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ISIL/DAESH AND AL-QAEDA THREAT TO
EUROPE

REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In recent years, few things have had as profound an impact on the daily lives of millions of people as international terrorism. The ongoing and relentlessly evolving threat of terrorism has left vulnerable those things that were once considered safe. In an age of mass information, a new generation of terrorists has emerged that, by exploiting the power and anonymity of the internet, have endowed themselves with more invasive, proselytising and lethal powers than in the past.

2. Al Qaida (AQ) and particularly Daesh are now the major trending topics in traditional and digital media, and not merely side points of the main news stories. Their capacity to exploit global communication tools has grown exponentially, enabling them to expand by recruiting young generations of affiliates motivated both by resentment created through a lack of integration and by their keen desire for violent reaffirmation.

3. In the field of extremist communications, the digital revolution has also transformed the way in which terrorist acts are planned. There is an inextricable link between mass communications and the informational impact of terrorism itself. At this stage, information itself has become a weapon that plays into the hands of extremists, and a reversal of this trend seems unlikely.

4. The digital generation has managed terrorist propaganda from remote safe havens in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria and Yemen, and from locations closer to home such as Libya, Tunisia the Balkans, and from within suburbs of some of Europe's major capitals. Digital communication has both inspired and enabled the execution of attacks at the heart of nations that were once unfamiliar with (non-domestic) extremist violence. This has essentially nullified the protection provided by EU borders. Moreover, the propagation of the extremist message has become so pervasive that it has given rise to undetectable radical movements within Europe.

5. In addition, even greater silent discontent pervades diverse sections of society. This is revealed by the existence of groups of sympathisers that, though unrelated to the deep roots of extremism, articulate social distress or even simple civic dissent by expressing veiled and sporadic support for shocking actions or violent ideologies.

6. The growing threat to Europe has its own peculiar causes and trajectories. Conversely, however, those causes determine which responses will be most effective. Delimiting and identifying terrorist threats with a view to maximising the effectiveness of the response is a priority also for the North Atlantic Alliance.

7. Varying reactions to the multifaceted phenomenon of terrorism within different European nations underscores the difficulty of establishing a single approach to combating extremism and effectively mitigating the threats to individual nation states and of the Alliance as a whole.

II. THE THREAT

8. The use of indiscriminate violence outside crisis areas, and, in particular, within Europe itself has gradually expanded as AQ and Daesh alternate in strength and step up their operations. Europe finds itself facing a new threat to security and democracy.

9. The threat combines several different phenomena to form a single weapon against Europe: illegal immigration, lack of integration, social malaise in poor urban peripheries, extremist Islamist* ideology as well as the presence and transit of returning fighters from the crisis areas. If efficaciously exploited, each of these destabilising factors offers international terrorism an opportunity to strike.

10. Daesh is also pursuing a pragmatic strategy of claiming responsibility for attacks that occur in places far from crisis areas. The attribution of responsibility for heinous actions (especially when dramatically effective) to Daesh is likely to be inspiration for the actions themselves even as the direct participation by Daesh in these actions is unlikely. It is as if the actions were autonomously generated without the support of a terrorist central command and without being included in the extremists' designs, even though they are strongly influenced by their model of radicalism.

11. In other words, the strategic projection into Europe of Daesh fighters, an objective widely proclaimed by the organisation, has been facilitated by the radicalising effect of digital propaganda. The organisation's scope for recruiting and claiming responsibility embraces, bombers who, at a distance of thousands of kilometres from Raqqa or Mosul, declare online that their affiliation to the organisation inspired their actions (Callimachi).

A. THE DAESH - AQ CONFRONTATION

12. No single group can claim clear predominance within the world of extremism. The complex melange of goals, purposes, ideologies and sponsors is indicative of the broad-ranging and varied nature of the extremist universe. In a world of 'ordinary' extremism, AQ and Daesh are the two groups that have achieved greatest prominence. In their capacity as icons of terrorism, AQ and Daesh have the capacity to attract loyalty from and inspire other extremist groups and apologists.

13. Consequently, in the pursuit of their respective goals and agendas, these two giants of international terrorism alternate between inevitable rivalry and alliances of expediency, sometimes fiercely asserting themselves, sometimes exchanging personnel under the guise of affiliations.

14. However, both Daesh and AQ, the two faces of global extremism, persist with an anti-western rhetoric and vie, in a tense and alternating dualism, for leadership of the anti-West opposition front. While the ideology behind Daesh's senseless atrocities claims that its greatest enemies are those whom the group deems to be "apostates" and/or "traitors to true Islam", it is Daesh that is most active in conducting an unremitting media-based recruitment campaign against the Western world.

15. The decline in the fortunes of AQ that followed the death of Bin Laden now seems to be abating as the organisation has begun to galvanise through its resistance to the aggressive rise of Daesh. Not only has AQ maintained some strongholds in Maghreb, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent, it has also somewhat strengthened its position following the retreat of Daesh in several key areas. Meanwhile, a mutual rivalry has arisen in areas in where AQ used to be the only group. These areas have since seen the gradual and inexorable encroachment of Daesh, which has not only imposed its presence but also poached land and personnel from AQ.

