



COUNTERTERRORISM YEARBOOK 2018

Edited by Isaac Kfir, Sofia Patel and Micah Batt

© The Australian Strategic Policy Institute Limited 2018

This publication is subject to copyright. Except as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part of it may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise) be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publishers. Notwithstanding the above, Educational Institutions (including Schools, Independent Colleges, Universities, and TAFEs) are granted permission to make copies of copyrighted works strictly for educational purposes without explicit permission from ASPI and free of charge.

First published March 2018

Published in Australia by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

ASPI

Level 2,
40 Macquarie Street
Barton ACT 2600
Australia

Tel + 61 2 6270 5100
Fax + 61 2 6273 9566
enquiries@aspi.org.au
www.aspi.org.au
www.aspistrategist.org.au
 [Facebook/ASPI.org](https://www.facebook.com/ASPI.org)
 [@ASPI_org](https://twitter.com/ASPI_org)

Contents

PREFACE	04
The Hon Peter Dutton MP	
INTRODUCTION	06
Isaac Kfir, Sofia Patel and Micah Batt	
AUSTRALIA	09
Jacinta Carroll	
SOUTHEAST ASIA	21
Greg Raymond	
PHILIPPINES	31
Greg Fealy	
SOUTH ASIA	37
Ayesha Siddiq	
AFGHANISTAN	51
Leah Farrall	
MIDDLE EAST: THE GULF TO THE LEVANT	59
Lydia Khalil	
IRAQ AND SYRIA	69
Isaac Kfir	
FIGHTING VIOLENT EXTREMISTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: OBSERVATIONS FROM IRAQ	75
Major General Roger Noble DSC AM CSC, Australian Army	
NORTH AFRICA	81
Sofia Patel	
WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL	101
Virginia Comolli	
EAST AFRICA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA	111
Ken Menkhaus	
TURKEY	117
Isaac Kfir	
RUSSIA	123
Elena Pokalova	
WESTERN EUROPE	129
Thomas Renard	
UNITED KINGDOM	141
Clive Walker, QC	
UNITED STATES	151
Seamus Hughes and Bennett Clifford	
HACKING TERRORIST INFRASTRUCTURE: INTERNATIONAL LAW ANALYSIS	157
Liis Vihul	
APPENDIXES	165
Appendix 1: Acronyms and abbreviations	166
Appendix 2: About the authors	168

Western Europe

THOMAS RENARD

*Senior Research Fellow, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations and
the Adjunct Professor at the Vesalius College, Brussels, Belgium*

SECURITY CONTEXT

The terrorist threat remained critical in Western Europe throughout 2017 and continued to be dominated by *jihadi* terrorism. Although still representing a very small share of the overall number of terrorist incidents,¹ jihadist plots are generally perceived as more threatening than other forms of terrorism (and are indeed responsible for a much higher ratio of deaths per incident). That perception is further exacerbated because they receive more media coverage than other incidents. During 2017, 16 attacks struck eight different countries,² while more than 30 plots were foiled. There were also a significant number of terrorism-related police raids and arrests (at least 621 in France and 1,100 in Germany, 90% of which were linked to *jihadi* terrorism). In last year's *Counterterrorism Yearbook*, I anticipated that the main terrorist risk would shift from foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to homegrown terrorist fighters (HTFs), which is what happened. All attacks in 2017 were carried out by HTFs. Although the return of FTFs from Syria and Iraq continued to concern European authorities, only a few returnees were recorded in 2017 and no incident involving a returning foreign fighter was reported. As a result, CT agencies' attention and efforts focused mostly on the homegrown

threat, for which new measures were devised, while they pursued the implementation of measures dealing with foreign fighters and radicalisation more broadly.

TERRORISM

OVERVIEW OF THE JIHADI PLOTS

Based on a review of open sources, I have been able to identify 16 completed jihadist attacks in Western Europe (excluding the UK) during 2017 (Table 8). Seven were claimed by IS, thus four less than in 2016, which tallied 11.³ It's worth noting that, contrary to a common assumption, IS doesn't 'claim everything', as it didn't take credit for the other nine attacks accounted for here, or for any foiled plot or any other incident. Remarkably, IS claimed responsibility for attacks only where perpetrators died in action (in all cases but one—the June car ramming attack in Paris—the attackers were killed by police officers or soldiers). There was only one attack resulting in the death of the perpetrator that wasn't claimed by IS: the Orly attack in March. It would be worth exploring whether this is indeed a conscious strategy of the group, or mere coincidence.

TABLE 8: Jihadi attacks in Western Europe, 2017

Date	Country	Description	Perpetrator	Claimed by IS?	Nature of incident?
3 February	France	Egyptian tourist Abdallah El-Hamahmy, 29, attacked soldiers with two machetes near the Louvre, Paris, screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He's alleged to have sympathies for IS, but his motives remain unknown.	Arrested	No	Unclear
18 March	France	French citizen Ziyed Ben Belgacem, 39, assaulted soldiers at Orly airport, saying he wanted to 'die for Allah', after he had shot at several people hours before without injuring anyone. He was known for radicalisation, violence and drug use. The terrorist nature of the attack was uncertain, however, as he was under the influence and the attack seemed improvised.	Killed	No	Unclear
7 April	Sweden	Uzbek asylum-seeker Rakhmat Akilov, 39, drove a truck into a pedestrian street in Stockholm, killing five and injuring 14. He expressed sympathies with IS, but the group didn't claim the attack. Uzbekistan claimed that he had tried to join IS in Syria in 2014, but that information couldn't be confirmed.	Arrested	No	Treated as terrorism
20 April	France	French citizen Karim Cheurfi, 35, killed a police officer and wounded two with an assault rifle on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. He had pledged allegiance to IS, which claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
18 May	Italy	Homeless Italian drug-dealer Ismail Tommaso Ben Youssef Hosni, 20, stabbed a policeman and two soldiers at Milan's central railway station after they asked for his papers. It was discovered that he was an IS sympathiser, but the terrorist nature of the incident hasn't yet been established.	Arrested	No	Unclear

