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Calibrating the Response: Turkey's ISIS Returnees

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Principal Findings

What's new? Turkey has to deal with thousands of citizens who travelled to join ISIS and have now returned. Of the few convicted, many will soon be released from jail. Others are under surveillance. The fate of the rest is murky.

Why does it matter? ISIS's diminished stature and measures adopted by the Turkish authorities have spared Turkey from ISIS attacks for more than three years. But while the threat should not be overplayed, it has not necessarily disappeared. That Turkish returnees turn their back on militancy is important for national and regional security.

What should be done? Ankara's approach toward returnees or others suspected of ties to jihadism relies mostly on surveillance and detention. The government could consider also offering support for returnees' families, alternatives for youngsters at risk of being drawn into militancy and support for returnees released after serving ISIS-related jail time.

Executive Summary

Turkey, like many countries, faces a challenge in dealing with citizens who travelled to join the Islamic State (ISIS) and have now come home. Thousands of returnees have crossed back into Turkey. Some were involved in ISIS attacks between 2014 and 2017 on Turkish soil that killed nearly 300 civilians. As the authorities stepped up counter-terrorism efforts, some returnees came under tight surveillance. Some were prosecuted and jailed. Those who returned early on are more likely to have remained undetected. The collapse of ISIS's "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq has sapped its ability to inspire and mobilise. Turkish clampdowns have also helped spare the country from ISIS attacks for more than three years. Still, scant data exists on the diverse trajectories of former ISIS members. Ankara's reliance on surveillance and detention to disrupt ISIS is resource-intensive and may not be fool-proof. The government could explore supplementary policies that offer help for returnees' families, alternatives for youths at risk of being drawn into militancy and support for those released after serving time for ISIS-related crimes.

The profiles of Turkish citizens who joined ISIS varied widely and so did their motivations. They included veterans of past wars, some of whom were key recruiters; ultra-conservative Sunni Muslims, drawn by the prospect of life under strict Islamic rule; Islamist Kurds pitted against the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which has carried out an insurgency in Turkey for more than 35 years and is designated a "terrorist" group by Turkey, the U.S. and the European Union, and its Syrian affiliate, the People's Protection Units (YPG); and youth seeking glory, wealth or "purification" of petty crime or drugs. Some returned to the social circles from which they were recruited. Others, rejected by their old friends and families, blended into Turkey's big cities.

Turkish authorities' understanding of the ISIS danger has evolved. At first, like counterparts in other countries, they underestimated the threat that returnees could pose and in 2014-2015 remained largely ambivalent toward ISIS recruitment. That perception began to shift over 2016, especially after an ISIS attack in May that year on Gaziantep province's police headquarters, one in a spate of sixteen attacks between 2014 and 2017 that cost hundreds of civilians their lives, but the first that appeared to target Turkish state institutions. The most recent ISIS attack on Turkish soil was a shooting at a nightclub on 1 January 2017 that killed 39 people. Since then, security agencies have kept ISIS in check, foiling plots through surveillance, detention and tighter border security. But the threat has not entirely disappeared, as Turkish officials themselves admit. Turkish policies may have pushed returnees and what is left of their networks further underground. Even a few individuals slipping through the cracks can be a serious menace if they recruit, finance or plan future attacks.

Turkey faces challenges with prosecuting and incarcerating returnees similar to those faced by other countries, but there are also unique aspects. Turkish officials still view ISIS as less threatening to national security than the PKK insurgency or what they call the "Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation" ("FETÖ"), a transnational movement Ankara accuses of infiltrating the Turkish bureaucracy and carrying out the July 2016 coup attempt. Suspects accused of affiliation with the latter two groups

face tougher prosecution and sentencing. Prosecutors and judges largely assume that women who went to Syria or Iraq to live under ISIS's rule were simply obeying their husbands and had little agency. Lawyers for the victims of some ISIS attacks suggest that with more resources, investigations might have uncovered the masterminds of the strikes, rather than just the foot soldiers who carried them out. If convicted at all, ISIS returnees tend to be jailed for three or four years for membership in a terrorist group. Hundreds are due for release soon. In prisons, some may have accrued connections and possibly also status in militant circles.

At the same time, Turkish state institutions have only recently begun contemplating what they call "de-radicalisation" or "rehabilitation" efforts – broadly speaking, policies designed to move former militants away from jihadist ideology and violence. For the most part, the authorities rely on surveillance – monitoring those they believe may pose a threat – combined with short detentions designed to scare anyone whom they think is poised to join militant circles away from doing so. To the extent that other policies exist, their goals are vague, and the approaches of the ministries involved uncoordinated. Social workers, police, imams, prison wardens and local officials lack specialised training and guidelines on how to deal with returnees and their families. Civil society actors are largely absent and officials reluctant to work with outsiders. Mid-level officials in Ankara express the need for options beyond security measures.

A number of steps could help. First, Turkey should differentiate between ISIS, PKK, "FETÖ" and ultra-leftist groups, each of which poses a different type of challenge to the Turkish state. Lumping them together muddles policy and hinders efforts to design an approach tailored to the jihadist threat. The government should ensure that overstretched judges, courts and prosecutors have the resources to investigate crimes by ISIS recruiters and returnees. Prison authorities and other agencies might share information on convicts jailed for ISIS-related crimes before their release to ensure they get appropriate support as they adapt to life outside bars. The authorities should consider what help they can offer families who seek aid in deterring youngsters from turning to militancy. They might also offer those young people extracurricular activities or jobs as alternatives. It is true that such programs have a mixed and often contentious record in other countries. But if the authorities are responding to families' demands and are sensitive to their concerns, policies along these lines might still be valuable.

Despite the lull in attacks, the evolution of the Syria and Iraq conflicts could yet present Turkey with new challenges related to returnees, particularly if ISIS resurges in either country or battle-hardened fighters cross back from war zones in Syria's north. Turkey has kept the threat at bay for more than three years with an approach based largely on surveillance and detentions. But a strategy toward returnees that combines security measures with social programs helping former ISIS members steer clear of militancy and supporting their families might over time be more sustainable and relieve some of the burden on the security services.

Istanbul/Ankara/Brussels, 29 June 2020

Calibrating the Response: Turkey's ISIS Returnees

I. Introduction

Since 2013, Turkey has been a leading source of recruits for ISIS and a hub for smuggling weapons, supplies and people across the Turkish-Syrian border.¹ The number of Turkish citizens who left to live in ISIS-held territory is high, with estimates ranging from 5,000-9,000.² Turkey is thus one of the countries with the largest number of recruits in absolute terms, albeit not relative to its population of more than 80 million. In a 2015 nationwide poll, 3.2 per cent of Turkish respondents said they knew someone who had joined ISIS.³ Still more may have planned to join but were foiled by circumstances and could harbour sympathy for the group while escaping state scrutiny. Thousands of recruits have now returned, many seemingly slipping undetected back across the border.

Turkey initially showed an ambivalent attitude to the flow of fighters across its southern border. In the Syrian civil war's early stages, the Turkish authorities, like their counterparts in some other countries, adopted a relatively complacent view

¹ A 2015 report ranked Turkish nationality among the top five "foreign fighter nationalities" in Syria and Iraq, after Tunisian, Saudi Arabian and Russian. It counted 2,000-2,200 Turks who had already joined ISIS or other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq by November 2015. The report adds: "Turkish fighters (who joined violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria) appear to return home in greater numbers than those from elsewhere". "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq", The Soufan Group, December 2015.

² Some studies have estimated that between 2013 and 2016, up to 9,000 Turkish citizens, including women, have gone to Syrian or Iraqi ISIS-held territory (some more than once, returning for certain periods). The methodology of such studies is often unclear. See Serhat Erkmen, "Suriye ve Irak'ta savaşan Türkiyeli mücahitler" [Turkey's mujahidin fighting in Syria and Iraq], Al Jazeera Türk, 25 May 2015. Ahmet S. Yayla, "Turkish ISIS and AQ Foreign Fighters: Reconciling the Numbers and Perception of the Terrorism Threat", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 42 (July 2019). Other accounts in Turkish media and from Turkish political parties and officials hint at the number of Turkish citizens who joined. In June 2014, the Turkish daily *Milliyet* reported that ISIS had 3,000 Turkish members (without specifying whether this number included women). "3 bin Türk savaşıyor" [3,000 Turks are fighting], *Milliyet*, 13 June 2014. In February 2015, then Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç said 1,000 youth of Turkish nationality (without specifying their gender) had joined ISIS. "Arınç: IŞİD'e Türkiye'den 1,000 kişi katıldı" [Arınç: 1,000 individuals from Turkey joined ISIS], *Bianet*, 23 February 2015; in March 2015, the Turkish daily *Hürriyet* reported that 2,307 Turkish citizens had joined ISIS (without specifying their gender). "Üç oğlu birden IŞİD'e katıldı" [All three of his sons joined ISIS], *Hürriyet*, 20 March 2015; a July 2016 field-based report prepared by Professor Ümit Özdağ for the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), of which he used to be a member, concluded that between 5,200-9,000 had joined ISIS or the al-Nusra Front, excluding women and children, whom the report estimated made up around 40 per cent of the Turkish citizens who went. Report covered in "Türkiye'nin detaylı IŞİD raporu" [Turkey's detailed ISIS report], *Cumhuriyet*, 1 July 2016.

³ "Metropoll IŞİD anketinden şaşırtan sonuçlar" [Striking results in Metropoll's ISIS survey], *Internet Haber*, 15 October 2015.

toward young people going to join rebels fighting Bashar al-Assad's regime.⁴ In 2013 and 2014, when Turkish families notified officials of sons and daughters tempted to join ISIS, the authorities did little to stop them.⁵ Turkish officials claim they were "caught off guard" in the war's early years. "Foreign fighters would come in with valid travel documents as ordinary tourists and countries of origin were not sharing information with us", one official said.⁶ Western and domestic critics, however, accuse Ankara of turning a blind eye to militants' movement across the border.⁷ Despite improved border security, illegal entry from Syria still takes place. There is also the risk of still more militants seeking to enter Turkey in the event of an all-out, Russian-backed regime offensive in Idlib.⁸

While Turkey has suffered no attack claimed by or attributed to ISIS since January 2017, returnees were involved in earlier plots. The first deaths at ISIS's hands on Turkish soil took place in March 2014, when foreign militants returning from Syria shot two security force members (also killing one civilian). The security forces had attempted to stop the vehicle carrying the militants at the boundary of the central Anatolian province of Niğde. In 2015 and 2016, Turkish ISIS members who had travelled to Syria and returned targeted pro-Kurdish movement and opposition groups (see Appendix A). From 2014 to 2017, 291 people died in sixteen attacks claimed by or attributed to ISIS.⁹ Turkish authorities stepped up policing efforts to crack down on ISIS after a suicide bombing at police headquarters in the province of Gaziantep in May 2016 and four strikes on tourist sites in Istanbul between January 2016 and January 2017. Ankara credits such efforts for stopping attacks for over three years, saying it has foiled more than 30 plots.¹⁰

The 2017 collapse of ISIS's territorial "caliphate" significantly weakened the group's capacity to mobilise but did not make it or global jihadism irrelevant. If new opportunities to join ISIS or a new transnational militant outfit emerge, returnees – including those soon to be released from prisons – arguably could do so.¹¹ "I still hold onto most of my previous convictions, *elhamdulillah* (praise be to God)", a Turkish returnee told Crisis Group.¹² ISIS cells – pushed underground by Turkey's security clampdown – may also serve as a rear support network for the group, were it to regain

⁴ See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°178, *How the Islamic State Rose, Fell and Could Rise Again in the Maghreb*, 24 July 2017.

⁵ Crisis Group interviews, returnee families, Adiyaman, July 2019.

⁶ Turkish foreign ministry official, speech at workshop titled "Radicalisation, Terrorism and Foreign Terrorist Fighters: The Current State of Affairs and Future Steps", Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM), Ankara, 2 May 2019.

⁷ Some Western officials and Turkish government critics argue that some in Ankara did not prioritise tackling ISIS because they viewed it as opposing common enemies, in that it was curbing the advance of the PKK's Syrian affiliate, the YPG, and weakening the Assad regime. Crisis Group interviews, academics, lawyers and opposition party affiliates, summer 2019.

