europe in general. One of the main inferences made from a counter-terrorism point of view regarding the Charlie Hebdo shooting was that local supporters of global jihadist networks, especially those that remain in their countries of origin and are not profiled as "returnees", represent a harder target from an intelligence point of view because,[34] due to their individual conditions and circumstances, as was in the case of the Kouachi brothers, they often "go off" the radar of the relevant law enforcement agencies and may be activated upon the order of their command structure and/or central leadership of their networks.[35]

Picture courtesy of Reuters

Also, the potency of local terrorist cells must not be underestimated in comparison to the battle-hardened returnees from the Syr-

32   Protection Group International. "French attacks highlight challenges of evolving terrorist methodology" <https://pgitl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PGI-Insight-Paris.pdf> (accessed 15 November 2015)

33   Dorsey, James. "Deaths in Paris: Separating Fact from Fiction" S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies no. 10 (2015): 4-6. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CO15010.pdf> (accessed 10 November 2015).

34   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2014. "Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach" <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/111438> (accessed 19 November 2015).

35   Inbar, Efraim and Frisch, Hillel. Radical Islam and International Security: Challenges and Responses. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

ian conflict. While local supporters by and large lack the combat experience and operational capabilities of global jihadists directly involved in major military conflicts, these individuals are nevertheless capable of perpetrating major terrorist acts and operations because they often are former or active criminals and/or members of organized criminal groups.[36] This was in the case of the perpetrators of the November 2015 Paris attacks, who demonstrated extreme effectiveness with the use of small arms and light weapons (pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns and light machine guns, heavy machine guns, hand-held grenade launchers, etc.), as well as improvised explosive devices. The ultimate weakness, however, of such clandestine networks is their contact and direct communication with their coordinators abroad, which is by and large perceptible and detectable, given the modern capabilities of intelligence services.[37] [38]

c. Lone-wolf terrorism

Finally, threats and challenges may be posed by local Daesh supporters that are inspired by the ideology but are in no direct contact with Daesh, outside of its command structure and without any material assistance from the group, i.e. lone-wolf terrorists. Such individuals probably pose the greatest challenge to the intelligence and law enforcement agencies of the region, particularly given their self-radicalization patterns, low profiles and inventive operational methods. Since lone-wolf terrorists are only inspired by an ideology or terrorist activities of a global jihadist network or a local extremist organization, and therefore commit violent and/or non-violent acts outside of any command structure, have no direct communication with the group, which may be intercepted by the relevant intelligence agencies, and receive no material assistance from the group, such terrorist threats are practically im-

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36   Hestermann, Jennifer L. The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus: An Alliance of International Drug Cartels, Organized Crime and Terror Groups. Boca Raton, FL: McFarland, 2013.

37   Davis, Fergal Francis, Nicola McGarrity, and George Williams. Surveillance, counter-terrorism and comparative constitutionalism, 2014.

38   Crotty, William. Democratic development & political terrorism: the global perspective. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005.

perceptible from an intelligence point of view. [39]

The 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, the first major terrorist act committed on American soil since the September 11 attacks, perpetrated by Al-Qaeda inspired homegrown violent extremists, is a classic example of the threat posed by self-radicalized and self-trained

Photo courtesy of Business Insider

lone-wolf terrorists. Having been initially exposed to radical views in their local mosque in Boston and later via an Internet-based platform remotely maintained by an Al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen[40] Tamerlan and Dzhohar Tsarnaev managed to "catch off guard" the most capable and resourceful intelligence services by activating what is known as a pressure cooker bomb, an easy to construct and deploy improvised explosive device favored by domestic terrorists who lack explosive and other materials. The effectively constructed and deployed IED killed 3 people and injured an estimated 264 others in one of the most monitored and secure environments in the world.[41]

The issue of lone-wolf terrorism and the increasing use of the Internet and other modern technologies for terrorist and radicalization purposes, particularly uploading illegal content, for example the on-line magazine "Inspire", issued and maintained by Al-Qaeda, "Sabotage Handbook", "Anarchist Cookbook" or on-line sermons by Al-Qaeda or Daesh professional preachers and propaganda and technical experts, is indeed increasingly alarming
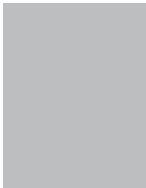
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39   Stern, Jessica. Terror in the name of God: why religious militants kill. New York: Ecco, 2003.

40   Williams, Brian Glyn. Inferno in Chechnya: Russian-Chechen wars, the Al Qaeda myth, and the Boston Marathon bombings, 2015.

