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From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’ II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate
By Joana Cook and Gina Vale

The Islamic State has lost its final territory in Syria, but the international community now faces an array of complex and difficult challenges, in particular those related to the up to 52,808 foreigners now recorded by the authors with the group including up to 6,902 foreign women and up to 6,577 foreign minors. Of unique concern are the minors born to parents in the ‘caliphate’ established by the Islamic State who represent up to 60 percent of total minors currently accounted for in countries with strong data on this issue. Returning home to varied state responses, up to eight percent of the up to 8,202 returnees are now recorded as women, and up to 20 percent minors. Thousands more remain in limbo in the region, however, and significant gaps in the data leave this picture incomplete.

In March 2019, the Islamic State lost the final territorial remnant of its ‘caliphate’ in Baghouz. Yet its demise has left the international community with a myriad of complex and difficult challenges, including how to deal with the many women and minors from across the globe recruited by, taken by, or born into the group. In July 2018, a dataset compiled by the authors revealed that of 80 countries beyond Syria and Iraq, women accounted for up to 13 percent (4,761)

a In this article, women are defined as adults aged 18 and above. See Joana Cook and Gina Vale, “From ‘Daesh to ‘Diaspora’: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State,” International Centre for the Study of Radicals, July 2018, p. 13 for further discussion.

b In this article, minors are defined as those 17 and below. Minors are further distinguished as teenagers (15-17), children (5-14), and infants (0-4). See ibid. for further discussion.

d The Islamic State actively recruited and utilized males under the age of 18. However, there are currently no clear figures of how many male minors were killed in battles against the Islamic State. Discussing the entire Islamic State foreign fighter population, Edmund Fitton-Brown, the Coordinator for the ISIL (Daesh)/Al-Qaeda/Taliban Monitoring Team at the United Nations, estimated an attrition rate of “over a quarter,” but acknowledged “nobody knows the true figures.” Paul Cruickshank, “A View from the CT Foxhole: Edmund Fitton-Brown, Coordinator, ISIL (Daesh)/Al-Qaeda/Taliban Monitoring Team, United Nations,” CTC Sentinel 12:4 (2019).

e Estimates that account for both foreign and local Islamic State followers killed have ranged from 25,000-70,000 and do not distinguish between men, women, and minors. A discussion on casualties on the battlefield is discussed at length in Cook and Vale, pp. 41-42.

Figures were unprecedented and the direct result of the territorial defeat, with the up to 52,808 foreigners now recorded by the authors revealed that of 80 countries beyond Syria and Iraq, women accounted for up to 13 percent (4,761) of the total 41,490 foreign persons who were recorded to have traveled to, or were born inside, Islamic State territory.

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These countries include Albania, Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, France, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden. All figures are in Table 1.

Second, a significant number of women remained with the Islamic State until its final stand in Baghouz and now require varied responses. Some are devout, battle-hardened members, while others may seek to leave this chapter of their life behind them. Third, due to the tens of thousands of adult males killed in counter-Islamic State and Islamic State operations, the proportion of women and minors present in the remaining Islamic State population in Syria and Iraq is higher than ever and therefore must be reflected in all responses to the group.

This article reexamines the status of Islamic State-affiliated women and minors, and the present challenges posed by these two distinct populations. Updating the authors’ dataset from July 2018, this article compiles the most recent figures for Islamic State-affiliated travelers, returnees, and detainees, and for the first time includes distinct figures for Islamic State-born infants. It considers how states have been responding to returnees and the long-term inter-generational concerns associated with these diverse populations, and it also provides considerations for international actors going forward.

Methodology
Obtaining precise figures for foreigners affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria remains a challenging task. The methodology for the original dataset in 2018 has been repeated. Figures

Dr. Joana Cook is a Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicals and an Adjunct Lecturer at Johns Hopkins University. She is the author of A Woman’s Place: US Counterterrorism Since 9/11.

Gina Vale is a Research Fellow at ICSR and Ph.D. candidate in War Studies at King’s College London.

The authors thank Alice Demillecamps for her research assistance and ICSR colleagues for their help with foreign language searches.

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These countries include Albania, Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, France, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden. All figures are in Table 1.
have been updated based on information released between July 2018 and July 2019, cross-referenced with the previous dataset, and where possible verified by regional experts. Several challenges remain. Many countries continue to not publish figures; others have only acknowledged ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ (FTFs) or do not distinguish women and minors. Others may not have the means to track the movement of all their citizens. Some states have increasingly released figures, while others’ data proves contradictory and diverse, which is reflected in the dataset, particularly seen in the ranges included.

Updated Global Figures

Two developments impact the issue of returnees: more countries have clarified figures for women and minors who became affiliated with the Islamic State, and there are an increasing number of recorded foreign Islamic State-born infants. This has raised not only the authors’ global estimates of all foreign Islamic State affiliated persons (men, women, and minors), including those now deceased to 44,279-52,808, but specifically women to 6,797-6,902 and minors to 6,173-6,577. Increasing numbers of women and minors have also returned to their countries of origin.

Returnees

A number of observations emerge. First is the important distinction between state-managed repatriation initiatives and independent return. Where governments control the flow and return of persons back to their country, they are better able to manage them, while those who return independently may be unmonitored or unacknowledged for. Second, the post-return realities of Islamic State affiliates vary by country. Some face immediate arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment. Others receive deradicalization and rehabilitation services or differing extents of physical, economic, or psycho-social support and return to normal life. Almost all, including women and minors, face social stigma for their time with the Islamic State.

Yet, many countries do not publicly acknowledge their citizens’ return. Women and minors may also be excluded or undistinguished in returnee figures or may return undetected. However, total confirmed returnees have increased in the authors’ updated dataset, albeit minimally since June 2018—from 7,145-7,366 to 7,712-8,202—with the greatest proportion found in the Southeast Asia region (up to 33 percent of those who traveled to, or were born within, the Islamic State) and Western Europe (28-29 percent).

Women

In 2018, only 256 women (five percent of total returnees) who had traveled to join the Islamic State had been recorded as returned to their country of departure. By July 2019, up to 609 women of those who traveled had been recorded as returned, comprising up to eight percent of all returnees, or nine percent of women who traveled. However, these figures may not accurately capture the true picture. Statements from the United Kingdom and European Union have suggested that women and minors have been returning more frequently than men over the past two years, even if these were not acknowledged or distinguished at the country level.