⁸ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°213, *Silencing the Guns in Syria's Idlib*, 14 May 2020.

⁹ See the list of ISIS attacks and corresponding court cases in Appendix A.

¹⁰ Senior Turkish police officer, speech at ORSAM workshop, op. cit.

¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, lawyers, Turkish officials and returnees, July 2019-May 2020. Europol has also highlighted the potential threat of returnees in relation to the reestablishment of logistical, financial and recruitment cells. "TE-SAT 2014: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report", Europol, 2014.

¹² Crisis Group telephone interview, May 2020.

strength in Iraq or Syria. ISIS continues to publish videos of Turkish militants pledging allegiance to the group, shows some signs of increasing assertiveness in Iraq and has instructed its affiliates worldwide to exploit potential disorder caused by the COVID-19 crisis (though it remains unclear if those calls have had any concrete impact).¹³

There is insufficient data to judge the risk that Turkish returnees remain connected to ISIS or could return to its ranks, but some social dynamics that enabled past jihadist mobilisation are still present. Veterans of past jihadist wars remain influential.¹⁴ A large number of Turkey's Salafis bitterly oppose the West, the PKK and the Kurdish movement more broadly, as well as Alevis, heterodox Muslims whom Salafis view as infidels. Such social tensions do not necessarily mean that people will turn to militancy but in the past have helped push some toward violence.¹⁵ The state offers little in the way of support for troubled youth. Less than 10 per cent, or some 450 Turkish citizens (around 30 of them female), of the estimated thousands who returned are imprisoned on ISIS-related terrorism charges – around half of those under arrest are awaiting trial.¹⁶ It remains unclear how those who have not been caught and have gone home or hidden elsewhere fare.

As many countries grapple with how to handle returnees, this report focuses on steps Turkey is taking toward its own nationals and offers recommendations for how to deal with returnees to forestall new cycles of recruitment. There is little research on the recruitment into ISIS of Turkish nationals or their return from Iraq and Syria. This report aims to start filling that gap. It focuses on Turkish nationals, rather than on the equally important challenge posed by high numbers of foreign ISIS-affiliated individual members in Turkey, some of whom say they are determined to make the country their home.

The report is based on interviews conducted by Crisis Group between April 2019 and December 2019 in Istanbul and southern and south-eastern provinces of Turkey, as well as remotely in the first half of 2020. Crisis Group spoke with returnees, as well as relatives, friends and a range of others in places where returnees are now living or from where they were recruited. Widespread fear among returnees of prosecution and the stigma attached to ISIS hampered field research, as did travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was difficult to speak to female return-

¹³ See Crisis Group Commentary, "Contending with ISIS in the Time of Coronavirus", 31 March 2020; and Sam Heller, "When Measuring ISIS's 'Resurgence', Use the Right Standard", Crisis Group Commentary, 13 May 2020.

¹⁴ For an account of influential Turkish jihadists who were active in al-Qaeda before joining ISIS, see Doğu Eroğlu, *ISIS Networks: Radicalisation, Organisation and Logistics in Turkey* (Istanbul, 2018), pp. 63-69 (Turkish).

¹⁵ Together, Alevis and Kurdish movement supporters make up around 25 per cent of Turkey's population. While there are no official statistics, estimates of the number of Alevis range from 15 to 20 per cent of the population. Judging by the electoral support for the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), the proportion of Kurdish movement sympathisers ranges from 8 to 12 per cent. See "The Alevis' fight for recognition in Turkey", Deutsche Welle, 26 January 2020; and "Turkey elections 2018", TRT World, 27 June 2018.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Turkish justice ministry official, July 2019. The pro-government daily *Yeni Şafak* reported that, of the Turkish citizens imprisoned on ISIS-related charges, 95 were convicted and 138 were convicted by the first instance courts but awaiting their final appeals, while 189 remained under arrest. "Hapiste 40 ülkeden DEAŞ'lı var" [ISIS members from 40 countries are in Turkish prisons], *Yeni Şafak*, 8 November 2019.

ees, so research related to women formerly linked to ISIS relied on interviews with relatives and neighbours, as well as lawyers who know them personally. The report also draws on interviews with Turkish state officials from all relevant ministries as well as diplomats and grassroots actors. It builds on Crisis Group's prior reporting on Turkey, Syria, surrounding countries and ISIS activities in the region.¹⁷

¹⁷ For previous coverage of related issues, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°273, *Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria*, 11 October 2019; Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°72, *Steadying the New Status Quo in Syria's North East*, 27 November 2019; Crisis Group Middle East Report N°208, *Women and Children First: Repatriating the Westerners Affiliated with ISIS*, 18 November 2019; Crisis Group Middle East Report N°197, *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, 14 March 2019; and Crisis Group Europe Report N°252, *Mitigating Risks for Syrian Refugee Youth in Turkey's Şanlıurfa*, 11 February 2019.

II. Recruitment and Return

Turkish authorities have been successful in preventing ISIS attacks since January 2017 but lack a full picture of their significant returnee population. A systematic and comprehensive assessment of Turkey's returnees that accounts for dynamics in different parts of the country would be important to determine what measures may be needed. A one-size-fits-all formula is unlikely to work.

The authorities have made some attempts to assess risks that could offer a starting point for further analysis. In one early effort to profile ISIS affiliates in prisons, officials concluded that most were not die-hard. "We tried to gauge how hardline they were by asking questions like whether they could be friends with people who didn't carry out Islamic requirements", a Turkish security official said. "They had been moved by the 'Muslims are being victimised' line and were excited and adventurous types looking for [a] sense of cause".¹⁸ Turkish authorities should build on such assessments. Policymakers might look at factors such as why individuals joined ISIS, how long they stayed with the group, what they experienced under the "caliphate", whether they returned by choice or necessity, and how connected they remain to past networks.¹⁹ "If we could have four or five categories based on likely risks returnees could pose, these individuals can be subjected to different rehabilitation programs, tailor-made for each category", one Turkish security official told Crisis Group.²⁰

One key determinant of whether former ISIS associates can turn their backs on the movement appears to be the social networks in which they find themselves once back. If ISIS returnees rejoin the circles that enabled their recruitment or simply maintain connections with friends who are involved with militancy, they can more easily resort to violence again.²¹ Some Turkish ISIS returnees have found different lives once back in Turkey: some rejected by or themselves choosing to turn away from their past contacts, some fearing prosecution and leading hidden lives in Turkey's big cities. Others have simply folded back into their old social networks, including in areas that in the past were fertile ground for recruiters.

A. Who Joined, and Why?

Crisis Group's research suggests that while ISIS appealed to diverse Turkish citizens, most men fit one of four profiles, which are not mutually exclusive: veteran jihadists from previous conflicts; marginalised urban youths; ultra-conservative Sunni Muslims; and Islamist Kurds whose primary motivation was fighting the PKK/YPG. Most

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, October 2019.

¹⁹ For factors identified as relevant elsewhere, see Edwin Bakker, Christoph Paulussen and Eva Entenmann, "Returning Jihadist Foreign Fighters: Challenges Pertaining to Threat Assessment and Governance of This Pan-European Problem", *Security and Human Rights*, vol. 11 (2014); "Focus on Returnees", General Intelligence and Security Service (Netherlands), 2017.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Turkish security official, Ankara, October 2019.

²¹ Evidence from elsewhere supports this conclusion. See Mary Beth Altier, Emma Leonard Boyle and John G. Horgan, "Returning to the Fight: An Empirical Analysis of Terrorist Engagement and Recidivism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 31 (2019); Badi Hasisi, Tomer Carmel, David Weisburd and Michael Wolfowicz, "Crime and Terror: Examining Criminal Risk Factors for Terrorist Recidivism", *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, vol. 35 (2019).

women, or at least those whose stories Crisis Group learned of, appear to be primarily from conservative Sunni backgrounds and were eager to live under strict Islamist rule; many left with husbands, though often remarried, sometimes more than once, after being widowed.²² Security officials say recruitment was particularly high in certain suburbs of Istanbul, Ankara, Adiyaman, Bursa, Gaziantep, Adana, Kocaeli and Konya.²³ Most recruits were aged between eighteen and 26 and often joined alongside friends and relatives.²⁴ Turkish ISIS recruiters, by contrast, were mostly older than 35. According to returnees' acquaintances, recruiters sought to attract youths with promises of a richer, more pious and purposeful life under ISIS rule.²⁵

Among Turkish nationals who took up recruitment and propaganda roles for ISIS were seasoned fighters from previous conflicts in Turkey's neighbourhood or linked to al-Qaeda attacks in Turkey in 2003.²⁶ Some had fought in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In the 1990s, some mobilised to join the wars in Chechnya, Bosnia and Kosovo. A stream of Turkish pan-Islamist militants travelled from Afghanistan to Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003.²⁷ ISIS seems to have exploited pre-existing networks in Turkey that had rallied people to join the insurgency against the U.S. occupation in Iraq.²⁸ From 2012-2013, some of these veterans journeyed to Syria to participate in ISIS' state-building project, while others played key roles as ISIS recruiters in Turkey itself.

The vast majority of Turks joining ISIS were, however, young – under 26 – and not seasoned fighters. Many reportedly hailed from rural families who had migrated to cities in the past two decades or lived in former countryside swallowed up by urban

²² Assessing the motives of women who left for Syria is hard. The difficulty of talking directly to these women means that any assessment must rely on the views of friends or associates of the women, but more usually of their family members or lawyers, who are often men. According to Onur Güler, a lawyer defending ISIS suspects: "Due to the culture of the pious communities, Turkish women were not prone to joining ISIS without their husbands. Instances of women making their own decisions to go without a husband appear very rare, though in one case in Konya a woman decided to divorce her husband because she began regarding him as an infidel since he was working as a police officer and, in her eyes, serving the *tağut* [false god] state". Crisis Group telephone interview, May 2020. A man who said his brother had been "martyred fighting the Nusayris (the Syrian regime) on behalf of ISIS" and who had, after his brother's death, gone to Syria to bring back his brother's wife, told Crisis Group: "Turkish women did not join individually like European women. I don't know of any Turkish woman there whose story was not husband-centred". Crisis Group telephone interview, 14 June 2020.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish security officials, Istanbul, fall 2019.

²⁴ Most accounts of Turkish ISIS returnees Crisis Group came across during its field research said the individuals were in the 18-26 age group when they joined the jihadists. Other field-based accounts, Crisis Group interviews with Turkish officials and news reports corroborate this finding.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Adiyaman and Diyarbakır, July 2019.

²⁶ Four al-Qaeda attacks in Istanbul in November 2003 targeted two synagogues, the British consulate and HSBC bank. Fifty-eight people were killed and 753 injured. Ely Karmon, "The Synagogue Bombings in Istanbul: Al-Qaeda's New Front?", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 18 November 2003.

²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, academics, Ankara, July 2019. Also see Serhat Erkmen, "Suriye ve Irak'ta savaşıyan Türkiyeli mücahitler", op. cit.

²⁸ Aaron Stein, "The Islamic State in Turkey: a deep dive into a dark place", War on the Rocks, 6 April 2016; Aaron Stein, "Islamic State Networks in Turkey", Atlantic Council, October 2016.

sprawl.²⁹ One of the world's most rapidly urbanising countries, Turkey had one quarter of its population living in cities in 1950, a proportion that rose to three quarters by 2015.³⁰ In the south-eastern province of Adiyaman – a recruitment hub for ISIS in 2014-2015 – much of the majority-urban population has moved to the city from rural villages over the last two decades.³¹

While social, economic and psychological grievances do not fully explain why youths joined ISIS – the vast majority of youngsters in deprived areas did not do so – they appear to have been contributing factors that made some young people more susceptible. People who had recently migrated to Adiyaman city felt looked down upon and uprooted, saying they missed their tightly knit villages; youth in particular struggled.³² “When they moved into the cities, families lost the social protection nets of rural life and didn’t have a status in urban life”, one local human rights worker said.³³ Unemployment in the majority-Kurdish province is high and wages are low, with yearly per capita income of \$4,771, less than half the national average of \$9,693 in 2018.³⁴ “Some of those we caught returning from Syria at the border had up to \$10,000 on them. Some men from the Black Sea region went like ‘seasonal workers’ to make money”, a Turkish security official said.³⁵ Officials also voice concern that youths who are abusing drugs – cheap narcotics are readily available across Turkey – are more vulnerable to ISIS recruitment pitches.³⁶

Socio-economic ills were certainly part of the narrative spun by recruiters. Adiyaman locals referred to youths turning toward ISIS as “*Cumasızlar*” (those absent from Friday prayers) after they stopped attending the state imam’s sermons, viewing him as an “infidel” (*kafir*).³⁷ Male recruits were reportedly lured by promises of payments, polygamy and adventure.³⁸ According to telephone wiretaps of those charged with ISIS-related crimes, youth with criminal records or alcohol and drug problems sometimes saw joining as a second chance, describing it as “purification” (*arınma*)

²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, locals, academics, lawyers, Adiyaman, Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa, summer 2019. “Most of the families of those who joined ISIS I know had migrated from rural areas to cities in the last two decades. ... I would estimate that 70-80 per cent of those who joined from Bursa were children of families who migrated there from the majority-Kurdish east and south east of Turkey, so most were ethnically Kurdish, possibly with sympathies for the Kurdish Hizbullah”. Crisis Group telephone interview, lawyer defending ISIS suspects, 30 May 2020.