41   Valencia, Milton. "Tsarnaev lawyers ask judge to extend prison arrangements." The Boston Globe <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/10/28/dzhokhar-tsarnaev-lawyers-ask-judge-extend-prison-arrangments-pending-boston-marathon-bomber-appeal/G0k4r4XsERzHRiTBdOEhjO/story.html> (accessed 24 November 2015).

counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization experts[42] focusing on Central Asia.[43] Especially since the national intelligence services lack adequate resources and suffer from limited technological capabilities, while extremists and potential terrorists, particularly lone-wolf terrorists, are able to self-radicalize, get indoctrinated and, in the case of local supporters in contact with global jihadist networks, be under direct coordination by means of the Internet and other modern technologies.

PROVIDING STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE AREA OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

a. Addressing conditions conducive to violent extremism and terrorism

Why is Central Asia a terrorism vulnerable region and how to design a successful counter-terrorism strategy? To design an effective and, more importantly, preventive counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism strategy, it is first and foremost critical to address the root causes that lead to terrorism and global jihadism. The root causes that

Courtesy of RFE/RL

create conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism and terrorism are mainly of socio-political and socio-economic

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42   Aldis, Anne and Graeme P. Herd. The ideological war on terror: worldwide strategies for counter-terrorism. London: Routledge, 2007.

43   Watts, Clint. "ISIS and al Qaeda Race to the Bottom." Foreign Affairs <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-11-23/isis-and-al-qaeda-race-bottom> (accessed 24 November 2015).

nature.[44] With regards to the socio-political factors, the national governments of the five Central Asian states must first of all concentrate their intelligence, human, financial and other resources on curbing political instability within their respective jurisdictions, as well as collectively facilitate the resolution of active/frozen ethnic, border, religious and other conflicts in the region as a whole, for violent extremism and terrorism thrive chiefly in chaos and lawlessness. Particular attention must be paid to Tajikistan and its regular outbreaks of localized political volatility, which are often linked to the dissatisfaction of the former members of the United Tajik Opposition, a former alliance of democratic, nationalist and Islamist elements from the country's civil war in the 1990s, and the ethnic strife and what is often described by regional experts as permanent social segregation, exclusion and marginalization in Kyrgyzstan's southern regions of Osh and Djalal Abad.[45] [46]

It is also essential to consider a potential accommodation of the demands of moderate political opposition elements in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, especially moderate Islamist forces,[47] for example the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, which arguably is the only moderate Islamist political force in the region.[48] The cases of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan and many other Muslim-majority countries demonstrate[49] that, if suppressed and persecuted, moderate Islamists often commence

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44   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2015. "Overview of OSCE Counter-Terrorism Related Commitments" <http://www.osce.org/node/26365> (accessed 12 November 2015).

45   Lillis, Johanna. "Kyrgyzstan: Osh Voters Warily Eye Watershed Election" EurasiaNet <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75376> (accessed 20 November 2015).

46   Najibullah, Farangis. "Death Of A Fugitive: Abduhalim Nazarzoda, Tajik General Blamed For Recent Violence", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, <http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-general-nazarzoda-deadly-attacks/27233955.html> (accessed 25 November 2015).

47   Paraszczuk, Joanna. "Tajikistan's Crackdown On Islam 'Helps IS Recruiters'" <http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-crackdown-helping-islamic-state-recruiting/27333859.html> (accessed 20 November 2015).

48   Casey, Michel. "Trouble in Tajikistan". Al-Jazeera Network, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/trouble-tajikistan-151104085616528.html> (accessed 26 November 2015).

49   Euben, Roxanne Leslie, and Muhammad Qasim Zaman. Princeton readings in Islamist thought: texts and contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2009.

to seek more radical and militant alternatives to existing political status quo. And, finally, the national governments of the Central Asian region must recognize that human rights are key to successfully combatting extremism and terrorism. The governments must initiate major comprehensive improvements in the area of human rights. According to some human rights experts, regular failures to address the issue of protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms, especially in detention and correction facilities, and especially in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, where human rights records have often been described by HRW experts as "atrocious, appalling and disastrous",[50] has been one of the most potent recruitment tools skillfully exploited by the indoctrination specialists of Daesh-type global jihadist networks.

An effective and preventive counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism strategy, especially in the context of Central Asia, must also include a solid socio-economic dimension covering the main social and economic issues and conditions on the ground that create a conducive environment for violent extremism, terrorism and global jihadism. The focus of the national governments and counter-terrorism strategists must center on the most cited socio-economic grievances that are time and again presented by violent extremists and terrorists and are often discussed by their sympathizers in the blogosphere. For example, high poverty and unemployment rates that usually affect the least developed regions and the most vulnerable social groups, general lack of the rule of law, widespread corruption and impotent justice systems that are unable to deliver justice for all, exclusive decision-making processes and bad governance that hinder political and socio-economic development, ineffective education and healthcare systems that provide limited opportunities and fail to create adequate social protection mechanisms, widespread gender inequality and gender disparity at all levels, dissatisfaction with the performance of public institutions and failures of local administrations, unfair distribution and utilization of public funds, etc.[51] The Nookat district

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50   Human Rights Watch Country Profiles. Updated 2015. <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/uzbekistan> (accessed 21 November 2015).