Media portrayals of Islamic State-affiliated women have generally oscillated between victims taken or duped by their husbands, naïve ‘jihadi brides,’ or active security concerns. Where framed in security terms, there appears to be less political will or public acceptance to return women. In contrast, where viewed more in terms of victimhood or naïveté, prospects for redemption and rehabilitation may appear more in public discourses.

Russia had been actively repatriating women up to November 2017, whereafter only minors were accepted due to women being perceived as security risks. Kazakhstan has taken a proactive approach, repatriating 137-139 women through its three-part ‘Operation Zhusan’ between January and May 2019. Upon arrival, women are isolated at a rehabilitation and reintegration center and face

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f The Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad acknowledged 970 “fighters” have returned from Syria and Iraq, Lindsey Snell, “The ISIS recruits that won’t be coming home,” Daily Beast, March 20, 2018.

g The United Kingdom has only acknowledged 40-50 percent have returned without distinguishing women and minors in these. Matthew Offord and Sajid Javid, “UK Nationals Returning from Syria – in the House of Commons,” theyworkforyou.com, February 18, 2019; Kim Sengupta, “War Against Isis: Security Services Bracing for Possible Return of Thousands of Jihadists as Group Loses Territory,” Independent, September 5, 2016.

h This article uses the word “affiliated” to account for the distinctions between both the roles of various persons within the group (not all of whom picked up arms), as well as the level of volition present in their joining the Islamic State. This is particularly true for minors who were forcibly taken by their parents, or infants born into the organization, who must now be addressed in comprehensive responses to the Islamic State.

i This figure of 44,279-52,808 comprises all foreign persons who between 2013 and June 2019 became affiliated with the Islamic State in its Levantine territory. A significant number of these persons were killed in Syria and Iraq so it does not represent actual figures for populations being responded to today.

j The United States has offered its assistance to any country willing to repatriate its citizens and has facilitated a number of returns, while others such as Kazakhstan have been active in independently repatriating hundreds of its citizens (though reportedly with U.S. mediation). “5 ISIS militants, families returned to Kazakhstan with US mediation: SDF,” Rudaw, January 7, 2019.

k The reasons for this are varied and may include security or intelligence motivations; political motivations driven by fear of public backlash; and privacy and safeguarding issues (particularly in the case of minors).

l The word “recorded” acknowledges that even when greater numbers of women have returned, these are not publicly acknowledged or distinguished in some cases.

m In the United Kingdom, women and minors have generally been noted to be returning, even though the authors’ table records only two women and four minors have been publicly recorded as returned. The United Kingdom’s 2018 CONTEST counterterrorism strategy noted, “The majority of those who have returned did so in the earlier stages of the conflict, and were investigated on their return. Only a very small number of travellers have returned in the last two years, and most of those have been women with young children.” The reason for not distinguishing these women and minors within total U.K. returnee figures is unclear. “CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism,” HM Government, June 2018, p. 18.

n In a January 2017 interview, Wil van Gemert, Deputy Director of Europol and Head of Operations, noted that “those recently fleeing back to Europe have mostly been women and children,” though he did not spell out how this was manifested country by country in the European Union. Paul Cruickshank, “A View from the CT Foxhole: Peter Edge, ICE Acting Deputy Director, and Wil van Gemert, Europol Deputy Director,” CTC Sentinel 10:1 (2017).

o The concern of female militancy is particularly acute in Russia where women have been active in Islamist militancy, including in the Chechnya context as the so-called ‘black widows’ who acted as suicide bombers. Ilya Arkhipov, “Putin Shows Rare Soft Spot to Rescue Russia’s ISIS Children,” Bloomberg, February 1, 2019.
questioning by security services. While many return home and continue to be monitored, at least five women have been charged with terrorism-related offenses. Indonesia, with 54 confirmed female returnees, has also managed a large-scale rehabilitation and reintegration program. At least one woman went on to attempt an explosive attack and now faces the death penalty. Here, reintegration at the community level has been specifically tailored to women, including economic empowerment programs. With such programming, public safety must remain a paramount concern. Adequate planning, resources, and gendered considerations must be integrated at every step, together with the active participation and support of community organizations and families. Yet, such tailored programs remain rare.

Some women have been prosecuted upon return, including British woman Tareena Shakil. 'Jennifer W.,' a 27-year-old German returnee, was charged with the murder of an enslaved Yazidi child, war crimes, membership in a foreign terror organization, and weapons violations. Sabine S. also became the first woman convicted in Germany of belonging to a foreign terrorist organization. Yet, this route remains challenging as the type of evidence obtained against men, such as recordings of their direct involvement in Islamic State activities, is more limited for women who rarely appeared in propaganda. However, women within the Islamic State may also have been privy to information that may help facilitate the prosecution of other members.

There has also been increased focus on the gender dimensions of criminal justice responses to counterterrorism and evidence that women may be arrested, charged, and sentenced differently (often more leniently) than men. Countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have opted to strip or deny citizenship, as demonstrated in the cases of Shamima Begum or Hoda Muthana, raising broader questions about rights and identity of first- and second-generation immigrants in these countries. Though many trajectories remain possible for Islamic State-affiliated women, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (as appropriate) remain the most feasible for their successful long-term monitoring.

Minors

By July 2018, 411,180 minors were recorded as confirmed and in-process returnees. A constant trend from 2018 is the international community’s prioritization of repatriation of minors. In total, 1,460-1,525 minors (22-25 percent) have now returned to their country of departure (or the country of their parents), representing up to 20 percent of total returnees. For some states, such as Tajikistan and Saudi Arabia, this is the result of proactive collaboration with local authorities to identify and return their underage nationals. Yet, these efforts are predominantly framed as ‘rescue’ missions to recover young children whose Islamic State affiliation was not through their own volition. This was epitomized by the reunion of a Trinidadian mother and her two sons, which was facilitated by Pink Floyd’s Roger Waters. This framing of the issue has put mounting pressure on hitherto unresponsive governments. For some, repatriation of the most vulnerable Islamic State-affiliated population can be presented as a politically acceptable concession. A salient example is Norway’s repatriation of five orphans, out of 40 minors in the conflict zone. This arguably creates a ‘hierarchy of victimhood,’ in which those seen to be most helpless and unthreatening are prioritized.