³⁰ See Stephen Karam et al., “Rise of the Anatolian Tigers: Turkey Urbanization Review”, World Bank, April 2015.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, mayor of Adiyaman, July 2019.

³² Crisis Group interviews, locals, Adiyaman, July 2019.

³³ Crisis Group interview, Adiyaman, July 2019.

³⁴ Data compiled by the Turkish Statistical Institute.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, October 2019.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Adiyaman, July 2019. A single pill of the synthetic drug referred to as “ecstasy” costs 5 Turkish lira (75 cents) in Şanlıurfa and 20 lira (\$3) in Istanbul. It is much cheaper than alcohol, which is heavily taxed. Crisis Group field observations, July 2019.

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, locals, Adiyaman, July 2019.

³⁸ Crisis Group telephone interviews, returnees, May 2020; Crisis Group interview, expert on ISIS recruitment and networks in Turkey, April 2019.

of past sins.³⁹ A local butcher is blamed by relatives for using such appeals to recruit over twenty youths in a few Adıyaman neighbourhoods.⁴⁰ One such youth, Orhan Gönder, was sentenced to life in mid-December 2019 for a bombing in June 2015 at a Diyarbakır People's Democratic Party (HDP) rally that killed five. Alevi by birth, he told his family at age sixteen that he was joining ISIS to learn the "real Islam", his mother said.⁴¹ His cousin, Ercan, who visits him in jail, said recruiters had told Gönder "his feelings of emptiness can only be overcome if they become part of a larger cause".⁴²

ISIS also recruited among Salafis.⁴³ Indeed, many returnees whose stories Crisis Group pieced together came from Salafi circles, sometimes having joined only a short time before leaving for Syria or Iraq. Most Salafis – in Turkey as elsewhere – are law-abiding. Moreover, the diversity of beliefs among those considered Salafis in Turkey is so wide that it would be hard to draw general conclusions about the relationship between Salafism in the country and violent jihad.⁴⁴ Still, Turkish authorities admit that they keep a close watch on Salafis, some of whom in turn say they feel unjustly targeted.⁴⁵ In a sign of the suspicion with which Ankara views Salafis, a 2016 Turkish police intelligence report estimated that 10,000-20,000 Turkish citizens were, in the report's words, "radical Salafi/Takfiri".⁴⁶ The report did not define what it meant by that term but noted that these people constituted a "potential threat to our country".⁴⁷

³⁹ See Eroğlu, *ISIS Networks*, op. cit., pp. 32-33. A lawyer defending individuals detained on ISIS-related terrorism charges estimated that 10-15 per cent of them had a history of petty crime or drug abuse. Crisis Group telephone interview, 30 May 2020.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, acquaintances of Turkish returnees, Adıyaman, July 2019.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, mother of Orhan Gönder, Adıyaman, July 2019.

⁴² Crisis Group field research, Adıyaman, July 2019.

⁴³ Salafi groups in Turkey strive for the restoration of "real Islam" based on a literal reading of the Quran and sunna (*sünnet*). They object to modern Islamic practice that, in their view, has incorporated novel elements over time that distance it from the Prophet Muhammad's example. Sometimes that translates into intolerance toward adherents of other strains of Islam, including Sufism and heterodox sects. Salafists differ among themselves over how to demonstrate their beliefs. Some "quietist" Salafists eschew political participation and focus instead on propagating Islam and perfecting their faith. Other "activist" (*haraki*) Salafists believe in participating in politics to achieve what they see as a more Islamic society and state. And "jihadist" Salafists abhor what they consider un-Islamic, *tağut* (false god) states and believe it necessary to topple them using violence, in order to eventually establish an Islamic state. See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005.

⁴⁴ More than 100 organisations that can be broadly categorised as Salafi are legally registered in Turkey as "associations" or "foundations". Crisis Group interview, Turkish presidency official, Ankara, October 2019. An interior ministry official estimated the total membership at well over 60,000. An interior ministry official gave this estimate in 2018 in an interview with a Crisis Group consultant.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Turkish presidency official, Ankara, October 2019.

⁴⁶ "Takfiri" is a pejorative term for Salafi-jihadists, playing up their *takfir*, or pronouncement of apostasy, upon Muslims whom they accuse of acts that "negate" Islam.

⁴⁷ İsmail Saymaz, "İşte Emniyet'in selefi raporu: Türkiye tabanları 20 bine ulaştı, bu bir tehdit" [The Turkish National Police's Salafi report: their supporter base has reached 20,000, this is a threat], *Hürriyet*, 25 April 2016. "I would characterise only a fraction, maybe 3,000-5,000, of Salafis as being close to resorting to violence as a means", said a lawyer defending ISIS suspects. Crisis Group telephone interview, 30 May 2020.

In Turkey, ISIS recruiters appear to have appealed to prospective members' desire to live under strict Islamic rules and escape what they described as state harassment, including searches of women wearing the ultra-conservative full body and face covers.⁴⁸ They reportedly sought recruits at gatherings around Salafi "travelling preachers" (*gezici vaiz*) at teahouses, bookstores and unofficial madrasas. "I went to live the Islam of our Prophet and his companions (*sahabe*)", one Turkish ISIS returnee who lived in Raqqa for two years told Crisis Group. "I was literally hypnotised by the great way of life that we had there when I first arrived. I lived the real Islam".⁴⁹ Especially in the civil war's earlier phases, this desire to migrate resonated broadly among a segment of ultra-conservative Turkish citizens, many of whom were slow to react when the caliphate turned out not to be the utopia they had expected.

A last group, Islamist Kurds, joined to fight the YPG/PKK, whom they viewed as atheist. Some supported the Hûda-Par (Free Cause Party), a political offshoot of the Kurdish Hizbullah, a predominantly Kurdish Sunni Islamist militant group.⁵⁰ The PKK and YPG were the most mentioned issue on Twitter by Turkish-speaking ISIS supporters, according to an analysis of more than 2,500 accounts and 787,400 tweets shared between 2013 and 2015.⁵¹ The ISIS siege of the Syrian town of Kobani in September-October 2014 became a rallying cry. "We saw videos of fellow Muslims slaughtered by 'the anarchists' [the YPG/PKK]. This motivated many of us to join to defend our brothers", one Kurdish male returnee said.⁵² In October 2014, Kurdish Hizbullah sympathisers clashed with pro-PKK Kurds protesting Turkey's failure at the time to protect Kobani from ISIS; more than 50 people died over three days.⁵³ A cousin of another returnee from Diyarbakır tried to dissuade him from going, but said his cousin "was convinced that if we did not go fight the PKK they would soon finish off the rest of us [referring to Islamist Kurds]".⁵⁴

B. *Returning from the Caliphate*

The fate and location of a significant portion of Turkish ISIS militants and their varying affiliated wives and children are unknown. Fearing the stigma of being associated with ISIS, some families have kept deaths secret, holding night-time burials.⁵⁵ Some analysts estimate that between 1,000-2,000 Turkish citizens, most of them

⁴⁸ "In Syria under ISIS they were more comfortable, as a couple, because all women wore the same attire, the full black *khimar* and *niqab*, while in Turkey they would be searched even if the metal detectors gave no signal", said an investigative journalist who has conducted extensive research on Salafi groups in Turkey. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, March 2019.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, returnee, Istanbul, September 2019.

⁵⁰ See Eroğlu, *ISIS Networks*, op. cit., p. 229.

⁵¹ "Twitter Social Network Analysis on Turkish-speaking Daesh Supporters", ORSAM, August 2016. This report's methodology was based on J.M. Berger and Jonathan Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter", Brookings Institution, March 2015.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, September 2019.

⁵³ "6-7 Ekim'in acı bilançosu 50 ölü" [Bitter consequence of 6-7 October protests: 50 dead], *Hürriyet*, 6 November 2014.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Diyarbakır, July 2019.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, local human rights lawyer, Adıyaman, July 2019.

males, died fighting in ISIS's ranks.⁵⁶ A smaller number defected to other insurgent groups, including jihadist militias, while hundreds of others have been detained in Syria or Iraq.⁵⁷ Thousands appear to have returned to Turkey from ISIS-controlled territory.⁵⁸ Even some potential recruits who did not make it to Syria or Iraq arguably could pose a danger. "We should also worry about those who wanted to go and didn't make it", a Turkish official told Crisis Group. "Some of those who came back are still dangerous, but the point is, it is not just them".⁵⁹

Part of the uncertainty owes to the once porous 911km border between Turkey and Syria. Turkish officials seem to have only a vague notion of how many people returned prior to 2016 before they tightened security.⁶⁰ Illegal crossing decreased due to stricter policing along the border after 2016, but, with the help of smugglers, people continued to cross back from Syria for a fee of \$500-\$2,000.⁶¹ An investigative journalist said some of the 500 ISIS affiliates on whom he conducted research in 2014 and 2015 "were 'part-time jihadists' – they came and went a few times".⁶² A new wall and beefed-up border security after mid-2018 further restricted movement to

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Diyarbakır and Adıyaman, July 2019. Estimates of the number of Turkish men killed fighting with ISIS vary: in May 2015, Serhat Erkmen estimated – based on his count of funerals in Turkey – that some 900 Turkish citizens had been killed fighting alongside ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Erkmen, "Suriye ve Irak'ta savaşan Türkiyeli mücahitler", op. cit. In a July 2019 article, Ahmet Yayla said around 2,000 ISIS members of Turkish nationality were likely killed in combat. Yayla, "Turkish ISIS and Al-Qaeda Foreign Fighters", op. cit. In June 2016, a Turkish foreign ministry representative was cited stating that 500 militants of Turkish nationality fighting in the ranks of ISIS or al-Nusra were killed in Iraq and Syria. Cited in Monica Marks, "ISIS and Nusra in Turkey: Jihadist Recruitment and Ankara's Response", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, June 2016.

⁵⁷ Around 100 Turkish ISIS fighters and a few hundred Turkish women remain in Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-controlled camps. Crisis Group field observations, north-eastern Syria, June and October 2019. Around 400 Turkish women, mostly wives of ISIS fighters, remain imprisoned in Iraq. "Türkiye'ye getirilen IŞİD'lilerin 250 çocuğu travma tedavisine alındı" [250 children of ISIS families brought back to Turkey receive trauma therapy], T24, 14 August 2019. Ankara repatriated around 200 children of ISIS families held in those Iraqi prisons in mid-2019. "Her eyes were full of fear': Turkey repatriates children of ISIS followers", *The New York Times*, 27 July 2019.

⁵⁸ The prominent Turkish daily *Hürriyet* claimed in May 2015 that of the 2,700 Turkish citizen ISIS members who went to Syria and Iraq, 1,500 had returned to Turkey. The newspaper did not disaggregate male and female returnees. Cited in Erkmen, "Suriye ve Irak'ta savaşan Türkiyeli mücahitler", op. cit.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, October 2019.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2019.