Date	Country	Description	Perpetrator	Claimed by IS?	Nature of incident?
6 June	France	Algerian PhD student Farid Ikken, 40, attacked police officers with a hammer and knives at the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, injuring one. Unknown to the authorities and apparently self-radicalised, he had pledged allegiance to IS in a video, but the attack wasn't claimed by the group.	Arrested	No	Unclear
19 June	France	French citizen Adam Djaziri, 31, who was known to the authorities for radicalisation, rammed his car, which was loaded with explosives and weapons, into a police van on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. The bomb failed to detonate, and only Djaziri was killed. He had pledged allegiance to IS, which claimed the attack a month later.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
20 June	Belgium	Moroccan citizen Oussama Zariouh, 36, detonated a suitcase containing gas canisters in the middle of Brussels central railway station (which was relatively empty at that time), but the device malfunctioned. He was gunned down as he ran towards a military patrol screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He had written an allegiance letter to IS, which claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
30 June	Austria	A Tunisian citizen, 54, killed an elderly couple in their home in Linz before turning himself to police. He was known for radicalisation and had sworn allegiance to ISIS, but the police treated the incident as murder.	Arrested	No	Unclear, treated as murder
28 July	Germany	Palestinian asylum-seeker Ahmad A., 26, stabbed clients of a supermarket in Hamburg, screaming 'Allahu akbar', killing one and injuring six. He was known for radicalisation, but his motives remained unknown and the terrorist nature of the attack was contested by investigators (although the prosecutor mentioned an 'Islamist motive'). The attacker appeared to be psychologically unstable.	Arrested	No	Unclear
9 August	France	Algerian citizen Hamou Benlatrèche, 36, rammed his car into a military patrol in Levallois-Perret, injuring six people. The investigation revealed that he was sympathiser of IS, and may have considered joining the group in Syria before the attack.	Arrested	No	Treated as terrorism
17 August	Spain	Moroccan citizen Younes Abouyaaqoub, 22, drove a van through the pedestrian Rambla Street, in Barcelona, killing 15 and injuring 130. The attacker escaped but was killed four days later. The individual belonged to the Ripoll <i>jihadi</i> cell, which was also responsible for the Cambrils attack. The attack was claimed by IS, and a document pledging allegiance was found.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
18 August	Spain	Five Moroccans from the Ripoll cell, which was linked to the Barcelona attack, rammed pedestrians with a car in Cambrils before stabbing passers-by, killing one and injuring six. The attack was claimed by IS, and a document pledging allegiance was found.	4 Killed, 1 arrested	Yes	Treated as terrorism
18 August	Finland	Moroccan asylum-seeker Abderrahman Bouanane, 22, stabbed people in central Turku, killing two passers-by and injuring eight. The police treated the case as a terrorist attack, as Bouanane was known for radicalisation and IS sympathies.	Arrested	No	Treated as terrorism

Date	Country	Description	Perpetrator	Claimed by IS?	Nature of incident?
25 August	Belgium	A Belgian citizen of Somali origin, Haashi Ayaanle, 30, attacked three soldiers on a Brussels street with a knife, screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He had been treated for psychological problems. Although he was unknown to the authorities, he seemed to have online contacts with Somali extremists. IS claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism
1 October	France	Tunisian illegal resident Ahmed Hanachi, 29, stabbed two women to death at Saint-Charles station, Marseilles, screaming 'Allahu akbar'. He was killed by a soldier. Hanachi is thought to have been radicalised by his brother, who joined IS in Syria. IS claimed the attack.	Killed	Yes	Treated as terrorism

Source: Author's own compilation.

However, there were significant doubts about the credibility of some IS claims either because investigators couldn't find any evidence of a connection with the group or because the claims didn't bring any evidence of such a connection beyond information available from media reports. In the case of the 20 April attack on Paris's Champs-Élysées, for instance, the group even misidentified the perpetrator as being Abu Yusef al-Belgiki (a name that had circulated in the media the previous day), instead of Karim Cheurfi.⁴

Next to IS-claimed attacks, there were nine other attacks seemingly bearing the *jihadi* seal. In all those cases, the perpetrator appeared to be inspired by IS, although neither having direct contacts with the group nor having received specific instructions. As a result, the terrorist motive doesn't appear clearly in the incidents, some of which are indeed being treated as criminal incidents. In some cases, investigators may later uncover ties with known *jihadi* individuals or local radical milieus, or find that the individual was truly isolated but identified with IS for various (and often unclear) reasons. In other cases, the investigators may conclude that the incident had no link with terrorism at all, either because there was a personal motive (such as revenge) or because the perpetrator was psychologically destabilised, suicidal or insane. In at least two cases, in France and Italy, the attacker appeared to be under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or both at the time of the incident. In 2016, there had already been a number of similarly ambiguous cases, as I reported in last year's yearbook. For instance, Hicham Diop, who stabbed police officers in Schaerbeek, Belgium, in 2016, was convicted for murder in 2017, but a terrorist motivation was rejected during his trial.⁵

The multiplication of unclaimed attacks perpetrated by isolated and unstable individuals with tenuous links to *jihadi* organisations, and attacks supported by doubtful claims, together confirm a trend identified by the European security services towards a more diffuse, multifaceted, unpredictable jihadist threat in Europe. This evolution is linked more broadly to the displacement of the threat from the FTF phenomenon to the HTF one. HTFs are individuals who didn't

travel to Syria or Iraq, but who act on behalf of a foreign jihadist organisation with which they have either developed operational contacts (notably through online communications) or to which they feel ideologically connected but with which they have established only loose interactions, if any. This absence of travel and connections, physical or virtual, as well as the diversity of profiles among perpetrators, makes it more complicated for the security services to anticipate and prevent such attacks.