Despite increasing awareness and efforts to repatriate minors, national initiatives remain limited and ad-hoc. In February 2017, a French official stated approximately 700 French minors were in the conflict zone. It was boldly announced, “they will return to France, it is just a question of time.” France later tapered this, pledging to return only 150 minors, stipulating “the mothers of any repatriated children would be left in Syria.” Yet, by June 2019, only 107 minors had been confirmed as returned. In contrast, Kazakhstan has repatriated 357 minors in quick succession.

The repatriation of minors, particularly infants, also raises the issue of separation from their Islamic State-affiliated parent(s). Although Islamic State-affiliated parents have endangered their children through their travel to Islamic State territory, separation could also exacerbate trauma experienced by minors. Furthermore, blanket separation policies may prove harmful if custody is granted to other family members also holding extremist views. This reinforces the need to assess the parameters of repatriation and rehabilitative needs for minors on a case-by-case basis.

Despite momentum shifting toward repatriation and rehabilitation, some countries have adopted a security-first approach, adding additional barriers to minors’ return. In Australia, Islamic State-affiliated minors from age 14 can have their citizenship revoked under recent legislation. This also applies to children of ‘suspected terrorists.’ Denmark introduced legislation that refuses the automatic assignment of citizenship to infants born to Islamic State-affiliated parents—the result of increasing public fears of the security threat that minors may pose upon return. Some officials have also (unhelpfully) referred to these children as a “ticking time bomb.” It is important that countries acknowledge and address minors’ indoctrination through the Islamic State’s education and training programs. However, approaches that generalize, secularize, and further victimize minors—instead of addressing their developmental needs—will compromise the effectiveness and sustainability of rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives.

Detainees

Another critical issue is the predicament of thousands of foreign Islamic State affiliates imprisoned in Iraq and detained by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria of which foreign women account-

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*p As women’s roles were primarily prescribed in the domestic sphere, offenses were more likely to have occurred in the home with local or enslaved women, making such evidence even harder to attain.

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q It was noted that of the 700, half are under the age of five and a third were born inside Islamic State territory. “700 mineurs français vont rentrer de Syrie [700 French Minors Will Return from Syria],” Figaro, February 2, 2017.

r Ninety-five minors were repatriated up until April 2019, with a further 12 repatriated in June 2019. Paule Gonzalès, “95 enfants de djihadistes rentrés en France depuis 2015 [95 French Children of Jihadists Returned to France Since 2015],” Figaro, April 1, 2019; “Syrian Kurds transfer 12 orphans from jihadist families to France for repatriation,” France 24, June 10, 2019.
ed for up to 5,350 and foreign minors 8,580.\textsuperscript{t} Iraq has tried thousands of persons in controversial court proceedings,\textsuperscript{v} and indefinite SDF-detention in Syria is unlikely. Several considerations pertinent to women and minors detained in the region have become visible.\textsuperscript{w}

**Women**

In Iraq in 2018 alone, 616 foreigners were tried and convicted of Islamic State membership, receiving varied sentences of up to life in prison, or even the death penalty. A staggering 466 of these were women, 108 of these minors, and only 42 of these men, and it was noted that “most of the women sentenced for ISIS links were from Turkey and republics of the former Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{x} For those who did receive the death sentence, these have not yet been carried out. For countries that oppose capital punishment, there are reports that Iraq has been willing to commute these sentences, for a price.\textsuperscript{y} However, serious concerns over flawed and swift trials and human rights violations in detention remain.\textsuperscript{z} If paid, Iraq has also offered to receive, try, and hold thousands of foreigners currently in SDF custody, including women, only compounding these concerns.\textsuperscript{aa}

Women currently in SDF custody face similar potential trajectories as men. These were well outlined recently by Brian Michael Jenkins in this publicaiton, who identified eight local and multilateral options for dealing with these detainees.\textsuperscript{ab} Yet, the proportion of women makes these options more complex and demands gendered considerations at every step. Of the three major SDF-administered refugee and internment camps in northeast Syria out of its total population, al-Hol alone hosts 12,000 Islamic State-affiliated foreigners—4,000 are women and 8,000 are minors. In contrast, SDF forces are holding only 1,000 men deemed ‘fighters’ across its prisons.\textsuperscript{ac} These persons do not have access to fair trial and cannot be held indefinitely—an important pillar of international law and another reason to repatriate citizens.\textsuperscript{ad}

For women currently detained in the region, there is a challenge of identifying persons in custody. Upon arrival in Iraq and Syria, many foreigners destroyed or surrendered their identification and may seek to conceal their identity.\textsuperscript{ae} “There is also a lack of deradicalization and rehabilitative services available while detained or upon release, highlighting long-term hurdles for reintegartion. While many detention facilities, particularly in Europe, have segregated areas for those convicted of terrorism offenses, such units do not (as far as the authors are aware) exist in Iraq for women, meaning that women who still adhere to the Islamic State’s ideology may radicalize others or their children.\textsuperscript{af} While SDF camps have segregated annexes for foreign women and minors suspected of being associated with the Islamic State, the same concern related to their children remains.\textsuperscript{ag} The potential for inter-generational radicalization has already been highlighted as a long-term strategic concern by senior officials.\textsuperscript{ah}

**Minors**

Despite more promising rates of repatriation and return for Islamic State-affiliated minors, thousands languish in limbo within prisons, camps, and detention centers in Iraq and Syria. According to a Reuters report in March 2019, an estimated “1,100 children of Islamic State are caught in the wheels of Iraqi justice.”\textsuperscript{ai} For the youngest, detention in Iraqi government facilities is the direct result of their parents’ Islamic State affiliation and conviction for terrorism offeneses.\textsuperscript{aj} Foreign infants and toddlers are now being raised in crowded and unsanitary cells.\textsuperscript{ak} Two hundred foreign infants have reportedly been born inside one Baghdad prison alone.\textsuperscript{al} Before the decision was taken to separate and repatriate only the children,\textsuperscript{am} seven minors have perished in the poor conditions.\textsuperscript{an} Recently, mothers from countries such as Tajikistan have refused permission for their children to be repatriated without them, resulting in 17 Tajik minors remaining in Iraqi prisons.\textsuperscript{ao}