⁶¹ The cost of crossing fluctuates according to smugglers' success rates. Those with workable arrangements with bribed border guards charge more. As of July 2019, it was most convenient for a Turkish citizen who wanted to come from Syria to cross back around Hatay. Crossing in this area is relatively easy because authority is not clear-cut on the Syrian side of the border: refugees, rebels and aid workers can all blend together. If regime-affiliated people want to cross, they would enter through the westernmost point of Hatay, around Samandağ, because there is a small slice of regime-controlled territory on Turkey's border with Syria there. Border controls at provinces bordering territory held by the SDF, the armed units dominated by the YPG, were stricter. Crossing through the Turkey-controlled Euphrates Shield area is also harder because Turkish security control is intense on the Syrian side. Also see "IŞİD'lilere 4 bin dolara sınırdan VIP geçiş" [VIP crossing for ISIS members costs \$4,000], T24, 24 May 2019.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, March 2018.

varying degrees, depending on where one intended to cross, but smugglers continued to find routes across with ladders, extracting a higher fee.⁶³

Turkey experienced three waves of returns by citizens disillusioned, forced out by ISIS military defeats or loss of territory, or readying to take on other roles with ISIS elsewhere. The first wave came back toward the end of 2014 and early 2015, after short visits to the caliphate; some were in Tal Abyad and escaped YPG-ISIS fighting there. Many militants also appear to have left for other countries around that time. The second surge in returns to Turkey came during the eight-month Operation Euphrates Shield against ISIS in 2016-2017, and the third during the battle for Raqqa in late 2017.⁶⁴ In smaller numbers, people have continued to return since then. One Turkish returnee from Bursa returned, for example, from Idlib in mid-2018 after joining the former al-Qaeda affiliate Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) for a time there.⁶⁵ Others who had been in Idlib were detained attempting to cross at the western end of the Syria-Turkey border in January 2020.⁶⁶ The circumstances of return to Turkey are varied, and offer only an incomplete picture of returnees' motivations, but further study could help authorities understand the phenomenon.

Many ISIS members who returned to Turkey appear to have little contact with state authorities.⁶⁷ Unlike some other countries, Turkey did not criminalise travel to designated ISIS-held areas in Syria and Iraq – although individuals can be charged with being members of a terrorist group if the state can prove they joined ISIS. Hundreds of Turks travelled to Syria to support rebel factions, providing cover for people wanting to join ISIS. Of the returnees Crisis Group spoke to directly or learned of through their acquaintances, many were never interrogated on their return.⁶⁸ “A boy from here who went to Syria, came back secretly and is now working in a hotel in Antalya”, a shop owner in Adiyaman who knew the youth said.⁶⁹ Others were questioned and released. Turkish security officials say they are monitoring returnees, even if police have not interrogated all of them.⁷⁰ Many women who returned, sometimes with children, live with relatives and have little interaction with the outside world.⁷¹ In some cases, widows (including foreigners) are cared for by the families of their late husbands.⁷²

Gauging whether returnees remain committed to ISIS ideology or to violence more broadly is difficult. In media interviews and police interrogations, returnees

⁶³ “Suriye sınırı ‘akıllı’ sistemle daha güvenli” [Syria border more secure with ‘smart’ system], *Hürriyet*, 5 January 2019.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group field research, border provinces of Turkey, June 2018 and July 2019.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, Turkish returnee, 4 May 2020.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, January 2020, Istanbul.

⁶⁷ A number of Turkish officials Crisis Group interviewed between July and October 2019 confirmed that many returnees, especially in the earlier waves, came back undetected.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, returnees or their acquaintances, Adiyaman, Diyarbakır, July 2019; and by telephone, May 2020.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Adiyaman, July 2019; Istanbul, September 2019.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul, fall 2019.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, locals, Adiyaman, July 2019.

⁷² “We know of at least seven foreign brides who are here in Adiyaman whose Turkish husbands were killed in Syria and the husband’s families accepted the women into their homes”. Crisis Group interview, cousin of a Turkish citizen returnee, Adiyaman, July 2019.

often express remorse, saying they took no part in violence and left because ISIS failed to live up to their vision of life under Islamic rule.⁷³ Crisis Group's own interviews with returnees indicate that some still carry positive memories of living in the caliphate and are willing to link back up with ISIS or another similar group, while others returned disillusioned. "If a new caliphate was established, depending on circumstances, ... I would consider joining again", one individual who went to Syria in 2017 and returned nine months later told Crisis Group. Another returnee, who lived in Raqqa for more than two years before making his way back to Turkey in 2016, leaving his Syrian wife and daughter behind, said:

The first year under Dewle in Raqqa was great. We had everything, we were rich and getting very good salaries. In time, the weaker Dewle got, the harsher its methods to punish sinners and infidels in public squares became. I realised this was not what I had hoped for.⁷⁴

Some returnees escaped prosecution by telling officials that while in Syria they fought in Turkey-backed Syrian rebel groups or were engaged in charitable or humanitarian work.⁷⁵ Officials told Crisis Group that ISIS trains people to obscure their links to the group, and they continued monitoring "suspicious individuals".⁷⁶ Women often tell officials or researchers that their husbands coerced them into joining and they had long been seeking a way home.⁷⁷ It is often hard to assess how genuine such claims are.

At least some returnees appeared to remain connected to their former ISIS network, referring in interviews to the current circumstances of others whom they had known in Syria and Iraq. One family told Crisis Group of locking up sons and confiscating their mobile phones to prevent them from remaining in contact with former fellow ISIS members or leaving for Syria again. Having joined and fought for ISIS remains a source of pride in some circles. "There were even some who had nothing to do with what was happening in Syria who congratulated me for going", a man who joined at the age of 20 and returned to his hometown Bursa in 2018 told Crisis Group. "I received only few negative reactions".⁷⁸ Among Kurdish Salafis in Turkey's east and south east, some ISIS returnees reportedly received from their religious circles so-called *sayyid* [Muslim claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad] certificates for fighting for ISIS.⁷⁹ The reputational gains of those who have fought for ISIS are well documented in other countries, including among imprisoned ISIS members.⁸⁰

⁷³ Crisis Group interviews, high-ranking police officer, Ankara, May 2019; and journalist, Istanbul, July 2019.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, September 2019. In Crisis Group interviews, Turkish returnees referred to ISIS as "Dewle", which means "state" in Arabic.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, relatives of returnees, Diyarbakır and Adıyaman, July 2019.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, October 2019; Istanbul, January 2020.

⁷⁷ See Başak Yavcan and Gülriş Şen, "Assessing the Role of Women in Fighting Radicalisation", Improving Capacity against Radicalization and Extremism for All (icare4all), March 2020.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, 4 May 2020.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, researcher who conducted relevant field research in 2015-2016, Ankara, April 2019.

⁸⁰ Studies find that the prestige and increased credibility of returning fighters mean that they are better able to recruit new members. See B.M. Jenkins, "When Jihadis Come Marching Home",

III. Turkey's Strategies Toward Returnees

Many states are struggling to assess the threat ISIS returnees could pose and how to respond. While many obstacles are shared, there are also unique aspects to Turkey's efforts. Turkey's focus on short-term detention, criminal investigation and prosecution appears to have disrupted attacks but has its limits: insufficient evidence complicates prosecution while mass surveillance is resource-intensive and far from failsafe. In some cases, "hard" security measures may even have unintended consequences. A closer look at some of the challenges Ankara faces in policing, prosecuting and detaining returnees might help Turkey determine whether and how to build out fledgling measures to help returnees reintegrate into society and deter recidivism, which would ease the burden on the security services.

Other countries have complemented security measures with "softer" policies, usually focused on "de-radicalisation", ie, efforts to change former militants' beliefs, "disengagement" – steps to move them away from a violent group or from using violence even if they retain some of those beliefs – or a blend of the two. Programs range from teaching peaceful interpretations of Islam to vocational training. They tend to be complex, costly and hard to evaluate, and have sometimes been controversial as well. They can require coordination among an array of stakeholders including security agencies, prison staff, religious scholars, community leaders, psychologists and specialised NGOs. In some countries, they have come in for criticism, especially for stigmatising communities targeted, tainting public servants, who arouse suspicion for being involved in state surveillance, or for distorting valuable social programs for counter-terrorism ends.⁸¹ Still, some governments see them as a way to guard against jihadist recruitment and engage with returnees such as minors or those who cannot be charged for lack of evidence.

Turkey's justice ministry, interior ministry and Directorate for Religious Affairs (Diyanet) – the state-run Muslim religious authority – have no fleshed-out policies along these lines for ISIS affiliates. Embryonic initiatives that do exist do not distinguish among affiliates of ISIS, the PKK, "FETÖ" or ultra-leftist militant groups.⁸² All these groups represent different challenges to the Turkish state; lumping them together can make efforts confused and unfocused. While politicians and top officials seem content with what Ankara is now doing, mid-level officials in the interior and justice ministries and the Diyanet express a desire for greater guidance on dealing with ISIS returnees who have been detained or are being monitored and, indeed, for other Turks who did not join but might want to do so.⁸³ Clarifying the aims of exist-

RAND Corporation, 2014; "Handbook for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism", Council of Europe, 1 December 2016.

⁸¹ For a comprehensive review of criticisms of de-radicalisation programs in Europe, see Lore Colaert (ed.), *De-radicalisation: Scientific Insights for Policy*, Flemish Peace Institute (Brussels, 2017).

⁸² "Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü" (Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation), or "FETÖ", is a moniker used by the Turkish state since 2016 to refer to followers of Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Islamic preacher heading a transnational movement. Ankara accuses "FETÖ" of illicitly infiltrating state institutions and holds it responsible for the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. Followers refer to the movement as the Gülen, or Hizmet, movement, and to Fethullah Gülen as their spiritual leader.

⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, state representatives, Ankara and Şanhurfa, July 2019.

ing initiatives would be a good start. The Turkish state might also try out modest, additional social policies, such as after-prison release programs and support for families worried about relatives turning to militancy. Ankara should see these policies as a complement to the current approach, not a substitute for it.

A. *Threat Perception*

ISIS attacks in 2016 on Turkish soil prompted officials to step up efforts to police the group, and they now say they have the threat under control.⁸⁴ ISIS networks are still present, officials say, but with degraded capabilities.⁸⁵ They say the group is organising in smaller cells, with more autonomous structures, geared toward carrying out attacks that require limited means and skills. “Some who crossed back, including foreign nationals, and are hiding have formed two- to three-person dormant cells waiting to be activated”, a Turkish security official said.⁸⁶ Following an April 2019 video in which ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (who was killed by U.S. special forces in late October 2019) holds a file labelled “Turkey Province”, Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soyulu publicly acknowledged that they assessed ISIS had become more active in Turkey and that Turkish intelligence and security units were “on alarm”.⁸⁷

Nonetheless, Ankara ranks “FETÖ” and the PKK as graver threats.⁸⁸ All three groups are designated as “terrorist”. But the designation is applied more broadly for those charged with PKK or “FETÖ” links, including those who would be regarded simply as sympathisers rather than terrorists themselves in countries with narrower definitions.⁸⁹ Lawyers for both the victims of attacks and individuals charged with ISIS-related crimes say the state puts higher priority on investigation and prosecution of “terrorism” cases linked to “FETÖ” or PKK than ISIS ones.⁹⁰ As little as a phone call or social media post can lead to a jail sentence for suspects accused of links to the PKK or “FETÖ”, while ISIS suspects are more often released for lack of evidence. “They dig deep to find some sort of evidence in order to establish a link between suspects of FETÖ or PKK affinity; it’s not the same for ISIS”, a lawyer for one of the five victims of a bombing of an HDP rally in June 2015 said.⁹¹

Turkey’s involvement in Syria and its support to certain rebel factions could complicate its domestic counter-terrorism efforts, particularly given the apparent fluidity among the membership of various jihadist groups. Turkey does not deem re-

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, July 2019; Istanbul, January 2020.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish security officials, Ankara, July and October 2019.

⁸⁶ Senior Turkish police officer, speech at ORSAM workshop, op. cit.; and statements made by Interior Minister Süleyman Soyulu on television in August 2019. “Türkiye’nin Nabızı – 20 Ağustos 2019 (İçişleri Bakanı Süleyman Soyulu)” [Turkey’s Pulse – 20 August 2019 (Interior Minister Süleyman Soyulu)], Habertürk, 20 August 2019.