* The terms "Islamist" and "Jihadist" are intended to convey certain deviations of the spirit of the Islamic religion. These are terms currently used in the Western literature, but they have a different meaning in the Islamic world and we want to make sure that what is expressed in this paper is not understood as a criticism of the Islamic faith.

16. In every theatre of war or conflict the two groups are now fighting for territorial, ideological and populist ascendancy. Their rivalry is very much to the detriment of people living in the contested areas, who are forced to endure the violent stand-off between the two organisations with the knowledge that, no matter which side prevails, the only prospect is rule by extremists and narrow-minded radicals.

17. While AQ and Daesh are vying for extremist supremacy, Europe too is facing even more threatening scenarios. The most likely prospect is the prolongation of the current rivalry in most of the theatres of conflict because AQ still predominates over groups that have historically been affiliated with the organisation and the organization's regional offshoots (AQAP, AQIM). None of this, however, rules out the possibility of marriages of convenience between AQ and Daesh (in-deed some have already been made) for the joint administration of certain zones, for the mutual distribution of benefits, and for the concentration of efforts to eliminate the local presence of state institutions. The attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris in January 2015 is a reminder of this threat.

18. A different and completely opposite outcome could be a gradual intensification of the quarrel between the two organisations, especially if one seeks to close the gap with the other. This particular scenario raises many issues for Europe and the international presence of the West. Although this may not have absolute priority, it can be turned into an effective propaganda tool, given the media coverage that such events attract.

19. It is worth noting that for Daesh or AQ, attracting international media coverage is no longer the main driver for the planning and execution of attacks. Both groups are aware that they no longer need to carry out complex actions, such as the Twin Towers attacks of 11 September, to garner global media coverage. Due to the ability of extremists to exert influence over people's everyday lives, even a simple action involving a knife-wielding fanatic in a crowd can have the same impact as an aircraft crashing into a skyscraper. Such an act can produce a strategic victory while serving the communication goals of extremist groups. A substantial difficulty now facing both extremist groups is how to devise policies and actions that are sufficiently original and unpredictable to effectively capture the media's attention. Essentially, the dissemination of propaganda through the media is assured whenever an attack on an adversary (whoever that may be) takes place. It is thus the novelty of the action that informs both target selection and operational planning.

20. This line of reasoning is all the more valid for actions carried out in Europe or in areas other than traditional war zones (Iraq, Syria and Libya), where the fragility of the security situation makes violence and killings an everyday event.

B. THE CRISES BESIEGING EUROPE

21. The arc of instability that stretches from North Africa to the Middle East encompasses the major flashpoints of crisis that threaten the European continent (and NATO Allies). It is comprised of terrorists affiliated with Daesh or AQ who are committed to disseminating radical ideology on European soil.

22. This potential movement originates within the very heart of the geographical boundaries and expressed within it is the flawed concept of state that Daesh has sought to impose. Daesh, located in an area straddling **Iraq** and **Syria**, is conducting a formidable and brazen resistance against the overwhelming power of the International Coalition, which nevertheless is not without its defects. The more conventional aspect of Al Baghdadi's organisation including its economy is evidently on the defensive because of continuous interventions by the Coalition. Even so, the organisation continues to resist, reorganise and redistribute "its territory."

23. It is undeniable that Daesh has lost key sectors and that there has been a geographical retreat as a result. But, at this juncture, these losses cannot be directly attributed to a decrease in effectiveness. Indeed, Daesh's battlefield retreat corresponds to an increase in asymmetric and unconventional extremist activism, both locally and abroad.

24. In fact, the reduction of Daesh's territorial control is best measured against its administrative performance, i.e. its success at maintaining the welfare system promised to fighters' families. These fighters were won over in the recruitment and propaganda campaigns with the promise of a life within a state that would provide a fair and righteous form of life in line with the ideological injunctions of its religion.

25. The organisation has stepped up its media rhetoric, which is mainly aimed at a domestic audience. It therefore plays down losses, exalts victories and advocates a supranational ideal that is based solely on rigid religious precepts, which are misrepresentations, deviant interpretations and deformed versions of the religion.

26. Consequently, the flow of fighters willing to abandon their countries of origin to join Daesh has waned significantly while discontent and desertions within the ranks of those enrolled increase. This has hardly translated into an overall advantage over Daesh, which has responded to this moment of difficulty by encouraging would-be fighters to remain in their countries of origin and to act out their militancy there.

27. The decrease in outflow of fighters has coincided with the exportation of terrorist actions to places beyond the central territories controlled by Daesh. The attack of 31 October 2015 against Airbus A321 belonging to the Russian company Metrojet en route from Egypt to Russia was one of the first indications that Daesh was moving towards a more international strategy of engagement. This was followed by claims of responsibility for more than 100 similar actions across Europe, North America, Australia, as well as attacks on targets that are of interest to Allied nations. All these attacks took place outside the conflict zones of Iraq and Syria (EUROPOL).