In line with the national minimum age of criminal responsibility, Iraqi authorities deem children from the age of nine to be legally accountable for their involvement in the Islamic State.\textsuperscript{ap} This contravenes international standards, which stipulate that children recruited to non-state armed groups are “primarily victims who should be provided with assistance for their rehabilitation and reintegration.”\textsuperscript{aq} Charges and prosecutions range from illegal entrance into Iraq to fighting for the Islamic State, and 108 foreign boys and 77 foreign girls have received sentences from a few months to up to 15 years in juvenile detention.\textsuperscript{ar} Of even greater concern are reports of arbitrary arrest, forced confessions, and torture of juvenile Islamic State suspects in Iraqi and Kurdish custody.\textsuperscript{as} Such actions can be harmful and counterproductive, and may create further barriers for minors to reintegrate into society upon release, psychologically and physically alienating individuals branded as ‘Islamic State-sup-

\textsuperscript{s} It should be noted here that there is a disconnect between this figure and the authors’ dataset, which only shows a number of foreign minors affiliated with the Islamic State up to 6,577. The significant number of countries that still do not publicly record disaggregated data for minors reinforces that the figure in the authors’ dataset continues to be an understimation. Iraq: 1,350 women and 580 minors. Syria: 4,000 women and 8,000 minors. Margaret Coker and Falih Hassan, “A 10-Minute Trial, a Death Sentence: Iraqi Justice for ISIS Suspects,” New York Times, April 17, 2018; Ben Hubbard, “In a Crowded Syria Tent Camp, the Women and Children of ISIS Wait in Limbo,” New York Times, March 29, 2019; Quentin Sommerville, “There are 12,000 foreigners in Kurdish custody. 4000 women- 8000 kids. Men, 1000+ From more than 50 countries. That’s not including Iraqis and Syrians,” Twitter, April 12, 2019.

\textsuperscript{t} In the case of 11 French citizens, the Iraqi government reportedly requested $1 million per person to commute their death sentences to life in prison. It is not clear if these citizens included women or if women will be treated differently in such cases. David Chazan, “Iraq offers to commute death sentences of French Isis members for ‘millions of euros,” Telegraph, June 2, 2019.

\textsuperscript{u} Reasons for concealment of identity may include avoiding authorities if the individual has committed a crime or if they do not wish to return home and hope to stay in the region. Thanks to Petra Ramsauer for highlighting this last point.

\textsuperscript{v} Such a scenario is reminiscent of Camp Bucca, where the forging of relationships and the hardening of ideological convictions preceded the rise of the Islamic State.

\textsuperscript{w} In contrast to Iraq, women or minors have not been charged or tried in SDF-held territory. OCHA, “Syria: Humanitarian response in al-Hol camp,” Situation Report No. 5, July 5, 2019.

\textsuperscript{x} Major General Alexus Grynkiewich, deputy commander of Operation Inherent Resolve who oversees joint and coalition operations, recently stated the potential for radicalization in these camps is “the biggest long-term strategic risk” outside of active military operations in efforts to counter the Islamic State. Richard Hal, “’Hardcore’ Isis ideologues held in Syrian camps represent long-term risk, warns US-led coalition,” Independent, July 3, 2019.

Minors face even greater uncertainty and insecurity in SDF-controlled camps. Al-Hol currently holds 73,000 foreign and local Islamic State ‘family members;’ 49,000 are minors, of which 95 percent are under the age of 12. Many sustained injuries prior to accessing these camps and have since contracted diseases and suffer from severe malnutrition, with more than 300 children dying in the first weeks after they departed Baghouz. This concern is further compounded by the scarcity of resources divided among residents that far exceed the camp’s maximum capacity. Approximately 8,000 of these are foreign children either born into or relocated to Islamic State territory with their parents, several hundred of whom are now separated or orphaned. For Islamic State-born infants, undocumented status and legal statelessness can restrict access to short-term benefits and aid inside camps, as well as long-term employment opportunities and permanent residency upon release.

The continued security-first approach to Islamic State-affiliated minors has led to few state-level repatriations, leaving thousands in limbo or at the mercy of rapid judicial processes. While recognizing the complex legal and logistical issues involved in repatriation, such lags in response appear to neglect minors’ welfare and development. This risks further alienation and stigmatization, deepening their ‘Islamic State-affiliate’ identity and fueling similar grievances that provided fertile soil for the Islamic State’s rise.

**Conclusion**

Over the last year, modest but important progress has been made to address issues resulting from the Islamic State’s territorial collapse. The need to recognize, record, and assess the status of women and minors in relation to political violence at every step is clear. It enables nuanced analysis of the demographic of the Islamic State, and the strategies, tactics, and objectives it engages, while informing responses to other groups who pursue state-building.

Returnee figures recorded for women since July 2018 have almost tripled, and the plight of minors and infants has captured international attention. The disaggregated figures for women and minors in this dataset demonstrate the need to act in accordance with their status as interrelated, though distinct populations, with the flexibility and nuance to respond to each case in turn.

For women, it is critical to assess the varying levels of individual agency based on their unique circumstances of joining, the plurality of their roles in the group, and possible continued support for, or disavowment of, the group. Assessments should take into account the risk that some women may pose, both in security terms and the possibility of radicalizing others. Action must also be taken in accordance with legal norms and with respect of human rights, including access to fair trials and gender-conscious rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Stripping citizenship of adults has potentially adverse implications. Such policies foster societal tensions and alienation born from a ‘hierarchy’ of citizenship and risk pushing these individuals to countries who may not be willing or adequately equipped to manage them.