It's noteworthy that no plot involved a returning FTF in 2017. Even if it's confirmed that the Stockholm attacker, Rakhmat Akilov, did indeed try to join IS in Syria in 2014, as claimed by the Uzbek authorities, he didn't manage to do so, as he was arrested at the Turkish border.⁶ Similarly, Adam Djaziri (the 19 June Champs-Élysées attacker), was observed at the border between Greece and Turkey in February 2015, but isn't known to have reached Syria.⁷ In fact, no terrorist plot on mainland Europe since the March 2016 Brussels attacks has involved returnees. All the 2017 plots were conducted by HTFs, except the Louvres attack, which was perpetrated by an Egyptian tourist.

The terrorists had very diverse profiles and backgrounds. The vast majority were first-generation migrants (born in Morocco, Algeria or Somalia) who had arrived in the host country several years ago (often more than 10 years ago), most likely with no prior terrorist intention. It's assumed that their radicalisation occurred in Europe. Four attacks involved second-generation migrants (born in the country they attacked, to migrant parents), whereas three were conducted by asylum seekers. With the exception of the Spanish cell (composed of youngsters between 17 and 24 years old), most perpetrators were around 30 years or older, thus belonging to an older age bracket than the vast majority of people who have left Europe to join IS in Syria and Iraq.⁸ Most perpetrators had criminal records, confirming the growing links between criminality or delinquency and terrorism; and at least two were considered psychologically unstable, confirming another trend towards a growing proportion

of mentally ill or psychologically challenged individuals among *jihadi* plotters.

In terms of *modus operandi*, all attacks except the Barcelona/Cambrils plot were lone acts. This seems to confirm a deeper evolution from complex plots conducted by wider cells towards (homegrown) lone actors.⁹ The majority of *jihadi* attacks in 2017 were rather unsophisticated, using knives, machetes or hammers in 10 out of 16 attacks, whereas vehicles were used as weapons in five attacks. With regard to targets, there were exactly the same number of targeted attacks against police or soldiers as indiscriminate attacks against civilians: nine cases each, as two perpetrators attacked both civilians and police or soldiers (the Orly and the Brussels Central Station attacks).

The most sophisticated attacks were all claimed by IS, although this isn't necessarily a defining feature for the group's claims. They included the Barcelona/Cambrils plot in August, which was meant to be more elaborate than occurred, possibly involving coordinated bombings in Barcelona,¹⁰ and was the only plot involving more than one perpetrator—in this case involving a whole *jihadi* cell. They also included the two consecutive but unrelated suicide-bombing attacks in Paris (19 June) and Brussels (20 June). Although resulting in no victims due to the bombs' misfiring, both were considered highly sophisticated for lone actors with no prior training. According to investigators, the Brussels bomb was indeed very powerful.¹¹ By contrast, all the attacks that weren't claimed by IS were quite unsophisticated (stabblings or car rammings).

Geographically, eight countries were affected by jihadist attacks in 2017. France was by far the most affected nation, with seven completed attacks and at least 13 foiled plots, including one masterminded from behind the walls of Fresnes prison.¹² Germany and Belgium continued to be targeted, but also successfully dismantled plots and cells (there were at least 11 foiled attacks in Germany).¹³ Other countries that had been relatively spared by terrorism so far became more alert in 2017 due to attacks but also to a growing number of *jihadi* activities leading to a number of police operations and arrests. That was certainly the case in Italy and Spain, which have a long history of terrorism but had been relatively less affected than their northern neighbours over the past few years. Nordic countries continued to be affected by terrorism (a trend since the publication of the Mohammed cartoons in the mid-2000s), while Finland, which had been spared so far, suffered its first *jihadi* attack.

Overall, the 16 attacks in 2017 resulted in 29 fatalities and injured around 180, marking a sharp decrease from the 135 fatalities in 2016 and 150 injured of 2015. It could be tempting to link this decrease to the weakening of IS, resulting

from the loss of territory and the death of key operatives (including so-called 'virtual planners', such as the infamous Rachid Kassim¹⁴) and affecting the group's capacity to organise attacks in Europe. We could also speculate that this is the result of the evolution described above towards a more diffuse threat, on the assumption that HTFs are more 'amateurish' because they lack training or access to weapons. However, we should remember that the most lethal attack of 2016, in Nice, was by a lone HTF using a very crude weapon—a truck. Furthermore, the Barcelona/Cambrils attacks could have been much deadlier if the cell had not been forced to improvise a Plan B after the cell's 'bomb factory' exploded in Alcanar the previous day, resulting in the death of its leader, imam Abdelbaki Es Satty.¹⁵ A number of foiled plots also appeared to be potentially very deadly, as at least four foiled attacks in France involved explosives. In short, the limited number of victims may be due to sheer luck more than anything else. It's simply too soon to tell.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND THE FALL OF THE 'CALIPHATE'

Since 2016, there have been only very few departures of Europeans to Syria and Iraq, and there have been equally few returns. European authorities remain concerned, however, as even a small number of diehard fighters can be a significant threat. It is also feared that returning FTFs could recruit and encourage individuals to act locally, without inciting them to travel in order to join IS. For instance, it's believed that the Marseille attacker, Ahmed Hanachi, was radicalised by his brother, Anis, who fought with IS in Syria between 2014 and 2016.¹⁶ More broadly, returnees could become a real danger over the long term, acting as radicalising agents and new entrepreneurs of local *jihadi* cells, starting within prison, as has happened in the past.¹⁷