28. The adaptive capacity of the organisation compounded by its still considerable capacity to generate wealth from the territories under its control have enabled it to survive and redirect its efforts. It has adjusted its propaganda rhetoric, using a multi-linguistic communication strategy that is conveyed through new publications. For example, 5 September 2016 saw the online launch of the first issue of *Rumiyah*, a new magazine from the media apparatus of Daesh that is currently available in ten languages: English, French, German, Russian, Indonesian, Turkish, Uyghur, Pashto, Kurdish and Bosnian.

29. In **Libya**, the fragile post-Gaddafi environment has enabled organisations and fighters affiliated to Daesh to establish strongholds and spread rapidly. The weakness of the Libyan State, which is constantly on the verge of collapse, along with the presence of heavily armed militias often involved in a flourishing criminal economy of trafficking, have allowed Daesh gradually and inexorably to strengthen its position so much so that there is the threat that it will take control of a number of oil fields and occupy much of the coastal city of Sirte, a former Gaddafi stronghold that is now a symbol of Daesh in Libya.

30. The expansion of Daesh has only been halted thanks to western military backing (consisting mainly of US air strikes) of the Al-Bunyan al-Marsus operation carried out by the Libyan armed forces. Once again, Daesh demonstrated both its resilience and capacity for adaption by dispersing its forces into more remote areas of the Libyan hinterland. Although no actual cases have yet come to light, the fear remains that fleeing Daesh fighters might infiltrate the ranks of the large groups of refugees passing through Libya some of whom are in search of alternative means of survival, and others who are in searching for opportunities to export their extremist ideology to Europe. The participation in recent attacks of foreign fighters who entered the Schengen area via the same illegal channels used by immigrants shows the need for a more coordinated and close cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination. Such policy is needed to prevent terrorist organisations such as Daesh from using the flow of refugees to put terrorists in the position to carry out attacks in Europe and elsewhere by exploiting the vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants.

31. Against a backdrop of widespread and chronic conflict, Libya continues to offer Daesh and its affiliates a safe haven, from which it can train fighters, receive shipments of arms and plan hostile actions in the rest of North Africa and the Sahel. Contrastingly, AQ in Libya continues to exercise prudence and often finds itself competing with pro-Daesh groups in the area.

32. The Balkans, located in the northern part of the South-Eastern Flank of NATO, form a natural outlet for violent overspill from the crisis areas. They continue to serve as a point of reference for extremist groups in the Syrian-Iraqi theatre, and as a source both of human resources and of logistical support for foreign fighters. Historical, ethnic, religious, political and economic factors as well as the region's social fabric, which leaves it vulnerable to the spread of radical doctrines, have led to a significant outflow of Balkan fighters into the crisis area.

33. The Balkans are a breeding ground for radicalisation, which began with the war of the 1990s that attracted Mujahideen veterans. At the end of the Balkan wars, fighters embarked on a phase of militant proselytising in partnership with radical preachers and built up a network of connections that also included extremists active in the Middle East and Europe. Gradually, what began as indifference towards the weakening of moderate institutions facilitated the establishment of an ever more deeply rooted and widespread network of Islamist non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charitable foundations and associations, the activities of which have often been associated with the diffusion of radical doctrines, including some in supporting terrorism.

34. Recent investigations led to the arrest and sentencing of a total of more than 126 years in prison for members of nine self-proclaimed imams in Albania, all of which were suspected of having set up an intricate network of connections in the Balkans with the purpose of recruiting fighters to be sent to Syria. These convictions came in the wake of numerous media messages that were transmitted through web channels in Albanian/Kosovar in which Balkan military leaders affiliated with Daesh threatened attacks on their countries of origin in the name of the terrorist organisation. A series of so far unsuccessful terrorism attempts have kept local security forces in a constant state of alert.

35. With the support of diaspora remittances and large donations from Middle Eastern countries, these organisations have been able to reknit a fragile social fabric, by supplanting religious authorities and exploiting the monitoring and control activities conducted by local radical communities. Their goal was to stir up social conflict. Due to the presence of a large Balkan diaspora in Europe (and the world), a dense network of logistical support is available to extremists both within the Balkans and beyond.

36. The power of these radical communities has been reaffirmed and amplified as a result of the presence of charismatic characters of Balkan origin in Syria who have assumed leading positions in Daesh. The case for Lavdrim Muhaxheri, an Albanian-Kosovar citizen present in Syria in the ranks of Daesh since 2012 provides one example. Muhaxheri previously worked at Camp Bondsteel, a US military base in Kosovo and now appears in Daesh videos urging his compatriots to attack Western targets. More recently, in July 2015, videos featuring other Albanian and Kosovar fighters (Abu Al-Muqatil Kosovi and Bilqis Abu Al-Albani) commemorated the exploits of the late Muhaxheri, and promised a long series of attacks in the Balkans.