For minors, stripping or denying citizenship is even more problematic. This creates barriers to access benefits, rights, and services that are needed to facilitate true reintegration into society. Fortunately, repatriation and rehabilitation of minors is a more common point of agreement and concession, yet still appears to prioritize specific groups, such as infants or orphans. Minors should have their rights and development put first, and initiatives that address healthcare, education, and psychosocial support should be prioritized. A rehabilitation-first approach responds to individual needs, provides an effective counterpoint to the Islamic State’s indoctrination, and offers a new ‘non-Islamic State’ identity on which to build a future.

Justice and recovery for the victims of the Islamic State, as well as prevention of future instability and conflict in the region, is paramount, but it is jeopardized by states’ inaction or hesitancy to manage their citizens. This is an inter-generational challenge, one that requires a nuanced and long-term approach. A transparent and rights-based process will provide justice for both Islamic State members and their victims, as well as demonstrate the values of the international community in contrast with the Islamic State. This, however, is the long game. It requires courage to overcome the temptation of vengeance; flexibility and collaboration to work across national jurisdictions; and patience to implement tailored and sustainable solutions.

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*The authors’ 2018 dataset records less than 8,000 minors, excluding those already returned. This demonstrates that not adequately and publicly acknowledging women and minors can produce consequences such as underestimations, which may limit preparation and response for such significant populations.*

*This is exemplified by some states’ public acknowledgment of “losing track” of their Islamic State-affiliated citizens. “Germany loses track of 160 ‘Islamic State’ supporters,” Deutsche Welle, June 23, 2019.*
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<th>Country</th>
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**Central Asia**

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**Western Europe**

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**South-Eastern Asia**

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**Notes:**
- ICR: International Classification of Radiological Findings
- CTC SENTINEL: CTC Sentinel
- JULY 2019

---

**Cook / Vale**
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<th>Singapore</th>
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<th>Sub-Saharan Africa</th>
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<table>
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<th>Sub-Saharan Africa</th>
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**Women and minors as % of total**

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**Global Totals**

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<td>7-8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>As a proportion of returned women and minors</td>
<td>22-25% of minors that were in theater have returned</td>
<td>9% of women that were in theater have returned</td>
<td>15-19% of all persons that were in theater have returned</td>
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*ICR refers to “individual cases recorded.” ICRs are not comprehensive and offer little numerical value to the dataset, but they do indicate that indeed women and minors were departing from, or returning to, these countries, prompting the need for further examination.*

---

**Citations**

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. For an expansive methodology, see Ibid., pp. 11-13.
5. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. This gendered dimension of rehabilitation and reintegration has been examined at length in Sanam Naraghi Anderlini and Melinda Holmes, “Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism,” International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and UNDP, 2019.
23. “[A film about Kazakhstanis returning from Syria published by the National Security Committee],” Tengrinews, June 8, 2019.
26. Ibid.
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State Territory,” ICSR, July 2018.


31 These are also expanded on in Cook and Vale, pp. 48-49.

32 “Iraq sentenced 616 foreigners for ISIS links in 2018.”


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39 Ibid.

40 Bel Trew, “‘Human timebomb’: 45,000 children may soon become stateless in post-Isis Iraq, warns rights group;” Independent, April 30, 2019.


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44 “State party reports: Iraq,” UNICEF.

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48 One thousand Libyans have reportedly returned; however, that figure is from an unknown source. “Spain fears potential return to Morocco of 1,500 jihadists from Syria;” BBC Monitoring, January 14, 2015.


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55 For a more expansive analysis of statelessness resulting from Islamic State-registered births, see Cook and Vale, pp. 52-53.


58 “[Flown By the United States… Algeria Receives Daeshis from Syria];” Deutsche Welle Arabic, March 24, 2019.

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61 Husain Marhoon, “ISIS Are Among Us: From Long-Lasting Denial to Confessing; ‘We Have 100 Fighters,’” Bahrain Mirror, November 30, 2014.


63 “Private: 3 Egyptian brothers”; Hubbard, “Story of Former Turkish Militant.”


65 “Counterterrorism Digest: 17-18 December 2014,” BBC Monitoring, December 18, 2014. *All 600 were arrested on return to Egypt from Syria. While both 600 persons who traveled and returned are reliable figures, it is unlikely that every Egyptian who traveled to Syria has returned and been arrested.

66 “Four Years of Jail for Arab-Israeli who Joined Islamic State;” Jerusalem Post, March 21, 2017. One infant was confirmed taken, though another three children were suspected of travel to Syria with their family. See Jack Khoury, “Israeli Arab Family of 5 Suspected of Joining ISIS,” Haaretz, June 22, 2019.

67 “Four Years of Jail;” Khoury; Anna Ahronheim, “19 Israelis to Have Citizenship Revoked for Fighting with ISIS;” Jerusalem Post, August 22, 2017.


70 Ibid.

71 Ahronheim, “19 Israelis to Have Citizenship Revoked.”


73 “Iran Jails 16 Women.”

74 Ibid.


76 “Iran Jails 16 Women.”

77 ibid.

78 ibid.


80 McKernan.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.; Youssef Diab, “[A Daesh’ Mechanic Failed to Immigrate to Canada So Chose to Live in Raqqa];” Shagq al-Awsat, November 11, 2018.


84 One thousand Libyans have reportedly returned; however, that figure is from an unknown source. “Spain fears potential return to Morocco of 1,500 jihadists from Syria;” BBC Monitoring, January 14, 2015.


86 Ibid.


90 Ibid.

91 In addition to the eight Moroccan returnees from Syria (Ibid.), Director of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) Abdelhak El Khayam noted in 2017 that 300 Moroccans had already returned. Martin Chulov, “Moroccan Isis Terrorists ‘Pose a Threat on Europe’s Doorstep;’” Guardian, August 20, 2017.

92 “Forty-six Saudi Women Have Joined ISIS Since 2011, MOI Says;” Al Arabiya, September 3, 2015. There have been further reports of a total of 95 women (40 of which were noted under age 16) who traveled to Iraq and Syria who have not been publicly verified and could not be included in the final figures of this article.


95 Seven hundred and sixty returnees in 2017. See Barrett, Beyond the Caliphate, p. 13. This is in addition to two minor returnees in 2019. “Saud children abducted by their ISIS father rescued. NB: Adel al-Jubeir, a senior Saudi official said his government was also “willing to repatriate some 50 Saudi men held in the Kurdish camps.” Charlie Savage and Eric


97 This figure includes travel to all theaters. Those who joined the organization, ‘Daash,’ outside the country does not exceed 340 people. The Minister of Interior complains about the growing foreign presence in the country, As-Sayha, July 14, 2016.