51   Satterthwaite, Margaret L., and Jayne C. Huckerby (eds.). Gender, national security and counter-terrorism: human rights perspectives, London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

of Kyrgyzstan's Osh region is an extremely illustrative example in this sense. The ethnically-diverse region, which chronically suffers from major unemployment and inadequate living standards, often coupled with natural disasters and environmental issues, has recently become one of the main suppliers of foreign terrorist fighters within Kyrgyzstan.[52] That is why while addressing the conditions of socio-economic nature, it is essential to draw particular attention not only to high-risk groups, e.g. youth, ethnic and religious minorities, women or the unemployed, but also to high-risk areas, e.g. remote and rural areas, ethnically diverse communities, detention and correction facilities, unregistered places of worship, etc.

b. Providing tactical recommendations

While it is essential to focus on the long-term factors that create the conditions conducive to the spread of extremism, terrorism and jihadism, it is also critical to prevent and combat the actual acts of extremism and terrorism by analyzing the constantly evolving tactics and methods utilized by extremists and terrorists. According to various sources,[53] such as the OSCE Department for Transnational Threats and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Governments of the Central Asian region have made commitments and are already working on improving their counter-terrorism capacities in such vital areas as critical infrastructure protection, non-proliferation of conventional and non-conventional arms, combatting drug-trafficking, enhancement of regional and international legal cooperation in criminal matters related to extremism terrorism and participation in foreign conflicts,[54] implementation of the relevant regional and international counter-terrorism legal frameworks, suppression of major sources of terrorism financing and others. However, the significance of certain counter-terrorism spheres, such as on-line extremism and terrorism, global terrorist travel and ideological warfare, which are

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52   Akipress.org. "In Nookat, there are many mosques and those who travel to Syria" <http://www.turmush.kg/ru/news:267521> (accessed 1 December 2015).

53   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2015. "OSCE activities to counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism" <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/144741> (accessed 15 November 2015).

54   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2015. "OSCE activities to counter foreign terrorist fighters" <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/165251> (accessed 20 November 2015).

especially skillfully utilized by Daesh-type modern terrorist networks require special attention and must be further emphasized.[55]

On-line counter-terrorism is central to combatting tech-savvy extremist and terrorist organizations of the 21st century. Due to the increasing use of the Internet for terrorist and radicalization purposes, the national law enforcement and intelligence agencies should increase their capacities in the area of counter-extremism and counter-terrorism in cyberspace. Experts outline four major areas of possible terrorist activities involving the Internet: posting illegal content, including propaganda and other extremist materials, tactical communications via the Internet and other computer systems, including email servers, social media networks, online video and voice calls applications and others,[56] terrorism financing via various online payment systems and internet banking and Internet-related attacks.[57] While Daesh-type terrorist networks rarely commit organized Internet-related attacks, posting illegal content and using the Internet and other computer systems for tactical communications has transformed into day-to-day business operations for extremists, terrorists, global jihadists and their sympathizers around the world, including the countries of the Central Asian region.

Obstructing global terrorist travel and increasing passenger screening is another major tactical measure that must be employed by the relevant national security services, particularly in order to prevent radicalized citizens of the Central Asian countries and their sympathizers from travelling to Syria, Iraq and other war zones.[58] Because

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55   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2013. "Synopsis of the OSCE Good Practices Guide on Non-Nuclear Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection (NNCEIP) from Terrorist Attacks" <http://www.osce.org/secretari at/103954?download=true> (accessed 10 November 2015).

56   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2012. "The use of the Internet for terrorist purposes." <https://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/ Use_of_Internet_for_Terrorist_Purposes.pdf> (accessed 10 November 2015).

57   Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. 2012. OSCE Handbook on Data Collection in Support of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing, National Risk Assessments <http://www.osce.org/ secretariat/96398> (accessed 18 November 2015).