In September 2017, the EU CT Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, estimated that there were still 2,000–2,500 European fighters alive in Syria (although this is probably a high estimate), while around 1,500 had returned to Europe since the beginning of the conflict.¹⁸ European intelligence services no longer expect a massive return of those who are still overseas, despite IS territorial losses and the fall of the caliphate. Many have died over the past few months or have been arrested (and in some cases summarily executed) by local forces. Fatalities include a significant number of high-profile fighters, recruiters, virtual planners and propagandists. This is reducing the terrorist threat in Europe, although a number of virtual planners are believed to remain active vis-a-vis their European audience. Jihadist propaganda and other materials will also continue to appeal to a certain group of individuals, although the

amount of new material produced has significantly decreased.¹⁹ In late 2017, some reports mentioned that a number of European fighters were relocating to other conflict zones, including Afghanistan. The further dispersal of European combatants might lead to the internationalisation of certain conflicts and possibly destabilise some countries or regions. This is a trend that will require constant monitoring by European intelligence services over the years to come. Overall, as discussed above, the threat of HTFs has been more tangible. In short, while the threat of returning FTFs will persist, particularly over the medium to long term, HTFs present a more immediate and probable risk.

RADICALISATION AND POLARISATION

Youth radicalisation towards violent extremism remained a serious concern in 2017. According to Gilles de Kerchove, there are around 50,000 'radicalised' Muslims within the EU, including about 20,000 in France and 10,000 in Germany (although these are high estimates, based on inclusive criteria).²⁰ Despite the military defeats of IS in Syria, the phenomenon of radicalisation doesn't yet seem to be waning in Europe. According to some anecdotal evidence gathered from my discussions with local prevention officers, radicalisation may actually still be growing in several Western European countries,²¹ perhaps because there's a certain momentum or 'snowball' effect (as people radicalise through kinship or friendship, with more radicalised individuals triggering still more radicalisation), but also because the conducive environment to radicalisation is insufficiently addressed across Europe. Radicalisation in Europe is seen first and foremost as a societal challenge. Not all the 50,000 'radicals' are seen as a threat to society, but some are. Although there's no straight path from radicalisation to terrorism, it's feared that more HTFs could emerge from this broader pool of radicalised youth.

As a corollary to the rising challenge of radicalisation, the polarisation of society (or mutual radicalisation) became a more acute problem, marked notably by a rise in far-right extremism as well as far-left and anti-fascist groups. In Germany, for example, refugee centres suffered almost daily attacks in 2017.²² In a twisted scenario, neo-Nazi soldiers had planned an attack disguised as refugees, with a view to killing left-wing pro-migrant politicians and to reinforcing societal polarisation.²³ Attacks against Muslims or places of worship were reported across Europe in significant numbers. Interestingly, a number of those attacks copied the *modus operandi* of jihadist groups, highlighting that polarisation operates like an echo chamber. For instance, in June, a man attempted to kill Muslims with his car at the end of prayers at the mosque of Créteil, France. He claimed that he wanted to 'avenge the Bataclan' but seemed psychologically unstable, according to investigators.²⁴ There were also a number of knife and hammer attacks in France, claimed by an anti-Islam commando, although investigators had doubts about the credibility of the claim.²⁵ Overall, polarisation seems to be leading to more intergroup violence.

COUNTERTERRORISM

Most Western European countries maintained their threat levels at 'high' or 'very high' in 2017. Finland raised its threat level from 'low' to 'elevated' following the attack in Turku.²⁶ In their CT responses, most European countries continued to lean towards a security-oriented approach, favouring repression over prevention. Efforts focused on implementing measures approved over the past couple of years, mostly related to FTFs, on the one hand, while working on their progressive broadening with a view to covering the threat from HTFs, on the other.

THE HOMEGROWN THREAT, COUNTERTERRORISM AND THE SECURITISATION OF EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

Over the past few years, Europe's CT efforts have focused essentially on the wave of FTFs travelling to IS's caliphate. 2015 was a milestone year, marked by the adoption of new laws, strategic frameworks and action plans, whereas 2016 was mainly a year of consolidation, with the pursuit and implementation of efforts initiated earlier. In 2017, however, CT agencies had to shift their attention to HTFs. The task of identifying potential terrorists, and preventing them from taking action, has now become more complicated for the security services because HTFs are often less connected to radical milieus or terrorist organisations than FTFs. Even though most perpetrators in 2017 were known to the authorities because of their radicalisation, criminal activities, or both, they weren't under close watch by the CT services, as they didn't appear to be immediate threats.²⁷ Although absolute security is a mere illusion, governments have started to extend existing laws and instruments or devise new ones to address the HTF challenge. Similar discussions are taking place at the international level as well, notably within the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which launched a new initiative on HTFs in 2017, in Malta.

Specific measures adopted in this area include, for instance, the extension of the Belgian dynamic database that was designed to share information on Belgian FTFs among all relevant services to include HTFs and hate propagandists. There were also discussions on extending the mandate of some of the key operational platforms that were designed to address the FTF issue (regular meetings among security services and local authorities) to also address potential HTFs. Furthermore, the Belgian federal prosecutor suggested in 2017 that the penal code could be extended in order to criminalise visits to *jihadi* websites, based on a widespread fear that a 'lone wolf' radicalised online could totally escape the radar of the security services.²⁸ The measure was supported by the government but opposed by a number of civil society organisations on the grounds that it would compromise the civil liberties of the many people who consult such websites and materials for research purposes, potentially criminalising cohorts of people who pose no

danger to society. It has not yet been approved. However, a similar law was adopted in France in 2016, before being declared unconstitutional and scrapped, but immediately restored by the National Assembly in February 2017.²⁹ In December 2017, the Constitutional Court rejected it again.