⁸⁷ “In the company of the leader of the faithful”, Al-Furqan Media, 29 April 2019 (Arabic). “İçişleri Bakanı Soyulu: Türkiye’de DEAŞ bir hareketlilik içerisinde” [Interior Minister Soyulu: ISIS has become more active within Turkey], T24, 17 May 2019.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, April, July and October 2019.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, lawyers of both victims and defendants of ISIS cases, as well as Crisis Group examination of court cases, summer 2019-spring 2020.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, lawyers of both victims and defendants of ISIS cases, Ankara and remotely from Istanbul, July 2019 and April 2020.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, lawyer of a victim, Ankara, July 2019.

bel factions opposed to the Syrian regime as a threat. Although it officially designates the former al-Qaeda affiliate HTS as terrorist, this group fights in north-western Syria alongside Turkish-backed forces against the Syrian regime and thus benefits indirectly from Turkish aid.⁹² HTS controls Idlib's main border crossing with Turkey and, in rebel-held areas in that province, coexists with Turkish forces deployed to observation points.⁹³ While authorities do not view HTS and most other rebel groups as a danger to Turkish domestic security, were relations between Turkey and those groups to sour, militants might turn on Ankara.

Turkish officials tend to view ISIS returnees as less threatening than agencies in other countries do. Authorities say Turkish citizens faced lower barriers to joining ISIS and were driven by the pursuit of adventure and personal gain rather than by ideology. "We found that more 'ordinary' people had gone from Turkey compared to the mostly already fundamentalist-thinking people that joined from Europe", one interior ministry official said.⁹⁴ "Picking up to go from Turkey was easier".⁹⁵ By the same logic, Turkish officials believe that the majority of returnees have an easier time returning to their previous life, an assumption that likely explains the lack of systematic effort at assessing the threat posed by returnees and helping them reintegrate.

A wide spectrum of Turkish state actors, from Ankara to front-line practitioners, are sceptical that ISIS members who strongly adhere to its ideology can ever be disabused of their convictions. While some officials think every effort should be made to win over hardline militants, most argue that they are a small minority of returnees and that the only option is monitoring them for life. As a result, and perhaps also due to the widespread view that most returnees are not ideologically committed, Turkish officials have not developed systematic programs to deal with those who might be. Most officials think they should focus on prevention, that is, stopping individuals from turning to militancy in the first place.⁹⁶ That said, few state policies are actually geared toward prevention – let alone systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of existing efforts.

Foreign militants transiting through or migrating to Turkey are a greater source of concern to authorities. Officials say it is harder to assess the risk they pose.⁹⁷ Monitoring and translating from foreign languages is a strain on the security services. While Turkish nationals may return to their former lives, officials assume, foreign nationals often lack the families and social circles that could help them leave ISIS and turn over a new leaf.⁹⁸ Crisis Group's open-source tracking suggests that, as of late 2019, there were at least 446 foreign nationals among the 955 ISIS-linked detainees mentioned in the Turkish media. Of those in prison over ISIS-linked charges,

⁹² HTS is the latest iteration of Jabhat al-Nusra, or the Nusra Front; the group had previously been Syria's avowed al-Qaeda affiliate, but it has since cut ties with that organisation's transnational leadership.

⁹³ See Crisis Group Report, *Silencing the Guns in Syria's Idlib*, op. cit.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 1 October 2019.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, October 2019.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, authorities from five state institutions, Ankara, July and October 2019.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, state official, Istanbul, January 2020.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, July and October 2019.

750 (62.5 per cent) are foreign nationals reportedly from 40 different countries (22 of them female).⁹⁹

As Turkey's perception of the threat posed by ISIS has evolved, so, too, has its approach to policing and prosecution, including online. A two-year state of emergency put in place after the failed military coup in July 2016 allowed law enforcement agencies to step up efforts to combat ISIS "by granting authority for more serious operations", a high-ranking security official said.¹⁰⁰ Cyber units within the Turkish police have deleted or blocked thousands of allegedly ISIS-linked social media accounts.¹⁰¹ They have also blocked access to ISIS's main Turkish-language propaganda outlets, though content remained accessible through VPN proxies.¹⁰²

Turkish officials say cooperation among key state agencies (such as national police, gendarmerie and military intelligence) has improved since the coup attempt. Most Turkish officials claim that "FETÖ"-linked police and prosecutors seeking to destabilise the country turned a blind eye to ISIS activity and that those officials' dismissal strengthened Turkey's counter-terrorist fight across the board. Turkish officials say they foiled ten major ISIS attacks in 2018 alone, seizing bomb-making materials, suicide vests, hand grenades and other weapons.¹⁰³ Critics of the governments argue that in reality, Ankara simply did not count ISIS as a major danger before 2016. It was only then that attacks began to take a toll on the Turkish economy and, in the case of the May 2016 attack on a Gaziantep police station, to target state institutions.¹⁰⁴

B. *Turkey's Response*

1. Policing

Law enforcement officials rely on widespread surveillance of known ISIS operatives and two- to four-day detentions (which can be extended to up to twelve days under certain conditions). Short-term detentions usually target people who come into contact with individuals under surveillance. Turkish security services say short detentions of individuals deemed susceptible to overtures by ISIS deter them from engaging with the group.¹⁰⁵ President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced on 10 October 2019 that so far 17,000 people had been detained for suspected links with ISIS (it is unclear if this number includes duplicates, in that the same person is detained more than

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish justice ministry representative, Ankara, July 2019. "Hapiste 40 ülkeden DEAŞ'lı var", *op. cit.* This conviction, paired with frustration that EU nations have left Turkey to deal with individuals they deem too dangerous to repatriate, motivated Ankara to step up its efforts to deport foreign ISIS-linked individuals to their countries of origin. Turkey deported a total of 778 foreigners suspected of ISIS affiliation in 2019 alone.

¹⁰⁰ Senior Turkish police officer, speech at ORSAM workshop, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ "Turkey's Fight against Daesh", Turkish Interior Ministry, July 2017, p. 53.

¹⁰² ISIS propaganda targeting Turkey and its leadership intensified in July 2015, in particular, with the publication of the second issue of the Turkish-language magazine *Konstantiniyye*. Six issues of *Konstantiniyye* appeared between June 2015 and May 2016.

¹⁰³ Details shared in a book titled *2018'de Türkiye* (Turkey in 2018), published by the pro-government SETA foundation (Istanbul, 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, analysts, lawyers and opposition party affiliates, Ankara and Istanbul, summer and fall 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish security officials, Ankara and Istanbul, July–October 2019.

once in a given time period).¹⁰⁶ Officials say the detentions send a clear warning to those contemplating violent acts that they can be caught at any time.¹⁰⁷ “It has proven effective to intimidate people who are just making first contact and are not yet entrenched”, an adviser to the interior ministry said.¹⁰⁸ Whether this contention is accurate is hard to assess.

Turkey's heavy focus on surveillance and periodic catch-and-release detentions is resource-intensive. It rarely leads to prosecution, and risks aggravating grievances and feeding persecution narratives among some groups.¹⁰⁹ “The sense of being watched all the time fuels anti-state sentiments and increases anger”, a lawyer representing individuals charged with ISIS-related crimes said.¹¹⁰ One mid-level official warned that surveillance and short-term detentions also risk pushing some individuals further underground.¹¹¹ Turkey's interior ministry should review their effectiveness.

2. Prosecution

The number of prosecutions related to ISIS links has increased in recent years but remains a fraction of the estimated returnee population.

A lack of evidence is a challenge in Turkey, as it is elsewhere, though Turkey has some advantages in obtaining evidence due to its forces' presence in Syria.¹¹² Evidence gathered by intelligence agencies is only admissible in court for terrorism-related cases and then only if additional, legally obtained evidence exists.¹¹³ A lawyer defending individuals accused of ISIS-related crimes said overstretched cybercrime police units have rarely processed digital evidence against clients in time for trials, particularly in the months after the July 2016 coup attempt.¹¹⁴ Pictures and video clips on seized telephones that his clients feared would be used against them rarely make it to court, although they have appeared more frequently in the last two years.¹¹⁵ Prosecutors in Turkey do, however, have an easier time than counterparts in other countries finding witnesses from among returnees to testify against defendants.¹¹⁶ They can also sometimes gain access to ISIS-issued identification documents seized at the border or in Turkey and draw upon testimony collected at police stations in areas in Turkish-controlled northern Syria.

¹⁰⁶ “DEAŞ’a en büyük darbe Türkiye’den” [Turkey country to deal biggest blow to Daesh], TRT Haber, 12 October 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Turkish security official, Ankara, October 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, theologian working closely with interior ministry, Ankara, October 2019.

¹⁰⁹ “While it is true short-term detentions deter engagement in violence, they also increase grievances among the broad set of groups the Turkish state is targeting. Their anti-state feelings are pent up as a result. It does not seem to be a durable solution”. Crisis Group telephone interview, lawyer defending ISIS suspects, 30 May 2020.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, 3 April 2020.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, April 2019.

¹¹² Crisis Group telephone interview, lawyer defending ISIS suspects, 3 April 2020.

¹¹³ Crisis Group telephone interviews, lawyer based in Istanbul, 22 January 2020; lawyer defending ISIS suspects, 3 April 2020.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group telephone interviews, 3 April 2020 and 30 May 2020.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group telephone interviews, 3 April 2020 and 30 May 2020.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, 3 April 2020.

Most ISIS returnees who go on trial are sentenced to between five and ten years for membership in a terrorist organisation – although in practice many serve only three or four years behind bars.¹¹⁷ Sentences can be reduced by a year or two during prosecution if the judge believes the defendant shows remorse or for other mitigating factors. Inmates may also be released early for good behaviour after serving three quarters of their sentence.¹¹⁸ Other returnees receive softer sentences of one to six months in jail or a fine for crossing the border illegally; between one and five years on charges of possessing illegal arms; or between one and eight years for possessing hazardous substances or providing support to or promoting a terrorist group. “Those calling the shots behind the scenes and carrying out recruitment/indoctrination work are usually not targeted because it is difficult to connect their activity to the criminal act committed”, one lawyer said.¹¹⁹ In some cases, ISIS suspects are given reduced sentences under an “active remorse” clause if they agree to share information.¹²⁰

Lawyers of both defendants and victims in ISIS attack cases claim that prosecutors in the past – particularly during the 2015 attacks – were not diligent in investigations, whether due to a lack of resources, a focus on higher-priority cases or a desire to protect informants or glean further intelligence from suspects let loose.¹²¹ Lawyers for one defendant and for several victims in the trial of Turkish citizens involved in the attacks on the Kurdish movement have accused prosecutors of not using their discretion to investigate the suspects’ links to other alleged ISIS militants.¹²² Both said the attacks’ true masterminds could have been arrested with deeper investigation.¹²³ Lawyers for victims in the trial of Orhan Gönner (and four other suspects) for the June 2015 Diyarbakır bombing said prosecutors took years to comply with their request to admit evidence consisting of footage of the bombers’ movements before the attack.¹²⁴ They also accuse prosecutors of failing to act on requests to bring charges against a local imam, Abdullah Ömer Aslan, against whom a judge eventually filed a criminal case, after his deposition in court as a witness in the case.¹²⁵

The relatively low number of prosecutions of ISIS suspects increases the number of individuals under watch by security agencies, but some Turkish officials see this

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, 3 April 2020.

¹¹⁸ See Mehmet Gün, “New criminal execution law: for reform or COVID-19?”, *Yetkin Report*, 14 April 2020.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, one of the lawyers of the victims of the ISIS bombings in Suruç and Ankara, Istanbul, July 2019.

¹²⁰ A person accused of terrorism can be acquitted if after being caught, provided there is no evidence of a crime committed, he/she expresses remorse and agrees to share valuable information that helps security services catch other members of the organisation or dismantle it. An acquittal decision can also be made if there is evidence of a crime committed and the individual turns himself/herself in and shares information on the organisation’s structure and its criminal activities. If a person involved in criminal activities agrees to cooperate after being caught by security services, his/her sentence can be reduced by one third to three quarters. See Turkish Penal Code.

¹²¹ Crisis Group interviews, lawyers, Ankara, July 2019; and by telephone, 3 April and 30 May 2020.