99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.; "70 Sudanese Joined IS: Interior Minister.

101 "456 children who previously lived with Turkish parents accused of being members of IS": Ayse Karabat, "Hundreds of children of IS members jailed in Iraq set to return to Turkey," Middle East Eye, December 14, 2018. This is in addition to a further 20 Turkish children of IS fighters previously returned. See Ece Doksefè, "Lost youth: Scarred children of Turkish Islamic State fighters return home," Middle East Eye, November 30, 2018.


103 These figures only comprise minors currently detained in Iraq and are believed to be a significant understimation. Ahmet S. Yaya, "Turkish ISIS and Foreign Fighters: Reconciling the Numbers and Perception of the Terrorism Threat," Studies in Conflict and Terrorism (2019); p. 4.

104 5,000 – 7,000 men, and 2,000 women. (See Yaya, p. 6.) 456 minors.

105 Ibid. Further reports have suggested in addition to men, family members (women and minors) comprise an additional 40% of total figures. See Yaya, p. 4.

106 This figure is calculated from 20 minors having returned by November 2018. (See Ibid.) This is in addition to 188 and 35 minor returnees. "[The Judge Decides the Fate of More than 1,000 Foreign ‘Daesh’ Children]." Republic of Iraq, June 2, 2019.

107 The figure of 900 returnees was published in error in the authors’ previous Daesh to Diaspora report; the only publicly acknowledged Turkish returnees are the minors listed in the above endnote.


113 El-Ghobashy.


117 Ibid.


120 144: Azinovic and Becirevic, p. 22. 13 born there: Mejdini.

121 150: Xharra. 13 born there: Mejdini.

122 120: Azinovic, Between Salvation and Terror, p. 10.


125 “The Judge Decides the Fate.”

126 This figure only accounts for women captured by Iraqi forces. Vian Dakhil, “512 #Russian and 200 #Azerbaijani women as #ISIS members were captured and incarcerated by #Iraqi forces,” Twitter, November 8, 2017.


128 “The Judge Decides the Fate.”


130 “The Judge Decides the Fate.”

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 80 taken, 150 infants born: Dario Sito-Sucic, “Bosnia will take back and try two captured Islamic state fighters,” Reuters, March 11, 2019.

134 Ibid.


136 230 minors: Sito-Sucic; 270 adults: Muslimovic.

137 Sito-Sucic.


139 Azinovic, Between Salvation and Terror, p. 10.


142 Ibid. Though these seven have Croatian citizenship, none of them has lived in Croatia.

143 "Women from Georgia’s Azeri community travelling to join Syria jihad, experts say," Rezonansi, May 19, 2015, accessed on BBC Monitoring.

144 Khativa Hasaya, "Why do women of Georgia go to ISIS?" Coba, January 29, 2019.


147 12:17: “Experts divided on danger of Jihadists’ return to Georgia," Rezonansi, February 26, 2018, accessed via BBC Monitoring. This article disputed claims that as many as 50 Georgians had returned. 3: Hasaya, “Why do women of Georgia go to ISIS?"


149 Ibid.

150 Fifty-five have “travelled or been caught en route.” "UN Urges Kosovo to Stop Citizens from Joining Terror Groups," U.S. News, December 5, 2017.


153 32: Zivanovic. 7: Hasaya, "Kosovo Women that Joined ISIS."

154 133: Hasaya, "Kosovo Women that Joined ISIS:" Zivanovic.

155 "Pair of Syrian Muslims may have joined ISIS in Syria," Latviais Sabiens Medijis, June 10, 2015.

156 Mejdini.

157 Azinovic and Becirevic, p. 35.


159 Azinovic, Between Salvation and Terror, p. 10.

160 Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment, p. 9.

161 Azinovic and Becirevic, p. 22.

162 Ibid., p. 41.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid.
Sixty-three Kazakh minors were repatriated in December 2017. See Alexander Bogatik, “Children of killed militants in Syria set to return to Kazakhstan: This was followed by a further 30 minor returnees in Phase I of Operation Zhusan. “In January 2019. See “ISIS militants, families returned to Kazakhstan with US mediation. In Phase II of the operation, a further 75 adults returned. See “Kazakhstan continues operation to repatriate citizens:” After these repatriations, 380 Kazakh adults remained in theater. See Ibid.

Eleven women returned in Phase I of Operation Zhusan in January 2019. See “5 ISIS militants, families returned to Kazakhstan with US mediation.” A further 61 women were repatriated on May 7-9, 2019, in Phase II of the operation. See “Kazakhstan receives 231 citizens from The Administration of northeast Syria,” North Press Agency Syria, May 9, 2019. A further 67 women were repatriated in Phase III of the operation on May 27-31, 2019. See Karin.

The figure compiled from the 420 minor returnees calculated in endnote 193, in addition to 174 adults. Fifteen Kazakh adults already returned in 2015. See “National Security Committee told how many Kazakhstani militants are fighting abroad:” Seventeen adults returned in Phase I of Operation Zhusan in January 2019. See “5 ISIS militants, families returned to Kazakhstan with US mediation.” A further 75 adults were repatriated on May 7-9, 2019, in Phase II of the operation. “Kazakhstan continues operation to repatriate citizens:” A further 67 women (no men) were repatriated in Phase III of the operation on May 27-31, 2019. See Karin.


Ibid. This figure references travelers between 2010-2016, suggesting that some of these individuals may not have traveled to join extremist groups, though the specific proportion is unclear.


Ibid. This figure may not account for the additional 19 families that were stated to have already returned. However, specific figures for women in this figure for families were not available, suggesting more women were present than 279.


“The Judge Decides the Fate:” “Iraqi Authorities Reportedly Holding Wives and Children.”

“About 100 Children to Return from Iraq to Tajikistan,” Qazaq Times, January 10, 2019; “Iraqi Authorities Reportedly Holding Wives and Children.”