Such controversial measures are part of a broader European trend towards criminalising ‘preparatory acts’ of terrorism and strengthening the legislative arsenal to be able to prosecute wannabe terrorists before they strike. In 2015–16, as a response to the FTF challenge, such measures focused on the criminalisation of travel to conflict zones to join terrorist organisations. As the travel dimension is absent from the HTF dynamic, legislators are now seeking to criminalise new types of behaviour, such as visiting *jihadi* websites or possessing *jihadi* material (such as ISIS flags). In a similar vein, Denmark has criminalised apologia for terrorism,³⁰ and Belgium is considering moving in the same direction. Apologia for terrorism is already considered an offence in France and Spain, and a new contested German law forces big internet social media companies to take down any ‘hate speech’ material (vaguely defined) within 24 hours.³¹

There’s a clear trend across Europe towards strengthening security measures, often at the expense of privacy and fundamental rights. Amnesty International, for example, has denounced what it describes as an ‘Orwellian twist’ in which people can be pursued for thoughtcrime, with limited means to defend themselves.³² The flagship measure in this area is the new French CT legislation that transferred into common law most measures introduced under the state of emergency declared in November 2015 after the Paris attacks and prolonged until the end of October 2017, when the new law was adopted. The bill gives sweeping powers to the administration, and only limited control or oversight to the judiciary. For example, individuals suspected of terrorism can be placed under house arrest, and their property may be searched, without approval from a judge.³³ This extensive law is supported by a view, articulated by Interior Minister Gerard Collomb, that France is ‘in a state of war’, which requires a ‘lasting response to a lasting threat’.³⁴ Exceptional measures have, de facto, become permanent.

Other measures recently adopted in Europe that are denounced by human rights organisations include the deportation of individuals suspected of terrorism. In Germany, the power to deport non-German citizens has existed since 2001, but it wasn’t used until Anis Amri’s attack in December 2016. It has now become more

standard practice, even when evidence is deemed insufficient for prosecution.³⁵ Italy has also significantly increased its use of deportations, making it a ‘cornerstone’ of its strategy.³⁶ The Netherlands has also made it possible to scrap the Dutch nationality of (and therefore possibly expel) dual nationals who are considered a threat to national security but haven’t been convicted.³⁷ While some in Belgium are pushing for a similar law, two key *jihadi* figures had their Belgian nationality revoked in November 2017 under the current legislation: Malika el-Aroud, nicknamed the ‘Black Widow’, who has played a central role in the national (and European) *jihadi* scene since the 1990s, and Bilal Soughir, who organised a recruitment network for the Iraqi *jihad* in the early 2000s.³⁸

According to Kim Cragin, this rising practice of deportations and scrapping citizenship is resembling a dangerous ‘hot potato’ game, in which countries are simply offloading their most problematic terror cases onto other countries (mostly in North Africa), which are often already overwhelmed.³⁹ Such practices may therefore increase the security risk in certain countries, but could also rebound on Europe if those deported aren’t properly handled, or if they use the opportunity of their deportation to build new ties with local groups and establish new terror networks across the Mediterranean.

Other controversial measures include Germany’s use of electronic ankle bracelets to surveil suspected terrorists, even in the absence of a conviction,⁴⁰ and Belgium’s extension of police custody for terror suspects from 24 to 48 hours (although the government was asking for 72 hours).⁴¹

Yet another trend that’s raising opposition across Europe is the lifting of restrictions on professional secrecy and patient confidentiality for various professionals who deal with radicalisation challenges. Governments are devising more comprehensive CT strategies to include a broader set of actors in the ‘prevention’ component, which is creating some tensions among actors whose main mission isn’t security-oriented. In Belgium, according to a new law, social workers dealing with people on government benefits are now required to pass information to the prosecutor’s office when there’s a ‘serious indication’ of terrorism activities. In the view of social workers, that puts at risk their professional secrecy and, as a result, the trust of their interlocutors.⁴² Training to help them recognise signs of radicalisation began in 2017. In France, President Emmanuel Macron announced his intention to deepen cooperation with health institutions, raising similar concerns about medical records and patient confidentiality.⁴³

FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND DERADICALISATION

Despite the preponderance of the homegrown threat, European authorities remained extremely attentive to the evolution of the situation in Syria and the whereabouts of European citizens in the conflict zone. As combat intensified, leading to the crumbling of the so-called caliphate, European governments sought to anticipate the next moves of European fighters, which could lead them to other *jihadi* theatres or back to their homelands, where they could become a liability. France (and the UK) adopted a radical and controversial position, publicly stating that they're actively engaged in targeted killings to prevent the return of their most dangerous FTFs.⁴⁴ French Defence Minister Florence Parly said in October that 'the more jihadists who die, the better'.⁴⁵ Although most European governments share this view off the record, they do not make it official policy.

A number of European fighters who weren't killed have been taken prisoner by local forces in Syria and Iraq, triggering new dilemmas and responses from European governments. On the one hand, some European governments sent intelligence officers into the area to interrogate the prisoners.⁴⁶ On the other hand, a political debate arose within Europe as to whether consular assistance should be offered to the prisoners, and whether diplomatic *démarches* should be initiated to seek to repatriate them (as European governments have no extradition agreement with Syria and Iraq, and certainly not with local militias), given that they're likely to be subject to torture and execution locally. Across Europe, the political appetite for actively seeking the return of dangerous individuals is quite low, and some countries argue that it is indeed normal to let local authorities prosecute and decide the fate of people who commit crimes in their jurisdictions. Legal, ethical and security considerations underpinned this debate concerning the fate of European FTFs in Syria and Iraq.