¹²² Crisis Group interviews, lawyers, Ankara, July 2019 and October 2019.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, lawyers of victims, Istanbul, September 2019. For details of the case, see “Suruç davası: Mahkeme ‘tanık’ imam hakkında suç duyurusunda bulundu” [The Suruç case: Court files criminal complaint against ‘witness’ imam], *Artı Gerçek*, 7 August 2019.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

tactic as effective policing – a way to cast a wider net. A Turkish security analyst said releasing ISIS suspects can be an effective way to track ISIS networks, identifying other suspects by monitoring the individual.¹²⁶ Turkish local police keep tabs on suspects if no court ruling requires more extensive surveillance.¹²⁷ A court can authorise stepped-up surveillance, for up to six months, with monthly extensions after the first two months.¹²⁸ In practice, however, police can ignore this rule and extend surveillance when it comes to terror suspects, and judges may use discretion in admitting evidence in cases linked to national security.¹²⁹

The success of this approach appears mixed. Releasing suspects in the hope that they will reveal ISIS networks may be effective, if suspects can be properly monitored. In the words of the same security analyst: “Flies will come to the sugar”.¹³⁰ Other official sources make the same argument.¹³¹ But there have been cases in which key figures were released and fled to Syria. Hasan Aydın, for example, was briefly taken into custody in 2015 while trying to take military equipment, including a drone, from the southern province of Hatay into Syria. He later appeared on the 2016 video in which ISIS militants in Syria burned two Turkish soldiers alive.¹³² In another high-profile case, Musa Göktaş, the first person to be convicted for being part of ISIS in Turkey in May 2015, returned to Syria after being released for “good behaviour” after his conviction (which was awaiting appeal). He is suspected of helping plot the October 2015 Ankara railway station bombing.¹³³ Particularly among opposition segments, such cases lowered public confidence in the authorities’ judgment of the threat posed by released ISIS operatives.¹³⁴

The judiciary has taken a more lenient approach toward ISIS-affiliated returnee women due to a widespread perception that women simply follow men’s orders and have little agency. As of the end of 2019, only around 50 women – including both Turkish nationals and foreigners – were in prison on ISIS-related charges.¹³⁵ Most of those detained are subsequently released pending trial, and few are ultimately sentenced. The court’s verdict in the trial of the wife of dead ISIS Gaziantep emir Mehmet

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, analyst with extensive experience studying al-Qaeda and ISIS, Ankara, July 2019.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, interior ministry official, Ankara, October 2019.

¹²⁸ See Turkish Criminal Procedures Code.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, lawyer based in Istanbul, 22 January 2020.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, analyst with extensive experience studying al-Qaeda and ISIS, Ankara, July 2019.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interviews, security officials, Istanbul, fall and winter 2019.

¹³² “ISIS executioner who burned two Turkish soldiers alive in sick video is killed in a firefight in Syria”, *Daily Mail Online*, 4 July 2018. “Türkiye’yi tehdit eden IŞİD’li 2 kez gözaltına alınıp serbest bırakıldı” [ISIS member who has threatened Turkey, was detained and released twice], *TimeTurk*, 21 January 2017.

¹³³ “‘İyi hal’den tahliye olan o IŞİD’li yeniden örgüte katıldı” [ISIS member released on ‘good conduct’ joined the organisation again], *İnternet Haber*, 19 November 2017. “Türkiye’de tutuklanan ilk IŞİD’li, tahliye edildi, tekrar örgüte katıldı” [The first ISIS member arrested in Turkey, was released and rejoined the organisation], *Duvar*, 29 November 2017.

¹³⁴ In interviews, lawyers representing victims of ISIS attacks expressed how such cases had fuelled the already deep mistrust toward the state among clients and their circles. Crisis Group interviews, lawyers of victims of ISIS attacks, Ankara, July 2019.

¹³⁵ “Hapiste 40 ülkeden DEAŞ’lı var”, *op. cit.*

Kadir Cabaël is emblematic of this thinking. A panel of three judges in the Kayseri 4th Heavy Penal Court acquitted Fadile Cabaël on charges of belonging to ISIS in April 2019, saying that “DEAŞ does not accept women as group members. On the contrary, it sees them as goods, the only job of women is housekeeping, raising children and serving their husbands”.¹³⁶ Only in a few rare high-profile cases were the wives of ISIS members involved in attacks in Turkey charged with “membership”, “knowingly and wilfully aiding an armed terrorist organisation” or “failure to report crime”.¹³⁷

While women's roles as prescribed by ISIS were largely domestic, the full picture is more complex. While rare in Turkey, examples of women making their own way to ISIS or playing roles in plotting attacks in Turkey suggest that judicial officials should not assume they are simply foils for their husbands. A former police chief in the Şanlıurfa border province said he had electronically monitored a Turkish woman who was “waiting for her child to reach six years old, and then would carry out a suicide attack”.¹³⁸ In reality, women are not a homogeneous group and have various reasons for joining and diverse roles within ISIS. While it is true that militant circles are male-dominated and patriarchal, women returnees can play supportive roles in propagating the group's ideology and recruiting upon return. The authorities need not take a more draconian approach to women if they correct the faulty assumptions. But Turkey's justice ministry could help raise awareness about the diversity of women's roles among judicial professionals dealing with ISIS cases.

That overstretched courts and difficulties collecting evidence hamper prosecution of ISIS suspects could mean that militants who slip through the cracks of the justice system subsequently commit attacks. As described, that has happened in the past. In 2014-2015, ISIS operatives who were released by courts pending trial – rather than being tried while remanded – later joined ISIS in Syria and played key roles for the group in Turkey.

When, after 2016, the security services took a tougher approach to ISIS, prosecutors followed suit with more detailed investigations and more caution regarding releases pending trial. While longer sentencing is not necessarily the answer, case-by-case risk assessments from police and prison officials on the threat level ISIS affiliates pose could help inform criminal justice decisions. An April 2020 amendment to Turkey's penal execution law requires that more detailed assessments be made to evaluate the “good behaviour” of inmates, including through interviews with other inmates and prison wardens, before granting early release. It also affords more authority to enforcement judges (*infaz hakimi*) to gauge inmates' attitudes and behaviours in deciding on early release.¹³⁹

This change mirrors efforts in other countries that have put in place new models for prison authorities to communicate with probation officers and law enforcement when people they regard as dangerous are released on probation. Italy's prison agency, for example, provides such reports to judges, law enforcement and other authorities

¹³⁶ “Turkish court acquits ISIL emir's wife in Gaziantep attack”, *Hürriyet*, 19 April 2019. Turkish authorities usually use the acronym “DEAŞ” in referring to ISIS.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, lawyer defending ISIS suspects, 3 April 2020.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group Skype interview, September 2019.

¹³⁹ “İnfaz kanunu: İyi hal de yeniden düzenleniyor” [Criminal execution law: Changes will also apply to clauses on good behaviour], *Duvar*, 25 March 2020.

in advance of a militant's release, which helps inform decisions about allocating additional police resources or potentially, if the person is a foreigner, deportation on national security grounds.¹⁴⁰

3. Prisons

Halting the spread of ISIS networks in prisons, where around 1,150 men and 50 women are being held for ISIS-related crimes, is a major concern for Turkish officials, as it is for counterparts abroad. Inmates may form relationships, even during short detentions, and accrue status in prison. "People from different parts of the country whose chance of knowing each other was otherwise low are thrown together in the same cell", said a lawyer who regularly visits ISIS-affiliated clients in prison.¹⁴¹ Many ISIS members cast time behind bars as *medrese-i Yusufiye*, a school for learning the virtues born of trials that may improve one's prospects in the afterlife, referring to the prophet Yusuf, whose tale of unjust imprisonment appears in the Quran.¹⁴² (This conceptualisation of time in prison is not particular to ISIS or other militant groups, but is also adopted by peaceful Islamic movements.) ISIS inmates see any state attempt "to get them to do social activities or rehabilitation in prison as [an] effort to detach them from DEAŞ and diminish their positive afterlife prospects", a Turkish justice ministry official said, alluding to the difficulty of meaningful state interventions in prison.¹⁴³

Over the last decade, Turkey has isolated suspects or offenders entering prison on charges of terrorism from other prisoners. They are placed in separate wings of high-security prisons, to the extent that capacity allows, in one- to ten-person cells with other inmates linked to groups that share the same ideology. Members of organisations with different ideologies (mainly PKK, "FETÖ" and ISIS) are separated to "prevent contagion and avert potential physical violence between them", according to a Turkish justice ministry official.¹⁴⁴ Where possible, inmates are also grouped according to their seniority in their respective organisations.¹⁴⁵ In prisons with limited space,

¹⁴⁰ See Lorenzo Vidino et al., "Il carcere e il suo paradosso: bacino di reclutamento per aspiranti mujaheddin e garanzia di riabilitazione per i detenuti" in *De-Radicalizzazione* ["Prisons and their Paradox: Recruitment Ground for Aspiring Mujahidin and Rehabilitation of Prisoners"], *Journal of the Italian Intelligence Community* (June 2018).

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, lawyer defending individuals charged with ISIS-related crimes in Turkey, 3 April 2020.

¹⁴² Crisis Group interview, justice ministry official, Ankara, July 2019. A source close to Salafis said "the concept of gaining religious credibility with time served in prison is common among Takfiri Salafi circles". Crisis Group telephone interview, June 2020.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, justice ministry official, Ankara, July 2019.

¹⁴⁴ These cells usually have a kitchen upstairs and a small courtyard accessible during certain hours of the day. Crisis Group interview, justice ministry officials, Ankara, July 2019. As of the end of 2019, out of a total prison population of around 300,000, some 41,000 inmates charged with terrorism-related crimes (convicts or arrestees pending trial) were imprisoned in Turkey. This number included some 1,150 Turkish men and 50 women jailed for alleged ISIS-related crimes, some 28,000-30,000 for alleged "FETÖ"-linked activities and 8,000-10,000 for alleged PKK involvement.

¹⁴⁵ This decision is taken either by respective courts or by prison managers after observations in the prison (through cameras or intelligence officers in prisons). Crisis Group interview, justice ministry officials, Ankara, September 2019.

ISIS inmates are placed in larger cells of 20-25 people.¹⁴⁶ Due to overcrowding, officials say, this containment policy is not always possible.¹⁴⁷ Women's prisons often have only twenty-person cells, and women held for ISIS-related crimes are often mixed in with others.¹⁴⁸ That said, the release of around 90,000 prisoners (out of a total of 300,000) in mid-March 2020 due to COVID-19 risks may have created more space. No one charged with terrorism was let go.¹⁴⁹

There are dangers both in isolating ISIS-linked convicts and in not doing so. Separating them from the larger prison population might help prevent the propagation of their ideology. "Many regular inmates turn to Islam for consolation when they are incarcerated. Being exposed to extremist interpretations at that stage could lead to bigger problems", the above-mentioned justice ministry official said.¹⁵⁰ Isolating ISIS inmates in small-group cells carries its own risks, however. Jailing like-minded individuals together can foster bonds, lead to more ideologically committed members influencing less devoted ones, and make it more difficult for inmates to resocialise upon release.¹⁵¹ Either option can harden the beliefs of either the ISIS convict or his or her fellow cellmates.

Beyond containment measures, imams are made available to inmates but only on a voluntary basis. Diyanet has 600 imams, 70 of them women, on duty at prisons to teach, lead prayer and officiate at funerals.¹⁵² Their effectiveness at countering narratives that promote violence is limited by a lack of specialised training and because in ISIS inmates' eyes they are extensions of the *tağut* state.¹⁵³ Most militants reject any form of religious counselling.¹⁵⁴ For those who are open to discussion of religion, the state could design programs involving specialised psychosocial workers alongside vetted Islamic scholars, perhaps with support from former militants, whom evidence

¹⁴⁶ Crisis Group telephone interviews, returnees, May 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, justice ministry official, Ankara, July 2019.

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, justice ministry official, Ankara, July 2019; lawyer, Istanbul, September 2019.

¹⁴⁹ "Turkish dissidents remain jailed as thousands of inmates are released to avoid prison epidemic", *Washington Post*, 22 April 2020.

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2019.