58   Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. 2009. "OSCE Travel Document Security Programme" <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/37962> (accessed 10 November 2015).

the threat currently posed by Daesh and other global jihadist networks primarily involves outsourcing foreign terrorist fighters from the region, the national governments and law enforcement agencies must put more emphasis on identifying high risk passengers through, for example, systematically obtaining what is known as Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record Data. Both security mechanisms are widely used by the United States Department of Homeland Security.[59]

Finally, because Daesh target-drive recruiters and indoctrination experts are skillfully radicalizing often uninformed individuals, especially in the religious sphere, promoting and facilitating public awareness regarding the threat and negative implications of extremism, terrorism and global jihadism, while also respecting cultural and religious aspects, is crucial. According to some counter-terrorism experts, to decrease the number of local followers of Daesh and other global jihadist networks, as well as their local sympathizers, it is essential to engage in a public ideological warfare against extremists, terrorists and jihadists by openly refuting their political platforms, theological credentials and social principles, as well as evidently rebuffing their accusations regarding socio-political and socio-economic failures of Muslim-majority secular states. The awareness of extremists and potential terrorists, as well as their sympathizers, and the public in general, must be raised particularly with regards to the atrocities, brutality and misanthropy of Daesh-type jihadist networks, who, according to some human rights experts, commit war crimes and crimes against humanity, particularly against the Yazidi communities and other minorities, almost on a daily basis.[60]

59   Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America. 2008. TSA's Management of Aviation Security Activities at Jackson-Evers International and Other Selected Airports <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/OIG_08-90_Sep08.pdf> (accessed 15 November 2015).

60   Miller, Michael E. "Islamic State's 'war crimes' against Yazidi women documented" The Washington Post <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/04/16/islamic-states-war-crimes-against-yazidi-women-documented/> (accessed 24 November 2015).

CONCLUSION

With the continuously growing regional conflict in the Middle East and increased terrorist activity worldwide, the threats and challenges posed by the nexus of religious extremism and international terrorism are increasingly becoming the most pressing security issue across the globe. Various counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization experts suggest that Central Asia remains to be a terrorism and extremism vulnerable region primarily because the national governments lack a strategic vision and are not focusing their administrative, financial and human resources on the systemic conditions that create a conducive environment for radicalization and militancy. Indeed, Daesh-type global jihadist networks are able to skillfully indoctrinate, recruit and outsource Muslims and non-Muslims from the region, often with their families, first and foremost because the populations of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan continue to suffer from systemic socio-economic failures, e.g. unemployment, lack of rule of law, bad governance, poor education systems, lack of transparency or unaccountability, and chronic socio-political issues, e.g. frozen/unresolved ethnic, religious, civil and other types of conflicts, marginalization and exclusion of certain social groups and minorities, political underrepresentation and gender inequality, poor human rights records or slow democratization.

In terms of actual security threats, the most immediate challenge posed by Daesh-type global jihadist networks to the region is the highly-indoctrinated and battle-hardened Central Asian veterans of Syria-type major conflicts who plan to or are actually returning to their countries of origin. After acquiring direct military experience and sophisticated terrorist capabilities, as well as thorough ideological indoctrination and extremely radical and militant views, such individuals represent an existential threat to the existing political structures and socio-economic arrangements in the individual countries and the region as a whole. The local followers of Daesh-type networks are also a serious challenge to the national law enforcement agencies, particularly given their low profiles, direct coordination with global jihadists, criminal backgrounds and the ability to conduct subversive activities from within the individual countries. Lone-wolf

terrorists, however, represent the greatest and most subtle threat from an intelligence and surveillance point of view. The example of the Tsarnaev brothers demonstrated the insufficiency and failures of human and other types of intelligence to detect and prevent threats posed by self-radicalized homegrown terrorist elements determined to act on behalf of a terrorist organization, radical ideology or distorted religious views.

In addition to addressing the root causes of extremism and terrorism in the region, an effective counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization strategy, in the context of Central Asia, also requires a special emphasis on certain tactical areas skillfully utilized by modern terrorist organizations. Given the growing use of the Internet and other modern technologies for terrorist purposes, carrying out effective and methodical on-line counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization measures is key to combatting tech-savvy global jihadists of the 21st century. Also, because Central Asia is above all a source of foreign terrorist fighters for terrorist organizations, obstructing global terrorist travel that involves citizens of the Central Asian countries must be a priority for the national law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Finally, no counter-terrorism strategy has been successful without including a solid ideological dimension. Successfully combatting violent extremism terrorism must not be done by treating the symptoms, but by preventing the "illness" by winning the hearts and minds of the would-be violent extremists and terrorists through open public debates, major theological conferences involving renowned religious scholars and experts and other systematic educational and awareness-raising activities organized by the States in cooperation with all main stakeholders, particularly civil society and representatives of the traditional and non-traditional religious groups. To paraphrase an argument by John L. Esposito and many other leading experts in the field of Islamic studies and political Islam, the cancer of violent extremism, militancy and global jihadism may be defeated only from within the faith and only by Muslims themselves.[61]

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61   Esposito, John L. Islam and politics. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press. 1991.