The perception of returning women and children evolved in 2017, to broadly converge across Europe.⁴⁷ Whereas women had been treated more leniently in the past, most countries are now systematically prosecuting them for terrorist activities, particularly since recent reports suggest that a number of them participated directly to the fighting in 2017, and could return with malicious intentions. As to children, they are mostly treated as victims, through a childcare approach as opposed to a criminal one, at least under a certain age (10 years old in Belgium, 13 in France). Their situation is decided on a case-by-case basis above that age limit. The German Foreign Ministry undertook *démarches* to repatriate children born to German parents under the caliphate who are now prisoners in Iraq,⁴⁸ whereas France and Belgium seemed to move in a similar direction.⁴⁹

A key concern among European security services remains that a number of foreign fighters will come back, via official routes or—more worryingly—clandestinely. With a view to having the best possible information on potential returnees, Gilles de Kerchoue

urged members of the military coalition to improve the sharing of military evidence from the battlefield with European authorities.⁵⁰ Such evidence includes fingerprints or recent photos that are extremely useful, particularly to border agencies, if they are entered into European databases in a timely manner.

Furthermore, a number of measures and mechanisms have been established to deal with returnees back home. In last year's yearbook, I identified this as a key task for 2017, as EU member states had been experimenting with such programs over the past couple of years. A lot was done in 2017 to develop a more comprehensive response to this challenge, but this is still work in progress.⁵¹ Key issues of concern remain:

- understanding the potential role that FTFs can play in prison in radicalising and recruiting inmates, including the apparently growing nexus between crime and terror
- designing effective rehabilitation and reinsertion programs for returnees
- dealing with returning children, including a number of orphans, some of whom have been exposed to violence and extremist ideology.

In the areas of rehabilitation and deradicalisation, a major development in France was the dismantling of the costly Pontourny deradicalisation centre, which was designed to welcome radicalised individuals (but not convicted ones) on a voluntary basis. In under a year, the institution, which used an ambitious but controversial methodology, attracted only 17 residents. This experiment was deemed a 'total fiasco' in a Senate report.⁵² Meanwhile, the French Government has initiated a much more discreet initiative, called Research and Intervention on Violent Extremists (RIVE), which is inspired by a Danish example (the so-called 'Aarhus model').⁵³ This pilot project (in contrast to Pontourny) is designed for radical convicts, who are offered intensive multidisciplinary counselling and mentoring outside of prison for at least a year. Also in contrast to the Pontourny model, RIVE is mandatory for selected individuals and is tailored for their personal needs. If it's successful with a first group of 14 convicts, RIVE will be broadened to include more candidates. In Belgium, the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis, the national fusion centre, has also announced its intention to review all existing deradicalisation programs, with a view to bringing some order and scientific evaluation into a burgeoning but unregulated market.⁵⁴

COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM EFFORTS—OFFLINE AND ONLINE

In the light of the continuation of the terrorist threat, most European countries have pursued their own efforts to strengthen their security apparatus. Many countries, including France and Germany, have announced that they'll continue to hire more personnel for their police and intelligence services. Reforms of the intelligence services, and an extension of their powers, have also been tabled in some countries. Finland

passed new legislation to extend the powers of its civilian agency, and France has reshaped some of its intelligence agencies by merging two of them and creating an overarching ‘fusion centre’, placed directly under the authority of the President.⁵⁵ Germany, however, still struggled to reform its intelligence landscape, which is dominated by the services of the *Länder* and gives little power to the federal agencies. Finally, Europe’s hard security approach to CT was also visible in Denmark’s decision to deploy soldiers at its border with Germany and in the streets,⁵⁶ becoming the fourth country to do so after Italy, France and Belgium. Soldiers can also take part in CT operations in Spain and Sweden, but aren’t permanently deployed, whereas Germany and Austria are debating the possible deployment of soldiers domestically.

Next to these ‘hard’ CT measures, governments continued to devote effort and resources to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism, particularly at the local level. Compared with 2015, local actors are now much better prepared and organised to deal with this phenomenon. An increasing number of actors from the social services, local authorities and educational systems have been trained, while local platforms continue to be set up in order both to deal with cases of radicalisation (or family support) and to facilitate the exchange of information among relevant actors and services. However, it remains true that these efforts are unequally distributed and developed across Europe, and even within countries.⁵⁷

In this regard, it’s worth emphasising the positive role played by the EU through a number of initiatives, particularly the Radicalization Awareness Network, with a view to connecting prevention actors across the continent to share experiences and good practices. More broadly, the EU has continued to support a number of projects in the context of its Security Union Agenda, notably to enhance the security of public spaces and to limit terrorists’ access to dangerous materials. The European Commission has also set up a high-level expert group on radicalisation to identify new priorities in counter-radicalisation.⁵⁸

Finally, a number of interesting developments were reported in relation to the digital space. Those measures include European efforts to combat radicalisation and recruitment online.⁵⁹ Europol’s Internet Referral Units continued to play an active role in identifying terrorist content that should be taken down. As cooperation with the technology industry (and particularly internet search engines and social media platforms) is crucial in this area, the EU and its member states have sought to deepen that partnership through the EU Internet Forum (a gathering of EU officials and internet representatives), adopting an action plan to combat terrorist content online in July 2017. Another EU priority is

linked to encryption, which is a major challenge in terrorism investigations. Although some countries, particularly France and Germany, have invested in their ability to investigate encrypted messenger services, to decrypt content or to monitor the darknet (where a growing proportion of digital activities is taking place), those issues remain a major challenge for most member states with more limited human, financial and technical capabilities. The EU has therefore announced its intention to reinforce Europol’s own decryption capabilities and to support member states’ capacities in this area by offering training on investigation techniques and shared toolboxes.⁶⁰