“Iraqi Authorities Reportedly Holding Wives and Children.”

187 returnees 2016: Urat Botobekov, “Is Central Asia Ready to Face ISIS?” Diplomat. July 8, 2016. This is in addition to 90-100 minors reported in 2019. See “About 200 children from Iraq to Tajikistan:” “The Judge Decides the Fate:” NB: The figure of 163 returning Tajik “members of banned groups” is not used as it does not stipulate Islamic State-only returnees. See “Over 160 Tajik ‘extremists’ returned home in nine months.”


246 Gustafsson and Ranstorp, p. 59.
247 "700 French Minors Will Return."
248 States 300 women remain in theater as of October 2017. Pascal Ceaux, Jérémie Pham-Lê, and Boris Thiolay, "We have foiled 32 attacks during the state of emergency," L’Express, October 31, 2017.
249 This figure is derived from 20% of 1,910 total fighters. Gustafsson and Ranstorp, p. 61.
254 398 French nationals have returned from ‘jihadi hotspots.’ It is not clear if these are exclusively from Iraq and Syria. It is not believed that minors are included in the figure of 398 and may be in addition to this. See “In Numbers: French, Jihadist Fighters and Their Kids in Iraq and Syria,” France 24, October 11, 2017. 12 orphans returned: “Syrian Kurds transfer 12 orphans from jihadist families to France for repatriation;” France 24, June 10, 2019.
255 This figure includes both children who were taken and born in theater. Andrea Shalal and Sabine Stiebold, “Brainwashed” Children of Islamist Fighters Worry Germany – Spy Chief, "Reuters, January 31, 2018.
256 The Federal Interior Ministry has noted that 270 women and minors who traveled from Germany and infants born there to German parent(s) are still in the region. Of this, “75% of the children are under the age of three.” Given the timeline of Islamic State control, it is assumed that minors under the age of three were born in Syria or Iraq. However, figures for minors still in theater were not distinguished from women, and an accurate calculation for Islamic State-born infants was not possible. "Ethische Klein- kinder deutscher Dschihadisten noch in Kriegsgebieten [Several toddlers of German jihadists still in war zones],” Spiegel Online, June 28, 2019.
257 BKA, BfV, and HKE, Analysis of the background and process of radicalization among persons who left Germany to travel to Syria or Iraq based on Islamist motivations (Wiesbaden: Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) and Hesse Information and Competence Centre Against Extremism (HKE), October 2016), p. 11.
259 13 children: "Two Islamic State Wives Return to Germany With Their Children,” Deutsche Welle, April 27, 2018. 3 children: Florian Flade, "Network of radical sisters,” Die Welt, July 20, 2018, accessed via BBC Monitoring. 3 children: "[Germany returns the first batch of ‘Daesh’ children from Iraq]," Deutsche Welle, April 5, 2019. In the authors’ 2018 dataset, they cited an article that noted “the federal Government expects more than 100 Underage dependents of ISIS members to return to Germany from these zones.” However, this has not materialized since 2018, and the authors have adjusted their figures accordingly. Manuel Bewarder and Florian Flade, "Fear of the children of Jihad,” Die Welt, January 8, 2018, accessed via BBC Monitoring.
261 347: 1,050 travelled to the Middle East to join ‘terrorist groups’ after 2013. About one-third have returned. “Germany loses track of 160 ‘Islamic State’ supporters,” Deutsche Welle, June 23, 2019. 10: “Germany returns the first batch.”

264 1 minor: Reynolds. 1: Though it is not confirmed in this story, it is highly likely that this is Lisa Smith. “Govt to try to ‘find a way’ to bring woman home from Syria – Coveney,” RTE, March 25, 2019.

265 O Cionnnaith.

266 Ryan Price, “Gardai concerned at risk of ‘lone wolf’ terror attack as boltholes are proposed for public areas,” Irish Post, May 16, 2019.


268 1 expected: Ibid.


270 Twenty-three have returned to Europe, but only 11 have returned to Italy. Stefano Vespa, “Chi Sono I Foreign Fighter in Italia. La Mappa nell’analisi di Stefano Vespa,” Fardimче, January 2, 2018.

271 Of these 138, only 25 are noted as “Italian nationals or naturalized Italians.” Grazia Longo, “Italy prosecutor wants foreign fighters tried in own countries,” Stampa, February 19, 2019, accessed via BBC Monitoring.

272 1 expected: Ibid.

273 2 expected: Ibid.

274 Marone and Vidino, p. 24.

275 The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon, p. 46.


277 “There are at least 175 minors with ties to the Netherlands presently in Syria and Iraq. Less than a third was taken there by one or both patents, and over two thirds was born there. This means that more than half of these minors is under 4 years old. The male-female ratio is about equal. The majority of these children was with ISIS.” See Annual Report 2017, pp. 14-15.

278 “Factbox – Europeans who joined Islamic State.”


281 Focus on Returnees, General Intelligence and Security Service, p. 2.


284 0 minors: The article notes that “about 40 children with Norwegian affiliation were born in areas controlled by the Islamists. A few of the children were taken from Norway.”

285 Correspondence with Trond Hugubakken, Head of Information, Norwegian Police Security Service, July 2018. The authors thank Åsne Seierstad for her assistance with these figures.

286 Hultgreen.

287 “Norway takes steps to repatriate 5 children born into ISIS family,” Rudaw, June 3, 2019.

288 40: correspondence with Trond Hugubakken, Head of Information, Norwegian Police Security Service, July 2018. The authors thank Åsne Seierstad for her assistance with these figures. The authors confirmed 40 persons have now returned to Norway, 20 have been killed, and 40 are unaccounted for, 5: “Norway takes steps to repatriate 5 children.”


290 Ibid.

291 Ibid.

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.

295 Ibid.


297 Sarah Dean, “Spanish ISIS widows are arrested while trying to return to Europe from Syria after their barbaric husbands were killed,” Mail Online, December 29, 2016.