37. Indeed, the presence of fighters from the western Balkans is so prominent that Daesh has been able to create entirely Balkan combat battalions in Syria and Iraq. This particular feature of Daesh has major consequences when entire groups of combatants from these battalions return to their home countries. The returnees tend to insert themselves into the nationalistic movements that are currently prevalent in the Balkans and place the expertise they gained from months of fighting in war zones at the disposal of anti-establishment activists.

38. Like in certain Middle Eastern and North African regions, where Daesh took advantage of the governmental and institutional weakness to exploit social discontent and entrench its presence, radicalisation has also flourished in the Balkans due to the conditions of post-war social malaise. The

geographical isolation of some communities and their sense of alienation from official institutions has only abetted this phenomenon. The complex and pervasive nature of Islamist radicalism poses a potential security threat to both of the Balkans and European states.

C. EUROPEAN RADICALISATION

39. Although conditions vary from country to country, the isolation and degradation taking place within the peripheries of certain European cities could precipitate (and in some cases, has already instigated) a repetition of what has occurred in the Balkans. These locations could become a bridgehead for the development of a support network for returnees and for the formation of terrorist cells instructed to conduct hostile actions against EU countries.

40. Given the positive results of the slow and tortuous military campaign against Daesh's symmetrical terrorist efforts, we can now anticipate an expansion of its asymmetric activities in parallel with the shrinking of its pseudo-state.

41. The collaborative anti-terrorist efforts of individual States, the European Union and NATO have significantly raised awareness of the threat posed by the transit of European and Balkan veterans to and from conflict zones. Whereas the current policy seeks to contain external terrorist threats originating from outside European national boundaries, it does not effectively address the issue of indigenous radicalisation and the growing internal threat.

42. As the recent terrorist attacks in Europe have demonstrated, the phenomenon of anonymous European residents or citizens who are inspired by ideological radicalisation (or self-radicalisation) is too complex to be exhaustively extinguished. One of the root factors of violence is that the perpetrators come from run-down neighbourhoods or situations of social malaise. Like AQ and Daesh who find safe havens and thrive within failed states or in countries where governance is irreparably compromised, radicalisation can take root in the dark corners of otherwise prosperous, modern and democratic Europe where unemployment, corruption, racism, social exclusion and human rights violations are prevalent. Such dark corners are often situated in neighbourhoods, urban peripheries, prisons and cities. Recent studies, however, indicate that Daesh is also recruiting young people who would not be categorised as marginalised but who participate in organised criminal gangs.

43. Compared to this type of radicalisation, which has laid to bare some of the darker aspects of a European society that is still reeling from one of the worst global financial crises of all time, extremist nationalist movements of the right or left have significantly decreased, particularly in comparison to the rise of ideological radicalisation associated with Daesh or AQ. The sophistication of the propaganda of these two organisations far exceeds that of any nationalistic propaganda in European media.

44. At the same time, radical preachers and other prominent figures of Islamist radicalism exert an evident negative influence, notably on young people lacking an adequate religious culture and living in deprived socio-economic conditions, who can more easily be induced to accept a confrontational vision of relations with the West, possibly leading to violent conflict.

45. Leveraging its dominance in this area, Daesh has adapted both its communications strategies and, to some extent its operational tactics, in a bid to exploit two major topical issues that act as accelerants to the problems we have been considering, namely:

- a. The social fears and reactions engendered by the inflow of migrants and refugees into Europe;
- b. The pervasive anonymity made possible by cyberspace.

1. Possible Relationship Between Radicalisation and Immigration

46. Before the November 2015 Paris attacks, law enforcement authorities in Europe regularly denied that there was a link between terrorism and immigration. According to the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2016 of EUROPOL, there is no direct link between immigration and terrorism. The fact that two terrorists passed through Greece and other EU countries on their way to Paris by joining the migration flows strongly suggests that extremist groups may exploit the migration phenomenon to penetrate the borders of Europe (Koutsliakos, Filntisis).

47. To date, however, there is no confirmed systematic strategy on the part of terrorist groups linked to Daesh or AQ to exploit international human trafficking to gain access to the European continent. Even so, the exploitation of migratory flows is a highly profitable business in which criminal networks play an active part and generates income that criminals can use to invest in other illegal activities. The sizeable profits generated by this triangular trade might well attract the attention of terrorist groups in search of anonymous sources of funding.

48. Moreover, in recent years the increase in migration and the simultaneous introduction of tighter border controls by EU member states have led to the opening of new migration routes. The “Balkan corridor” has emerged as an alternative to the sea route favoured by most immigrants arriving from Libya. This poses the obvious danger that migrants might be radicalised as they move through certain areas.

49. It is also necessary, however, to recall that one of the objectives of Daesh’s incessant media campaign is to use scare tactics to keep the threat perception in the West persistently high. The migration phenomenon thus multiplies the sense of insecurity. It becomes an accelerant by both engendering and feeding resentment, fear and racism, which in turn increases the probability that individuals will become radicalised. This is a ‘societal security dilemma’ that Daesh is able to opportunistically exploit in order to create alarm and spread disinformation.