PROSPECTS FOR 2018

After the fall of IS’s caliphate and the weakening of the group in Syria and Iraq, European security agencies expect the terror threat to evolve. As a sign of this post-caliphate era, on 22 January 2018 Belgium was the first European country to lower its threat level, from 3 (‘serious and credible threat’) to 2 (‘average and unlikely’), although emphasising that the threat remained higher than in 2014–15 (when it was also at level 2), and that it would not suddenly disappear. While the main risk will continue to emanate from HTFs, a key issue in 2018 will be the fate of European FTFs. Some will move to other conflict zones and will continue to require monitoring by the intelligence services, as they’re likely to maintain some ties with Europe and possibly encourage youngsters to either travel to join them or to strike at home. Others will try to come back, becoming a security and societal challenge for the authorities. Returning children, particularly, will be a sensitive issue calling for long-term responses. In 2018, a number of foreign fighters will also be released from European jails, putting national approaches to dealing with *jihadi* terrorists after prison to the test.

In the post-caliphate landscape, other jihadist groups, and particularly al-Qaeda, could regain importance in certain parts of the world. As a consequence, some European individuals could again associate with al-Qaeda, as opposed to IS, which calls for greater attention to these group dynamics among security services. Beyond the *jihadi* threat, polarisation will also continue to draw attention.

In CT, a number of key tasks lie ahead. First, there’s a need to continue deepening and improving responses to terrorism and radicalisation. As the threat is evolving—and to some extent waning—in the post-caliphate era, that will somewhat reduce the pressure on the authorities and present an opportunity to address the conducive environment to radicalisation and terrorism. A lot’s been achieved

over the past few years, often in a rather experimental manner (the ‘try and learn’ approach), and there’s now a need to evaluate those efforts and develop a more comprehensive and systematic response to these issues. The aim is to avoid wasting resources or supporting counterproductive measures, but it is also necessary to ensure the sustainability of all recent efforts and good practices over the long term and to finalise a comprehensive and coherent strategy before political attention and will are diverted from terrorism

to other topics—something that’s been labelled ‘CT fatigue’, which has occurred before. Second, the internet is clearly a new frontier in the fight against terrorism and radicalisation. A lot’s already happening on this front, but clearly more is needed, and public–private partnerships will be crucial in this area. Finally, in the context of the Brexit negotiations, 2018 will see operational discussions on future EU–UK CT cooperation.

NOTES

- 1 Most attacks in Europe are caused by separatist groups, as well as far-right and far-left extremists and anarchists.
- 2 This chapter excludes the UK from its analysis, as the UK is covered in a separate contribution.
- 3 If we count the March 2016 Brussels attacks as two separate incidents, as I have done here with the attacks of Barcelona and Cambrils.
- 4 ‘Attentat des Champs-Élysées: pourquoi la revendication de l’Etat islamique pose question’, *France Info*, 21 April 2017.
- 5 J Balboni, ‘Hicham Diop condamné à neuf ans de prison, l’attaque des policiers de Schaerbeek n’était pas terroriste’, *La Libre*, 10 October 2017.
- 6 ‘Uzbekistan says told West that Stockholm attack suspect was Islamic State recruit’, *Reuters*, 14 April 2017.
- 7 S Seelow, J Pascual, ‘La surveillance en dents de scie d’Adam Djaziri, auteur de l’attentat manqué des Champs-Élysées’, *Le Monde*, 1 July 2017.
- 8 Although most European fighters in Syria and Iraq were in their early 20s, there were also a number of older recruits in their 30s and 40s and, in some rare cases, even beyond their 50s.
- 9 T Renard, *Europe’s ‘new’ jihad: homegrown, leaderless, virtual*, security policy brief 89, Egmont Institute, Brussels, July 2017; P Nesser, *Islamist terrorism in Europe: a history*, OUP, Oxford, 2015.
- 10 A Baquero, G Sanchez, ‘Los terroristas de Ripoll tenían 100 kilos de explosivos para atentar en Barcelona’, *El Periodico*, 13 September 2017. See also F Reinares, C Garcia-Calvo, ‘“Spaniards, you are going to suffer”: the inside story of the August 2017 attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils’, *CTC Sentinel*, January 2018, 11(1).
- 11 ‘Bom Brussel-Centraal even krachtig als 15 granaten: ‘We zijn aan veel erger ontsnapt’’, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 12 July 2017.
- 12 ‘“13 attentats ont été déjoués” en France depuis janvier 2017 annonce Macron’, *Le HuffPost*, 18 October 2017; ‘Ce que l’on sait sur l’attentat déjoué dans la prison de Fresnes’, *France Info*, 10 October 2017.
- 13 German Database on Jihadi Incidents [Die Deutsche Terrorismusdatenbank: Dschihadismus], German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies, <http://www.girds.org/>.
- 14 See my contribution to ASPI’s *Counterterrorism Yearbook 2017*.
- 15 G Tremlett, ‘Alcanar: the coastal idyll where young militants hatched Barcelona plot’, *The Guardian*, 19 August 2017.
- 16 R. Heuzé, ‘Le frère du tueur de Marseille a combattu en Syrie’, *Le Figaro*, 10 October 2017.
- 17 Nesser, *Islamist terrorism in Europe: a history*.
- 18 ‘EU anti-terror chief: IS still has 2,500 European fighters’, *Associated Press*, 12 September 2017.
- 19 ‘Analysis: Islamic State media output goes into sharp decline’, *BBC Monitoring*, 23 November 2017.
- 20 ‘Britain is “home to 35,000 Islamist fanatics”, more than any other country in Europe, top official warns’, *The Telegraph*, 31 August 2017.
- 21 The French Minister of the Interior also confirmed in August 2017 that the number of radicalised individuals continued to grow in 2017. F Leboucq, ‘Radicalisation terroriste: le FSPRT, beaucoup de chiffres pour quelques lettres’, *Libération*, 8 November 2017.
- 22 N Goebel, ‘Refugee centers in Germany suffer near daily attacks’, *Deutsche Welle*, 6 November 2017.
- 23 L Dearden, ‘Second German soldier arrested over “false flag” plot to assassinate left-wing politicians in terror attack’, *The Independent*, 9 May 2017.
- 24 J Pascual, ‘A Créteil, un automobiliste tente de renverser des fidèles à la sortie d’une mosquée’, *Le Monde*, 30 June 2017.
- 25 ‘Dijon: un “commando” anti-islam revendique des attaques au marteau’, *Le Figaro*, 3 November 2017.
- 26 ‘Security police raises Finland’s terrorist threat level to “elevated”’, *YLE*, 14 June 2017, [online](#).
- 27 A notable exception being Adam Djaziri (19 June attack), who managed to plot an attack although he was listed and monitored for his ties with violent extremists.
- 28 ‘Le procureur fédéral veut rendre punissable la consultation de sites djihadistes’, *RTBF*, 23 June 2017.
- 29 ‘Le Parlement rétablit le délit de consultation “habituelle” des sites djihadistes’, *Le Monde*, 13 February 2017.
- 30 ‘Denmark looks to block access to online terror propaganda’, *The Local*, 12 January 2017.
- 31 P Evans, ‘Will Germany’s new law kill free speech online?’, *BBC News*, 18 September 2017.
- 32 ‘EU: Orwellian counter-terrorism laws stripping rights under guise of defending them’, *Amnesty International*, 17 January 2017, [online](#).
- 33 A Rubin, E Peltier, ‘French parliament advances a sweeping counterterrorism bill’, *New York Times*, 3 October 2017.
- 34 Rubin & Peltier, ‘French parliament advances a sweeping counterterrorism bill’.
- 35 ‘Constitutional court rules deportation of suspected terrorists is legal’, *The Local*, 27 July 2017.
- 36 L Vidino, F Marone, *The jihadist threat in Italy: a primer*, ISPI, Milan, November 2017.
- 37 ‘Nederlandschap van vier jihadisten ingetrokken’, *NOS*, 13 September 2017.