¹⁵¹ Of the incarcerated perpetrators of the Suruç attack, a few of the young men were merely fixers, arranging transport and accommodation for the bomber. But because the indictment notes them as charged with an ISIS-related crime, they are placed with the ISIS militants in prison. Crisis Group interview, lawyer of convicted perpetrator Orhan Gönner, October 2019, Ankara. One NGO network outlines the following disadvantages of the containment approach: new and stronger bonds forged among prisoners; eroded trust between staff and prisoners; entrenched oppositional mindset; perceptions of unfairness reinforced; labelling effects/stigmatisation; status associated with being in a special unit; all violent extremists assumed to be of equal risk; difficulties finding staff; high financial cost. "Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism – Prison and Probation Interventions", Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2018. Also see "Handbook for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism", Council of Europe, 1 December 2016.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interviews, justice ministry and Diyanet officials, Ankara, July-September 2019.

¹⁵³ Crisis Group telephone interviews, Turkish returnees who were imprisoned for a period of time, May 2020.

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group telephone interviews, Turkish returnees who were imprisoned for a period of time, May 2020; lawyer of ISIS suspects, 3 April 2020.

from elsewhere suggests can more easily build trust with ISIS inmates.¹⁵⁵ Authorities might also look into programs that can help inmates acquire new professional skills. Investing in day-to-day staff-inmate relationships has proven to be key in dealing with jailed jihadists in other places.¹⁵⁶

Turkish authorities have taken other initiatives to ensure that inmates convicted for terrorist offenses are held in conditions that mitigate rather than exacerbate the danger they pose. A two-year EU-funded Twinning project brings together Spanish and Turkish officials to develop systematic rehabilitation services for inmates under arrest for or convicted of terror-related crimes.¹⁵⁷ The project includes a needs analysis phase during which participants review legislation and develop risk assessment tools for training correctional officers and prison managers. Turkish officials involved welcomed the project but were sceptical that foreigners were sufficiently versed in local realities to offer recommendations. The different demographics of inmates and the different ways diverse militant groups recruit make it hard to transplant policies from one context to another. The Turkish government should, however, continue dialogue with European capitals, who have an interest in improving conditions in jails where many of their own citizens who joined ISIS are held, to exchange best practices.

The justice ministry should coordinate with the family ministry to explore whether and how to design programs aimed at preventing former militants from returning to ISIS after their release.¹⁵⁸ How incarceration influences the risk of recidivism for offenders remains an area of debate and is understudied in Turkey. Where appropriate, the family ministry could carry out visits to families to help evaluate whether they can be helpful, on a voluntary basis, in reintegration. It could also offer guidance on how to best communicate with relatives behind bars during regular visitations and after their release. If such programs do take place, they should rely on baseline studies and be piloted.

4. Social policy

Outside the prison system, different ministries say they lack clarity about which should take the lead on efforts to help returnees reintegrate and prevent them, or indeed others, from turning or returning to militancy.

¹⁵⁵ In Indonesia, for instance, the prison program is run by former inmates who may not have much religious knowledge but are nevertheless regarded as “credible”, if not “charismatic”, by many of the prisoners, in particular those they had personally recruited or trained. See, for instance, Cameron Sumpter, “Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Priorities, Practice and the Role of Civil Society”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, vol. 11 (Summer 2017) pp. 112-147.

¹⁵⁶ See “Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism – Prison and Probation Interventions”, op. cit.

¹⁵⁷ The two-year Twinning project’s aim is to develop counter-radicalisation measures in Turkish prisons. An adviser to the project said: “The project has four components: alignment of Turkey’s legal framework (which is already quite good); dissemination of a concept called ‘dynamic security’; a treatment program and risk assessment tool; and training for correctional officers and prison managers”. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2019. The project was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁵⁸ Justice ministry representatives themselves told Crisis Group that they felt the need for such collaboration. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2019.

Overseeing the work of all legally registered mosques and imams in the country, the Directorate for Religious Affairs, or Diyanet, promotes Islam as a religion of peace, which it says is important for countering jihadist narratives. It also publishes anti-ISIS messages in books, pamphlets, seminars and Friday sermons. In the words of one Diyanet official: “Our mandate is enlightening society about Islam; therefore, everything we do shields against terror organisations that exploit religion”.¹⁵⁹ Diyanet officials add that their advocacy of family values is in itself a prevention mechanism, in that strong family bonds can provide some protection from militant recruitment. They have no defined policy intervention for returnees or their families. The Diyanet also groups “FETÖ” and ISIS together in one basket as “terrorist organisations exploiting religion”.¹⁶⁰ Conflating the two would hinder efforts to devise more targeted policies, were the ministry to undertake them.

The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (FLSS) is tasked with dealing with women and children returnees, but by law has no mandate to extend support to adult men. Even with women and children it gets involved only when security agencies invite it to do so. “We are not there yet”, said one high-level ministry official. “We are at the security response stage”.¹⁶¹ The ministry is charged with mental health support and other initiatives for some 200 children of ISIS-affiliated adults repatriated from prisons in Iraq in mid-2019.¹⁶² It does not divulge details of those programs.

In the absence of official guidance, families of returnees of all ages have found ways of coping. Children have often ended up with extended families. Some families have kept relatives’ involvement a secret; others rejected those who had joined ISIS.¹⁶³ “We took away his cell phone and web access”, said the cousin of a Diyarbakır-based returnee, who had worked as a state imam before going to Syria. “We are watching him but don’t really see any signs of him becoming less radical”.¹⁶⁴

The Diyanet and the FLSS ministry could consider some of the “soft measures” other countries have developed to deal with returnees. In particular, they might test whether imams and social workers, who often have better access to returnee families than other state authorities, could play more of a role. To be sure, there are potential pitfalls in their doing so. State imams may not be the best placed to pull young people away from militancy. If they and social workers do get involved, they would have

¹⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Diyanet representatives, Ankara, July 2019.

¹⁶⁰ See, for instance, “Dini İstismar Eden Terör Örgütleriyle Mücadele Seminerleri” [Seminars on Fighting Terrorist Organisations That Exploit Religion], video, Diyanet TV, n.d.

¹⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, deputy FLSS minister, Ankara, October 2019.

¹⁶² The Maya Foundation partners with the FLSS ministry to work with Syrian children to this end, but no such arrangement has been possible for Turkish citizens. Crisis Group interview, Maya Foundation representatives, Istanbul, September 2019. While some NGOs have been developing know-how in dealing with war trauma and extremist indoctrination working with Syrian refugee children in Turkey, they need significant capacity building in this respect. Crisis Group interviews, Turkish NGO representatives of professional psychosocial services who have witnessed FLSS ministry social workers in action, September 2019, Istanbul.

¹⁶³ Crisis Group interview, local authority, Istanbul, November 2016. This official said he personally knew a few families who had spurned children returning from ISIS-held territory. The youths had to move to other cities. “These people are going to be trouble for the country in the future, because their family did not take them back”, he added.

¹⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, Diyarbakır, July 2019.

to guard against being suspected of surveillance on the state's behalf: Turkish officials across ministries appear to recognise that the interior ministry would likely have to coordinate any additional policies toward returnees both locally and at the national level.¹⁶⁵ Still, in some instances, families have sought imams' or other local religious leaders' support. Diyanet and interior ministry officials argue that imams should develop expertise in engaging people who reference the Quran to justify violence.¹⁶⁶

The ministry already has a program, called Informing and Preventing Activities (abbreviated as BÖF in Turkish), focused on stopping youth from joining groups the Turkish state designates as terrorist. Under this program, Turkish officials say, police work with social workers and psychologists to offer "off-ramps" to youths reported by their families or flagged by security services. In other words, they provide opportunities for extracurricular activities, jobs or psychosocial support that might help prevent them from joining militant groups.¹⁶⁷ The program has, however, primarily been geared toward preventing PKK recruitment. Overall, its success appears to have been limited.

Whether such programs could be applied to those vulnerable to ISIS recruitment is an open question. Some families, who in 2014 saw their sons and daughters being drawn into ISIS-linked circles, told Crisis Group they had reported their children to police but received no support. They said police had told them that unless a crime is committed, they had no role. The interior ministry could consider what programs designed to provide vulnerable youth alternatives to militancy might look like and whether they would give families who approach the authorities worried about kin being recruited by jihadists the support they need. Efforts along those lines might be more effective than locking people up for a few days in the hope that jail deters them. They would need to thoroughly assess the effectiveness of the BÖF program and identify neighbourhood-level actors who might have the necessary influence and could usefully be involved.

¹⁶⁵ Belgium provides one example of how central and local coordination could be structured: Belgian authorities work through the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA), which deals with the evaluation and coordination of a threat. The line ministry in charge of CUTA is the interior ministry. CUTA has about 80 staff members from different ministries and works with local task forces that include social workers. When authorities identify people who leave Belgium to fight in jihadist wars, they inform CUTA. When the fighters come back, CUTA decides on a case-by-case basis which measures to take. For each returnee, CUTA determines whether the police, justice or intelligence are in charge. Local mayors and social workers are consulted in decisions on case-by-case approaches. For more information, see "What is the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment?" on CUTA's website.

¹⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Diyanet and interior ministry officials, Ankara, July 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Crisis Group Skype interview, former interior ministry official, September 2019.

IV. Conclusion

Thousands of Turkish citizens have returned from ISIS-held territories in Syria and Iraq. Intensive Turkish policing over the past few years appears to have disrupted potential attacks and helped keep in check those still committed to militancy. But maintaining that so-far successful effort will require the Turkish state's sustained attention and investment. The jihadist landscape's evolution outside Turkey's borders could affect militancy inside the country. If ISIS gains ground in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, for example, or other jihadist groups fighting in Syria, such as HTS, turn against Turkey, returnees are among the most likely to mobilise against the state. The risk could grow further if a regime offensive in Syria's last rebel-held bastion in Idlib prompts many more militants to cross into Turkey, stretching the capacity of security services monitoring domestic and foreign ISIS returnees. Those in Turkey who were thwarted in their plans to join ISIS may also pose a lingering threat. Authorities should develop policies across the board aimed at ensuring that returnees refrain from violence and reintegrate safely into society.

Istanbul/Ankara/Brussels, 29 June 2020

Appendix A: List of ISIS Attacks in Turkey and Corresponding Court Cases

1.

Target: State

Date: 20.03.2014

Event: Niğde; three ISIS militants, who reportedly were travelling to Istanbul from Hatay, opened fire on a Turkish gendarmerie patrol that tried to stop their car.

Fatalities: Two state security force members, one civilian (Turkish citizen)

Accused/convicted perpetrators: Three people (all foreign nationals) were convicted on 15 June 2016. Benyamin Xu (German national), Çendrim Ramadani (Swiss national) and Muhammed Zakiri (Macedonian national) were all sentenced to life imprisonment.

2.

Target: State

Date: 06.01.2015

Event: Istanbul, Sultanahmet; a suicide attack hit a police station in Istanbul's historical Sultanahmet district. Diana Ramazova, a Russian citizen reportedly from Dagestan, committed the suicide attack.

Fatalities: One state security force member

Accused/convicted perpetrators: According to news reports dated 14 April 2016, two of the five foreign national arrestees were released pending trial: Abdula Abdulaev (Azerbaijani national) and Yakup İbragimov (Russian national). Both are charged with human trafficking and membership in a terrorist organisation. No further information was reported.

3.

Target: Kurdish movement and/or left-leaning opposition

Date: 05.06.2015

Event: Diyarbakır; a bombing took place 48 hours before the June 2015 general election, two separate bombs were detonated at a pro-Kurdish HDP electoral rally in Diyarbakır.

Fatalities: Four civilians (all Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin)

Accused/convicted perpetrators: Five Turkish citizens (Mustafa Kılınç, İsmail Korkmaz, Orhan Gönner, Burhan Gök, İlhami Balı) are tried on charges of attempting to abolish the constitutional order, murder, attempted murder and unauthorised possession of hazardous materials. Orhan Gönner, Mustafa Kılınç and İsmail Korkmaz were sentenced to a total of 3,336 years of imprisonment on charges of "attempting to intentionally kill 104 people" and "injuring 112 others". Meanwhile, Burhan Gök, who had been apprehended together with Brussels-bomber İbrahim el-Bakraoui in a park in Gaziantep in June 2015 (he was on trial without arrest) was acquitted of all crimes by majority vote. The fugitive defendant, İlhami Balı will be considered as part of a separate case.

4.