50. With respect to migration, national and European institutions still need to come fully to terms with the possibility that migratory flows and reception centres might be transformed into incubators of radicalisation.

2. The Cyber-world as an Accelerant

51. The unscrupulous, sophisticated and increasingly targeted use of information and communications technology as a tool by extremists linked to Daesh and AQ is by now widely acknowledged. This, however, has raised questions regarding the capabilities of the extremist organisations.

52. The capacity of these organisations to exploit propaganda and strategic communication for the purposes of recruitment and the transmission of intimidating messages sometimes rivals the communication capacities of most advanced states. Most importantly it fully exploits the media and propaganda potential of the Internet. Adroit editorial timing, a ‘captivatingly’ gory style, effective graphics and the shrewd selection of a target audience constitute a lethal resource for these organisations.

53. Daesh has extended its geopolitical reach by diversifying its media production, both by decentralising the production of some of its messages to *wilayats* (administrative districts), and by dedicating entire lines of media output to a specific language. At the same time, the unstated goal of the most recent media messages would appear to be that of placing less emphasis on the territorial ambitions of Daesh (evidently as a result of significant territorial reductions) and refocusing attention on the West and exhorting all members of the *Umma* (the virtual Islamist community) to carry out “lone wolf” attacks during outdoor gatherings, celebrations, on busy streets, and during markets, festivals, parades and political rallies.

54. Since the spectacular propaganda campaign surrounding the 9/11 attacks, terrorist strategic communication has significantly evolved. Attacks such as those made on the Twin Towers are no longer among terrorists' goals because there are clear risks that law enforcement will interrupt such complex operations (Bockstette). Today's terrorist organisations prefer more resistance-style tactics whereby the responsibility for planning an action is delegated to the final operative who follows the strategic guidelines disseminated online from the core of the terrorist organisation. The extremist ideologue Abu Musaab al Suri has compiled a lengthy strategic handbook that has been repeatedly referenced in recent issues of Daesh's digital magazines.

55. The digital revolution has had a remarkable effect on the media communication strategy of the terrorists. The media has become another weapon in their arsenal of IT tools. We are witnessing a "mediamorphosis" of terrorism, whereby this phenomenon has ineluctably and quintessentially morphed into communication. In other words, we are faced with an entirely new weapon (Antinori).

56. There are several indicators that Daesh and AQ could develop the capacity to transform their communications and digital recruiting powers to launch cyber-attacks that are sufficiently destabilising enough to rival the 'classical' asymmetric actions they previously used (suicide bombers, IEDs, targeted assassinations, truck-attacks, etc.).

57. In this respect, the extremist propaganda itself probably overstates the real capacities of the highly celebrated (or feared) cyber-terrorists. What has so far prevented the execution of a Daesh cyber-attack on Europe is essentially its own inability to stage an adequate cyber-attack that sufficiently broadcasts its aims. However, countries do have such a capacity. Fortunately for now, these countries are not in sympathy with the aims of the two extremist organisations.

58. The real concern (and fear), then, is that in addition to gaining non-conventional capabilities such as CBRN weapons, Daesh or AQ might acquire the support of countries that possess the skills needed to carry out truly effective cyber-attacks. The prospect remains remote for now, but in an increasingly digitised world, an opponent's capabilities can easily be impaired by an attack, whose main purpose is to deliver devastating media messages.

3. The New Risks: Homegrown Terrorists, Single Perpetrators and Lone Wolves, Foreign Fighters, and Returnees

59. Foreign fighters and returnees made up of veterans who decide to return to their countries of origin pose a key threat to European security. Greater emphasis is now being put on the potential threat of returnees, given that they are highly value to Daesh or AQ as emissaries.

60. The conditions of social disaffection and unrest that have led thousands of people to give up their daily lives to take an oath to a terrorist organisation, fight to defend the interests and ideology of the organisation, and subsequently return to the homeland they had renounced are certainly critical elements of the radicalisation process. Given the characteristics of the returnees, national law enforcement has little choice but to carry out strict controls.

61. By their very nature, foreign fighters constitute a shared threat to Europe. A foreign fighter is a radicalised individual with expertise in the use of weapons who is ideologically oriented towards extremism, and has, in all likelihood, witnessed atrocities and undergone the traumatic stress of conflict. In short, the foreign fighter constitutes a danger to any civilised society.

62. Unless such extremism finds an immediate outlet, it is conceivable (as has already happened) that the returnee will serve as animator/instigator/facilitator for other radicalised groups already present in Europe (lone wolves, homegrown terrorists or frustrated travellers) who have not had the chance to reach Daesh-controlled areas.

63. Law enforcement is on full alert in view of the unpredictability of this threat. Strictly speaking, homegrown terrorists are not necessarily linked to the ideology of AQ or Daesh. Radicalisation can also occur among individuals who are unconnected with religious groups but adhere to political movements or are radicalised for economic reasons. In some cases, social malaise, marginalisation and psychiatric disorders have been motivating factors. The hypothetical connection with online extremist propaganda can be found in self-radicalisation rituals premised on violent videos of atrocities committed by Daesh in crisis areas or through websites proselytising Salafist ideology.