- 38 'La veuve de l'assassin du commandant Massoud et pionnière de la djihadosphère est déchue de sa nationalité belge', *La Libre*, 1 December 2017.
- 39 K Cragin, 'Foreign fighter "hot potato"', *Lawfare blog*, 26 November 2017.
- 40 'Germany approves electronic ankle bracelets to monitor extremists', *Deutsche Welle*, 1 February 2017.
- 41 'Terrorisme: l'extension du délai de garde à vue à 48 heures approuvée à la Chambre', *Belga*, 20 July 2017.
- 42 'Terrorisme et secret professionnel des CPAS: la loi adoptée', *Belga*, 5 May 2017.
- 43 E Vincent, 'M. Macron annonce un nouveau plan de prévention de la radicalisation d'ici la fin de l'année', *Le Monde*, 6 September 2017.
- 44 T El-Ghobashy, M Abi-Habib, B Faucon, 'France's special forces hunt French militants fighting for Islamic State', *Wall Street Journal*, 29 May 2017.
- 45 'Djihadistes français: "Tant mieux" s'ils meurent à Raqqa, estime la ministre de la Défense', *Le Parisien*, 15 October 2017.
- 46 M Prothero, 'The good news: ISIS is failing. The bad news: its fighters want to go home', *BuzzFeed*, 13 September 2017.
- 47 See T Renard, R Coolsaet, 'Returnees: Who are they, why are they (not) coming back and how should we deal with them? Assessing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands', *Egmont Paper 101*, Egmont Institute, Brussels, February 2018.
- 48 R Staudenmaier, 'Berlin to bring back children of German "Islamic State" fighters—report', *Deutsche Welle*, 23 November 2017.
- 49 H Sallon, E Vincent, 'L'épineuse situation des djihadistes français et de leurs enfants prisonniers en Irak et en Syrie', *Le Monde*, 2 December 2017.
- 50 M Peel, D Bond, 'Military urged to share intelligence on Isis members', *Financial Times*, 6 December 2017.
- 51 Renard & Coolsaet, 'Returnees: Who are they, why are they (not) coming back and how should we deal with them? Assessing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands'.
- 52 S Kovacs, 'À Pontourny, le fiasco de la déradicalisation', *Le Figaro*, 28 July 2017.
- 53 'RIVE, le projet de déradicalisation secret du gouvernement', *FranceInter*, 9 November 2017.
- 54 O Schneider, 'OCAM considers increase in deradicalisation proposals', *Brussels Times*, 6 November 2017.
- 55 P Alonso, 'Antiterrorisme : des structures plus proches du Président', *Libération*, 12 November 2017.
- 56 'Armed military to replace cops on Danish streets and border', *The Local*, 28 September 2017.
- 57 J Pieters, 'Half of Dutch municipalities do nothing to prevent radicalization: Justice Inspectorate', *NLTimes*, 14 September 2017; P Ortega Dolz, 'Spanish cities fail to apply national plan against Islamic radicalization', *El Pais (English)*, 29 August 2017.
- 58 European Commission, *Eleventh progress report towards an effective and genuine Security Union*, COM(2017) 608 final, Brussels, 18 October 2017.
- 59 European Commission, *Eleventh progress report towards an effective and genuine Security Union*.
- 60 European Commission, *Eleventh progress report towards an effective and genuine Security Union*.