Target: Kurdish movement and/or left-leaning opposition

Date: 20.07.2015

Event: Şanlıurfa, Suruç; a suicide attack hit a municipal cultural centre killing 33 mostly pro-Kurdish youth activists as they were making a press statement before their planned visit to the Syrian border town of Kobani to aid reconstruction and help civilians. Abdurrahman Alagöz, a Turkish citizen returnee, reportedly committed the suicide attack. He was the brother of Yunus Emre Alagöz, who in October 2015 would be one of the suicide bombers in the ISIS attack in Ankara (see item 6 below).

Fatalities: 33 civilians (mostly pro-Kurdish movement youth activists)

Accused/convicted perpetrators: One Turkish citizen, Yakub Şahin, remains under arrest in this ongoing case. Even if he is not convicted in this case, Şahin will serve a life sentence for his involvement in the 10 October Ankara railway station bombing case (see item 6). Two Turkish citizen fugitives (İlhami Balı and Deniz Büyükçelebi) are also charged in this case.

5.**Target:** State**Date:** 23.07.2015**Event:** Kilis, Elbeyli; ISIS militants conducted a cross-border shooting attack targeting a Turkish border outpost in Kilis, killing one soldier.**Fatalities:** One state security force member**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** One of the alleged assailants was killed by the security forces returning fire. The other four reported attackers escaped.

6.**Target:** Kurdish movement and/or left-leaning opposition**Date:** 10.10.2015**Event:** Ankara; a twin suicide bombing took place three weeks prior to the 1 November repeat general election. Two bombs were detonated outside the central railway station during the "Labour, Peace and Democracy" rally organised by the HDP, the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey and some other left-leaning organisations. Yunus Emre Alagöz reportedly was one of the suicide bombers, while the second bomber remained unidentified. Yunus Emre Alagöz was the brother of Abdurrahman Alagöz (suicide bomber of the 20 July 2015 Suruç attack – see item 4 above).**Fatalities:** 103 civilians (mostly left-leaning pro-opposition activists)**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Eighteen convicted (all Turkish citizens). Individuals sentenced to life imprisonment on 3 August 2018: Abdülmühtalip Demir, Talha Güneş, Metin Akaltın, Yakub Şahin, Hakan Şahin, Halil İbrahim Alçay, Resul Demir, Hacı Ali Durmaz and Hüseyin Tunç. Sentences on terrorism-related charges of Burak Ormanoğlu, Suphi Alpfidan, Mehmedin Baraç, Nihat Ürkmez, Yakup Karaoğlu, Esin Altıntuğ, Hatice Akaltın, Yakup Yıldırım and Abdulhamit Boz ranged between seven and 32 years. Meanwhile, sixteen fugitives charged included İlhami Balı, the so-called border emir of ISIS. The other Turkish citizen suspects, Mehmet Kadir Cabael, ISIS' so-called Gaziantep emir, and Yunus Durmaz, allegedly one of the main plotters of the Ankara railway station bombing, would later be killed during police raids on 16 October 2016 and 19 May 2016 respectively (see items 13 and 14 below).

7.**Target:** Tourism**Date:** 12.01.2016**Event:** Istanbul, Sultanahmet; an ISIS suicide attack targeted tourists in the historical district of Istanbul. Nabil Fadli, a Saudi national, committed the suicide attack.**Fatalities:** Twelve civilians (eleven of them German, one Peruvian)**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Two Syrians, one Turkish citizen convicted. Atala el-Hasan el-Mayyuf (Syrian national), who brought the bomb to Şanlıurfa, Fevzi Muhammed Ali (Syrian national), who brought the bomb to Istanbul, and Halil Derviş (Turkish citizen), who facilitated Nabil Fadli's arrival to Istanbul, were sentenced to life imprisonment on 31 January 2018.

8.**Target:** Tourism**Date:** 19.03.2016**Event:** Istanbul, Beyoğlu; a suicide attack targeted tourists on İstiklal street, Istanbul's main shopping alley. Mehmet Öztürk, a Turkish citizen returnee who went to Syria and joined ISIS in 2013, committed the suicide attack.**Fatalities:** Five civilians (three of them Israeli, two Iranian)**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Four Turkish citizens convicted. On 5 April 2019, Ercan Çapkın and Hüseyin Kaya were convicted to life imprisonment on charges of murder and attempting to abolish the constitutional order. Mehmet Mustafa Çevik and İbrahim Güler were sentenced to 15 years in prison on terrorism-related charges.

9.**Target:** Unknown**Date:** 22.04.2016**Event:** Kilis; projectiles fired by ISIS hit the border province of Turkey.**Fatalities:** None**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Unknown

10.**Target:** Unknown**Date:** 24.04.2016**Event:** Kilis; projectiles fired by ISIS wounded sixteen people, six of whom were Syrian nationals.**Fatalities:** None**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Unknown

11.**Target:** State**Date:** 28.04.2016**Event:** Gaziantep, Karkamış; ISIS fired projectiles targeting a military border post in the south-eastern province of Gaziantep.**Fatalities:** None**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Unknown

12.**Target:** Unknown**Date:** 29.04.2016**Event:** Kilis; projectiles fired by ISIS hit the border province of Turkey.**Fatalities:** None**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Unknown

13.**Target:** State**Date:** 01.05.2016**Event:** Gaziantep; a vehicle-borne suicide attack carried out by Turkish citizen İsmail Güneş targeted the province's police headquarters.**Fatalities:** Three state security force members**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Two Turkish citizens, Emin Kepel and Hanifi Küplü, were convicted to 8 years and 9 months, and 7 years and 6 months in prison respectively on membership in a terrorist organisation charges on 5 August 2016. Yunus Durmaz, allegedly the plotter of the attack, was killed during a police raid on 19 May 2016 carried out in connection to the attack.

14.**Target:** Kurdish movement and/or left-leaning opposition**Date:** 20.06.2016**Event:** Gaziantep, Şahinbey; a suicide attack apparently executed by a child (identity unknown) wearing a suicide vest targeted the wedding of a pro-HDP Kurdish family.**Fatalities:** 57 civilians (all Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin)**Accused/convicted perpetrators:** Ten people (nine of them Turkish citizens, one foreign) were convicted on 14 March 2019. Mehmet Şahin Erğan, Mehmet Çalikuşu, Ahmet Köşgeroğlu, Ali Çalikuşu, Hacı Polat, Hasan Uzun and Mehmet Karakurt received life sentences for murder and violation of the constitution. Enes Karataş and Yunus Sarı were sentenced to 10 years in prison for membership in a terrorist organisation. The only foreign perpetrator, Abdurrahman el-Najjar, was also sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of murder and violation of the constitution. El-Najjar was apprehended in a police raid on 16 October 2016 in the Güneykent district of Gaziantep, during

which an explosion killed three police officers. During another anti-terror raid following the attack, on 16 October 2016, Mehmet Kadir Cabael, a Turkish citizen and the so-called Gaziantep emir of ISIS, was killed in clashes with police.

15.**Target:** Tourism**Date:** 28.06.2016

Event: Istanbul, Atatürk Airport; three gunmen armed with automatic weapons and suicide belts staged an attack at the international terminal. Rakim Bulgarov (Kyrgyz national), Vadim Osmanov and Akhmed Osmanov (Russian nationals from Chechnya) carried out the attack. Two assailants blew themselves up, while one was reportedly shot dead by state security forces before being able to detonate his suicide belt.

Fatalities: 30 civilians (nine of them Turkish, six Saudi, three Jordanian, three Palestinian, two Iraqi, one Tunisian, one Iranian, one Ukrainian, one Uzbek, three undisclosed)

Accused/convicted perpetrators: Ten people (among them seven Turkish citizens) convicted on 16 November 2018: Turkish citizens Rıza Coşkun, Levent Uysal, Ahmet Kaplan, Eyüp Demir, Ahmet Dizlek and foreign national Djamel Slimani (reportedly Algerian) were sentenced to aggravated life sentences on charges of murder, membership in a terrorist organisation, violation of the constitution and damaging property. Djamel Slimani was also sentenced to three years and nine months in prison for forging official documents. The other two foreign defendants, Anzor Davitiani and Artur Tengizov (nationalities not reported), were sentenced to nine years of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organisation. Seyhun Ali Akçay and Cuma Güneş, both Turkish citizens, were sentenced to twelve years in prison on the same charges.

16.**Target:** Tourism**Date:** 01.01.2017

Event: Istanbul, Ortaköy; a gunman opened fire on a crowd in the Reina nightclub in the Ortaköy neighbourhood of Istanbul, during new year celebrations. This was the only attack among those listed here that ISIS claimed. All other attacks were attributed to the group.

Fatalities: 39 civilians (twelve of them Turkish, seven Saudi, three Iraqi, three Lebanese, two Jordanian, two Moroccan, two Indian, one Kuwaiti, one Libyan, one Israeli, one Tunisian, one Tunisian-French, one Canadian, one Syrian, one Russian)

Accused/convicted perpetrators: Seven people (six foreign, one Turkish citizen) are still on trial, with the accused including shooting assassin Abdulkadir Masharipov (Uzbek national) and Abdurrauf Sert (Turkish citizen), who is accused of plotting the attack and was apparently tasked with securing safe houses for ISIS operatives in Istanbul as a so-called "deputy emir". On 27 January 2020, the prosecutor demanded consecutive aggravated life sentences for the accused. The trial is ongoing.

* ISIS only claimed the 1 January 2017 shooting attack that killed 39 civilians. The other fifteen attacks were attributed to the group. ISIS also claimed a car bombing in Diyarbakır's Bağlar district in November 2016, but so did the PKK-affiliated Kurdistan Freedom Falcons. Turkish officials attributed this attack to the PKK and a court case against six accused for PKK-related terrorism charges in connection to the attack is pending.

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Europe and Central Asia since 2017

Special Reports and Briefings

Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.

Seven Opportunities for the UN in 2019-2020, Special Briefing N°2, 12 September 2019.

Seven Priorities for the New EU High Representative, Special Briefing N°3, 12 December 2019.

COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch, Special Briefing N°4, 24 March 2020 (also available in French and Spanish).

Russia/North Caucasus

Patriotic Mobilisation in Russia, Europe Report N°251, 4 July 2018.

The COVID-19 Challenge in Post-Soviet Break-away Statelets, Europe Briefing N°89, 7 May 2020.

South Caucasus

Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds, Europe Report N°244, 1 June 2017.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Time to Talk Trade, Europe Report N°249, 24 May 2018 (also available in Russian).

Digging out of Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh, Europe Report N°255, 20 December 2019 (also available in Russian).

Ukraine

Can Peacekeepers Break the Deadlock in Ukraine?, Europe Report N°246, 15 December 2017.

Ukraine: Will the Centre Hold?, Europe Report N°247, 21 December 2017.

"Nobody Wants Us": The Alienated Civilians of Eastern Ukraine, Europe Report N°252, 1 October 2018 (also available in Ukrainian).

Rebels without a Cause: Russia's Proxies in Eastern Ukraine, Europe Report N°254, 16 July 2019 (also available in Ukrainian and Russian).

Peace in Ukraine I: A European War, Europe Report N°256, 28 April 2020 (also available in Russian and Ukrainian).

Turkey

Managing Turkey's PKK Conflict: The Case of Nusaybin, Europe Report N°243, 2 May 2017 (also available in Turkish).

Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions, Europe Report N°248, 29 January 2018 (also available in Turkish).

Turkey's Election Reinvigorates Debate over Kurdish Demands, Europe Briefing N°88, 13 June 2018.

Russia and Turkey in the Black Sea and the South Caucasus, Europe Report N°250, 28 June 2018.

Mitigating Risks for Syrian Refugee Youth in Turkey's Şanlıurfa, Europe Report N°253, 11 February 2019.

Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters, Europe Report N°257, 30 April 2020 (also available in Arabic and Turkish).

Central Asia

Uzbekistan: The Hundred Days, Europe and Central Asia Report N°242, 15 March 2017.

Central Asia's Silk Road Rivalries, Europe and Central Asia Report N°245, 27 July 2017 (also available in Chinese and Russian).

The Rising Risks of Misrule in Tajikistan, Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°86, 9 October 2017 (also available in Russian).

Rivals for Authority in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan, Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°87, 14 March 2018 (also available in Russian).

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