64. It is difficult to detect and prevent the actions of lone perpetrators who may have never been caught up in previous investigations or inquiries. Moreover, radicalisation is often the final product of an accretion of many factors of which the community is usually unaware. The disruptive effect of a lone perpetrator is quite distinct from the actual effectiveness of the action. The instability and sense of utter vulnerability that such actions create is often even more gratifying to extremists than the number of victims.

65. Generally, lone perpetrators who commit acts of terrorism in Europe can be said to belong to a particular group made up mainly of young men with a criminal past who have suffered discrimination, humiliation or marginalisation within the societies in which they live. Though they are not rigorous practitioners, they self-radicalise very quickly with the help of the unremitting web-based narrative of Daesh, contact with veterans from one of the theatres of war, or while in jail. At the culmination of the radicalisation process, they decide to become "soldiers" for Daesh in their country of residence.

66. Direct connections between these individuals and Daesh are sometimes minimal, virtual, or even entirely absent. To be sure, their actions are inspired by the terrorist group, but the inspiration is generally the only identifiable connection between perpetrator and ideological mastermind. In some cases, the Daesh connection is based on an arrangement that involves a number of elements including: an extremist command centre located in an area of crisis which issues orders; facilitators drawn from the ranks of veterans or returnees who act as intermediaries; and the actual executors, who are recruited through web-based propaganda. The support network for all terrorist planning activity exploits the pressure points of the Schengen area to launch attacks by deploying anonymous, unskilled and vaguely radicalised personnel. The system depends upon both a dense network of accomplices, which can provide logistical support to extremist cells at the initial preparation stage, and a higher tier capable of managing unexpected events and opportunities. Only recently has it become apparent that Raqqa hosts an "operations HQ," which served as the mastermind behind a range of terrorist actions carried out by lone perpetrators.

67. A system such as this not only maximises the capacity of individual terrorists to inflict harm, but also presupposes the consolidated capacity of some organisations to operate pragmatically at multiple levels using lone attackers, support networks and returnees in order to refocus their efforts as necessary onto whichever players are most likely to prove effective in a given contingency.

4. The Sympathisers of Daesh

68. To pursue its strategy of indirect threats, Daesh relies on a support base consisting of persons with unique experiences who come from diverse backgrounds. Within this support base, only a minority are sufficiently radicalised to undertake an action in the name of Daesh. This minority therefore constitutes an asset that the terrorist organisation wants to manage and protect.

69. What is generally not acknowledged about the level of radicalisation in Europe is the social substratum from which extremist views emanate. The reference here is to a mixed group of people who initially may not have had any aggressive intent but who, owing to current conditions, experiences or difficulties, are eventually enticed by propaganda. Without any permanent affiliation, they nevertheless begin to espouse elements of the extremist ideology or begin to condone its criminal actions.

70. These persons are commonly considered "sympathisers" of Daesh because they have no stable relationship of dependency (or even moral ties) with extremist groups. Yet it is among these individuals that the opportunity, the idea or the support for a specific occurrence is formed, whether the occasion be a claim of responsibility for an attack or the spreading a news story about the destruction of an archaeological site in Syria. Within this category are also those who support organisations that may not be officially radical but are strongly supportive of extremist values and ideologies.

71. It is impossible to connect such persons with any overt advocacy of extremism, as to do so would be tantamount to punishing the expression of opinion. That said, it is groups such as these that support unremitting propaganda in the media. Along their path to the extremist universe, radicals will likely have emerged from a community where favourable opinions and sympathies for Daesh were commonly expressed.

72. An offshoot of radicalisation has been the emergence of deviant internet use by increasingly young members of society through sharing and networking video games as well as music and video-clips replete with acts of violence and extremist rhetoric. The digital leap forward that led to the final consolidation of the terrorist information and communications technology infrastructure has enabled a culture of terrorism - that is especially attractive to the younger generation - progressively to take root. It is a culture that speaks in the same communication codes as these young people, and thus succeeds in infiltrating and exploiting their behaviour. This is demonstrated by the proliferation of hyper-violent films of executions and other violence committed by Daesh fighters which are then made accessible to a wide audience (Antinori). The radicalisation of members of this cultural group is often done virtually through the filter of the web and takes place in a purely cyber-social and deterritorialised dimension. Recruitment is aimed at the younger and most psychologically fragile minds who demonstrate a need to assert their existence through hard-line, violent deeds. It is a form of generational fixation on false values conveyed through the incessant bombardment of messages of violence from media and social channels.

73. Migration can act as an accelerant also with respect to this base of personnel. The massive influx of refugees from crisis areas may include people susceptible to becoming, first supporters and, subsequently targets of radicalisation. Furthermore, a predominant number of young men make up the migrant population pouring into Europe. This is the very same group that, in areas where extremists hold sway, is most vulnerable to the unceasing appeals of radical principles and symbols and figures associated with radical movements. These are often used as political tools to nurture hatred for foreigners.