298 Garcia-Calvo.
moved from Syria, set to return to Australia,” ABC News, June 23, 2019. 1 minor: Sam Duncan, “Wife and three-year-old child of ‘hardcore’ ISIS terrorist have returned to Australia after the jihadist was killed while fighting in the Middle East in 2016,” Mail Online, February 22, 2019. 358 Duncan. 359 Of these 40, some predate the rise of the Islamic State. Peter Dutton, “Address to the 2017 Victoria Police and LineCT International Counter Terrorism Forum, Melbourne,” Minister for Home Affairs, December 11, 2017. 8 minors: From the article, “Children of ISIS terrorist Khaled Sharrouf removed from Syria, set to return to Australia.”}

360 **Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment.** p. 8.

361 Catherine Solyom, “Would-be terrorists back in Quebec under RCMP watch after leaving for Syria eight months ago,” National Post, August 6, 2015; Alexandra Bain, “@FAVE.Canada represents the families of 33 Canadians being held in the prisons and detention camps of northern Syria. 4 men are in prison; 7 women and 14 children are being in Al Hol; 3 women and 5 children in Camp Roj, FAVE also represents the families of 4 Canadian women and 5 children who are missing in Iraq and whose whereabouts are still unknown.” Twitter, July 2, 2019.

362 Alexandra Bain, “18 out of 24 children were born in Syria or Iraq. These infants and children are all under 5 years of age,” Twitter, July 3, 2019.

363 Approximately half of 180 travelers are estimated to be in Iraq and Syria, 20% of which are women. 2016 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada (Ottawa: Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, 2016), pp. 7 and 16.

364 18 born there: Bain, “@FAVE.Canada represents the families,” 90-100 traveled there: Approximately half of 180 travelers are estimated to be in Iraq and Syria, 20% of which are women. 2016 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat, pp. 7 and 16.


366 Ibid.

367 Diane Francis, “All of Canada under threat for Liberals’ refusal to uphold law concerning returning ISIL fighters,” Financial Post, March 18, 2019. Figures of 60-75 returnees have been acknowledged by the former head of CSIS, Richard Fadden, but include those from all conflict zones. Dougla Quan, “Canada’s ability to monitor returning foreign fighters is ‘on the margins,’ ex-CSIS chief says,” National Post, April 2, 2019.


369 This figure is derived from the statement that the total number of women that traveled was “less than a dozen,” thus 11. “Q&A: Why do young, educated women want to be jihadi brides?” New Zealand Herald, December 9, 2015.


372 Ibid.


374 Correspondence with Dr. Simon Cottee, University of Kent based on re search featured in forthcoming book, Jihadists in the Caribbean, June 12, 2019.


376 Bonn.

377 Cottee, “The calypso caliphate.”

378 The total number of minors born or born to American women in Iraq and Syria is unknown. Fourteen is the number that have been confirmed as returned. Two additional children were born upon their mother’s return to the United States. Correspondence with Seamus Hughes and Bennett Clifford, George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2019. For continuously updated U.S. figures, see Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Seamus Hughes, and Bennett Clifford, The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq (Washington D.C.: George Washing ton University Program on Extremism, last accessed June 29, 2019).
Footnote 98 in this source states, “Of the aspiring U.S. foreign fighters in our sample, nine (15 per cent) were women. If applied to the 250-plus estimate of total Americans who have traveled or attempted to travel, you get a prediction of around 38 females;” Final Report of the Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel, U.S. House of Representatives, Homeland Security Committee, 2015, p. 16.

Figure based on most recent FBI estimate of those traveled/attempted to travel of 300 minus 28 individuals prevented from travel (see Ibid., p. 15): Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, The Travelers.

Ibid.


One hundred and twenty citizens have been noted to have returned to Afghanistan. However, it is not clear that these persons originally departed from Afghanistan, and these figures may represent other nationals that have departed Syria and Iraq and traveled to Afghanistan. “Eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2255 (2015) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2017/409; United Nations Security Council, May 25, 2017, p. 14.

“BD family disappears as members missing;” Asian Age, July 19, 2016.

Ibid.


390 “About 100 People from Kerala Joined ISIS Over the Years: Police;” India Today, November 11, 2017; “Six More Youngsters from Kannur Have Joined ISIS in Syria: Kerala Police;” DNA India, last updated November 2, 2017; Bharti Jain, “150 Indians Under Lens for Following ISIS Propaganda;” Times of India, November 19, 2015. T. A. Johnson, “IS Arrests: ‘Support Went Beyond Online;” Indian Express, February 8, 2016; VR Jayaraj, “ISIS Links, Three Arrested in Kannur;” Pioneer, October 26, 2017. The three mentioned in the above article may have traveled to Afghanistan, hence the range. Additionally, the definition of ‘child’ in this case is unclear, as both youth and minors are referred to in this figure.


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394 Zeeshan Sheikh, “3 Techies and a Dropout, Lured Together from Kalyan;” Indian Express, September 1, 2015.

395 Dhruba Jaishankar and Sara Perlangeli, “Assessing the Islamic State Threat to India: It is a Serious but Manageable Challenge;” Times of India, May 6, 2017; Rath.

While this article cites 11 returnees, it is not clear whether they are all returning from Syria and Iraq. Gupta.


397 “Govt. to verify list naming Maldivians in Syria;” Greg Bearman, “Maldives: Islamist terror could sink Indian Ocean paradise;” Australian, August 30, 2016.


399 “Increase in Maldivians Heading to Syria;” Maldives Independent, January 15, 2018.

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402 Ibid.; Imad Soomro, “Missing Girl Student Has Joined Daesh, Claim Police;” News Pakistan, March 18, 2017. These cases were confirmed by the police as missing and assumed to be with the Islamic State in Syria.


405 Ibid.


409 Ibid.


411 This figure includes travelers to Libya as well. “ISIS Makes Inroads into Kenya;” News 24, June 30, 2016.

412 Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment, p. 8.


414 Ibid.

415 El-Ghobashy.

416 “South Africans held in Syria went there to join Isis;” CapeTalk, March 14, 2019.

417 Ibid.

418 Ibid.


421 Ibid.

422 Ibid. Other estimates have stated 80-100 South Africans have returned from “ISIS camps;” but these were not verified and it is unclear whether this figure also includes returnees from other Islamic State-held territories. Tom Head, “Terror Threat In SA Debated as 100 South Africans Return Home From Isis Camps;” South African, December 3, 2018.