III. PREVENTING RADICALISATION: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST AN ENCROACHING ENEMY

74. Europe and the Arab-Muslim world today both suffer from problems of jihadism and radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. Both are now seeking preventative solutions, yet radicalisation is as elusive as it is impending. The search for solutions to stymie it has revealed the impossibility of finding a one-size-fits-all solution.

75. "Every radicalisation is local", while radicalisation itself is "an elusive concept" and "a complex and evolving phenomenon." Such observations illustrate the difficulty not only of preventing but, above all, defining the phenomenon. If the term "radicalisation" generally refers to the process through which "an individual or group adopts a violent form of action, directly linked to an ideology of extremist political, social or religious content that challenges the established political, social or cultural order", then radicalisation is not just the result of a lack of integration or of social, psychological, political or economic marginalisation. It is also the product of, on the one hand, a misperception of Islam and Muslims, and, on the other, the spread throughout the Muslim world of extremist political and religious ideologies that become breeding grounds for attitudes that condone the use of violence against a

designated enemy. As Fethi Benslama, a psychoanalyst of Tunisian origin who teaches at the University of Paris, has pointed out, "radicalisation is an attempt to find a root, and the young people who become involved in radicalism are primarily searching for their roots."

76. The complexity of radicalisation defies any efforts to use one single counterstrategy. In any case, to be valid, any strategy needs to achieve at least two objectives. First, already radicalised persons who form an integral part of the Islamist network need to be de-radicalised. The ultimate aim here is to make up for lost time and alter behaviour that has already changed. Second, preventing radicalisation also means attacking the breeding grounds which nourish violent extremism and Islamist ideologies that seek to wreak revenge on a world that is perceived as hostile.

77. The Manichean vision promoted by radical Islamist ideologies conceives life as a constant struggle between good and evil. This vision facilitates recruitment among disaffected youth who are marginalised economically, socially and politically. Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that sometimes adherence to Islamist terrorism follows directly from a past life of petty crime. In other words, the adherents shift from a 'neutral' form of radicalisation to one with powerful ideological connotations or, in some cases, it is a simple shift of allegiance towards a more profitable criminal organisation that happens to be more politicised or which simply offers an alternative. Prisons are hotbeds of radicalisation where recruiters are highly active. They are now being more closely monitored and are the subject of numerous studies.

78. Gilles de Kerchove, the EU Counter-Terrorism Co-ordinator, has stressed the importance of activating more national and local channels to stymie radicalisation in Europe.

79. The prevention of radicalisation is further complicated by the dissemination of radical ideologies and web-driven recruitment, which accelerate, facilitate and amplify the phenomenon.

80. The above point suggests that any measures to develop strategies, projects and ways to counter radicalisation must be complex and diversified because the phenomenon itself is a complex one. In 2011 the European Commission launched the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) to bring together European professionals who deal with the phenomenon on a daily basis (teachers, doctors, social workers, police officers, and so on) so that they might compare notes and map out a common route forward.

81. The working groups set up in connection with RAN analyse past and future actions with the primary purpose of helping operators spot signs of radicalisation through the creation of training programmes, publications and workshops. In addition, they help to identify the most significant areas and issues, and to highlight best practices. RAN does not replace but rather complements national and local prevention programmes responding to specific needs and circumstances. As a result, each country, European and otherwise, has drawn up its own roadmap.

82. The amount of effort that Europe is vesting into the prevention of radicalisation is evidenced by the latest report published by RAN which lists and assesses the principal projects, practices and approaches, all of which attest to the far-reaching commitment both of government institutions and of NGOs.

83. Unfortunately, the situation is quite different in the Balkans, an area that continues to serve as a recruiting ground and logistics base for Islamist terrorism. Despite the efforts of local security authorities, the complex social fabric and the spaces of sanctuary offered by what is a highly segmented terrain favour the continued elusiveness of the terrorist threat and its progressive entrenchment.

IV. COMBATING TERRORISM IN EUROPE: MULTIPLE ACTION LINES BUT FEW COMMON DEFINITIONS

84. In Europe, the history of common anti-terrorism legislation is relatively recent. In 2002, the EU Council Framework Decision on combating terrorism (2002/475/JHA) laid out the first agreed definition of "terrorism" and "terrorist organisation". Before the Framework Decision, only five Member States (the UK, Germany, Italy, France and Spain) had legislation on the books that was framed to meet national needs and to respond to the local challenges posed by radicalisation.

85. On 30 November 2005, the European Union's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which analysed the issue in more depth, was approved. The document identifies four main measures of prevention:

- combating radicalisation and the recruitment of terrorists;
- protection, namely by reducing the vulnerability of potential targets;
- the pursuit of terrorists, including efforts to choke off their sources of financing;
- the development of response mechanisms to deal with attacks.

86. In April 2007, the procedures related to the European Arrest Warrant were fine-tuned and clarified, thus adding another element to the European Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Recent attacks, such as at the Bataclan in Paris and at the Christmas market in Berlin, and the debate they triggered, brought the weaknesses of Europe to the forefront and called into question the principle of free movement within the Schengen area. This debate also highlighted the critical failings and shortcomings not only of how information is exchanged and in the unity of political purpose within the European Union, but also of the effectiveness of the relations and agreements between the EU and the countries to the south of the Mediterranean (Tunisia, for example, in the case of the Berlin attacker Anis Amri) as well as between the EU and areas of crisis such as the Balkans.

87. Despite the clear awareness of the global terrorist threat and the continuing flow of foreign fighters in and out of Europe, albeit in smaller numbers than in 2014-2015, EU member states are having difficulty keeping track of citizens who have 'migrated' to Daesh-controlled areas. They are also finding it difficult to identify groups - such as certain Salafist organisations in Germany (e.g. *Die Wahre Religion*, which was proscribed by the German Interior Ministry on 15 November 2016) with links to NGOs in the Balkans – who promote ideologies that incite people to enlist in the ranks of Daesh or act as lone perpetrators in Europe.

88. The aforementioned attacks demonstrated the ability of terrorists to move within the Schengen area for months without detection. But the failure also extends beyond the official borders of the European Union. The Balkans region, for example, has become increasingly prominent as a logistics hub and as a corridor of jihadist* terrorism from which significant flows of foreign fighters have passed. Many now threaten to return *en masse* and redirect attacks towards their own countries.

89. Greater cooperation is needed not only at the European level, but also and especially between the European Union and its neighbours who lack sufficient terrorism legislation and/or whose institutions are primarily concerned with preserving domestic balance and internal security rather than acting in concert with foreign or international bodies.

90. The European Counter-Terrorism Centre (ECTC) set up by Europol in January 2016 marks a step in the right direction. Its main objectives are to pool intelligence about foreign fighters and terrorism financing, and especially, to promote inter-national cooperation among institutions dedicated to combating terrorism.

91. A crucial counter-terrorism instrument is the EU passenger name record (PNR) system, which, following approval by the European Parliament on 14 April 2016, should be put into effect by all EU member states by 25 May 2018 with a view to strengthen intelligence exchanges. In addition, Europol, Euro-just, Frontex and CEPOL have all started opening channels on counter-terrorism with Lebanon, Tunisia and Turkey in the hopes of making up for the lack in intelligence. With increased military

pressure on Daesh, the flow of Foreign Terrorist Fighters' to conflict areas is changing. The threat without doubt is still high and there is the need to join forces to analyse the changing risk landscape and to deepen cooperation. It is also crucial for the source countries in Europe and elsewhere to take necessary precautions and share information on risky profiles with the transit and destination countries' law enforcement units.

92. Last but certainly not least of all the challenges, is the increasing fluidity of the terrorist phenomenon. National and international legislatures, security apparatuses and institutions are compelled to move very swiftly to revise their definitions of terrorism and terrorist organisation to help implement effective strategies of prevention against attacks that are often organised with minimum expenditure for maximum effect. Individual acts of violence, the use of trucks or sudden knife or machete attacks against unsuspecting passers-by in the main streets of European capitals are all actions that are punishable under various criminal justice systems in EU countries. However, countries often fail to associate these deeds with the aggravating factors of terrorism or mass murder.

V. CONCLUSIONS

93. Terrorism is a phenomenon that stems from a host of concurrent human motivations, including a sense of personal frustration. For this reason, terrorism continues to transform in ways that are difficult to predict. However, an analysis based on the structural features of the current terrorist threat to Europe should attempt to define the future challenges facing Europe and the Atlantic Alliance.

94. It is impossible to dismiss or ignore the significance of the relentless acceleration of the cyber component, which will continue to have a growing importance for extremists. Consequently, terrorist organisations will hone their specific skills, and enhance the efficacy of their propaganda machine and capacity to organise attacks.

95. Given what has already occurred in Iraq with the neutralisation of the capacities of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) of Al Zarqawi, the territorial losses of Daesh will lead to a reprioritisation of its efforts towards other theatres that are not necessarily crisis theatres.

96. The monitoring of the trafficking of human beings is therefore a priority matter demanding coordinated action both within the EU and within the NATO Alliance.

97. In view of the significant issues surrounding the theme of terrorism (immigration, foreign fighters, cyber-attacks and the like), it is essential to stress that a robust response to aberrant activity is impossible unless countries fundamentally agree on the need for common legislative framework that defines the contours of the terrorist threat, albeit in a manner that can be adapted to the requirements of individual states. Similar considerations also apply to the complex and controversial question of cyber-terrorism. Such legislation would mark an important and necessary step towards preventing radicalisation.

98. Finally, while greater sharing of legislative experiences with a view to building a uniform response to terrorism is a desirable aim, it is worth noting that intelligence and security agencies are already acknowledge the need for information sharing. In response to the fluidity and elusiveness of the enemy, agencies have for some time opted for enhanced intelligence sharing and are starting to break down the walls of past national compartmentalisation. This will facilitate a more rapid and effective national and European response to the terrorist threat.

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