



This cover picture was taken from National Geographic.



**Why are we here?**

**We want to hear from you, the community.**

We know this is a difficult time for you. The conditions in Syria are dire, and have been that way for years now.

**We want to listen to your concerns, fears, and frustrations.**

We understand there may be concerns and even disagreements with how the USG has conducted its foreign policy around this crisis.

**We want to help inform you of what we know, so you are aware of the serious problems in Syria.**

Beyond the ongoing fighting and Assad's refusal to step down and end hostilities, the USG is noticing troubling trends regarding people leaving their homelands to fight in Syria. We will discuss what implications this could have for our national security.



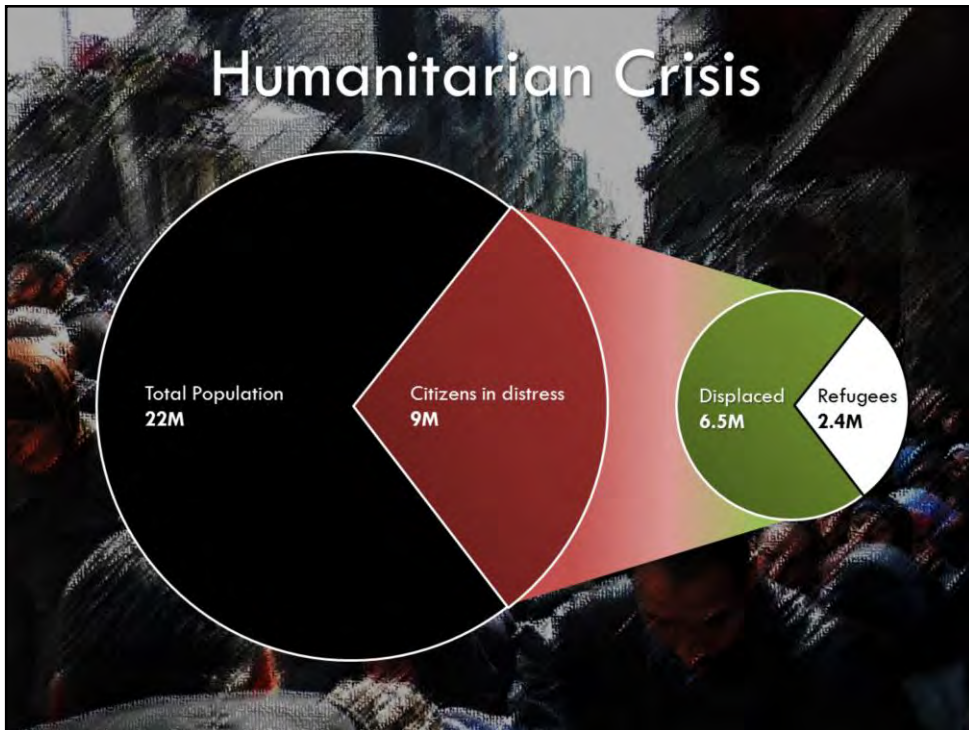
This picture shows the devastation from barrel bombing in Aleppo.

**Picture Source:** Reuters



This picture shows refugees from the Yarmouk Camp waiting in a line to receive essentials.

**Picture Source:** Reuters



### Humanitarian Crisis – Numbers

#### Syria has a total population of 22 million

For perspective, we can compare that to roughly the population of the state of New York. And, as many of you are aware, Syria has a diverse population with multiple ethnicities, religions, and socio-economic statuses.

#### According to the United Nations, 9.3 million of the population, nearly 40%, need humanitarian assistance.

Forty-percent is a staggering number, especially for a nation of 22.4 million people. To give us some perspective, and keeping with our comparison to the United States' population, this 9.3 million number is equivalent to the entire population of the Chicago metro area needing food, water, medicine, and access to facilities and care. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/04/us-syria-crisis-un-idUSBRE9A30UW20131104>

#### Of the 9.3 million, the UN estimates 6.8 million have been displaced.

Again, another staggering number. For perspective, this would be the equivalent of the entire Dallas metro area's population being forced to flee their homes and seek refuge, either within the country or abroad.

#### Of the 9.3 million, approximately 2.5 million have sought refuge outside Syria.

You may have seen the pictures of the mass exodus from Syria. To date, the UN estimates there are over 2.5 million Syrians whom have fled Syria and sought refuge in neighboring countries, primarily Jordan and Turkey. Again for perspective, we can imagine all of the citizens of Denver fearing for their lives and fleeing to Canada, Mexico, or other neighboring countries.

Source: USAID - <http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria>



#### **How Did We Get Here?**

##### **Arab Spring – March 2011**

Beginning in March 2011, protests emerged in Syria following similar protests throughout the region, commonly referred to as the so-called "Arab Spring."

##### **Assad Response – May 2011**

In response, the Syrian army deployed tanks into Homs, Darra, and parts of Damascus in May 2011. Fighting began to progressively escalate.

##### **West Calls on Assad to Step Down – August 2011**

President Obama publicly calls on Assad to step down.

##### **UN Accuses Assad Regime of War Crimes – August 2012**

The U.N. Human Rights Council says the Syrian military committed war crimes in the massacre of more than 100 civilians, half of them children, in the village of Houla in May 2012.

##### **Syrian Army Accused of Using Chemical Weapons – April 2013**

Britain and France inform the United Nations there is credible evidence Syria used chemical weapons against rebel forces. In August 2013, the USG later concluded the Syrian government used such weapons. Later, in September 2013, the UN found "convincing evidence" of the use of chemical weapons.

##### **Assad Regime Accused of Torture – January 2014**

A team of internationally renowned war crimes prosecutors and forensic experts has found "direct evidence" of "systematic torture and killing" by the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

#### **Sources:**

<http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/world/timeline-unrest-in-syria/207/>

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/20/world/syria-torture-photos-amanpour/index.html?sr=tw012014syria2p>



According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Zaatari Refugee Camp is now Jordan's third largest city

**Text Source:** UNHCR - <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=528a0a190&query=zaatari>  
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Pictured here are casualties from an alleged chemical weapons attack in Damascus.

**Picture Source:** Reuters

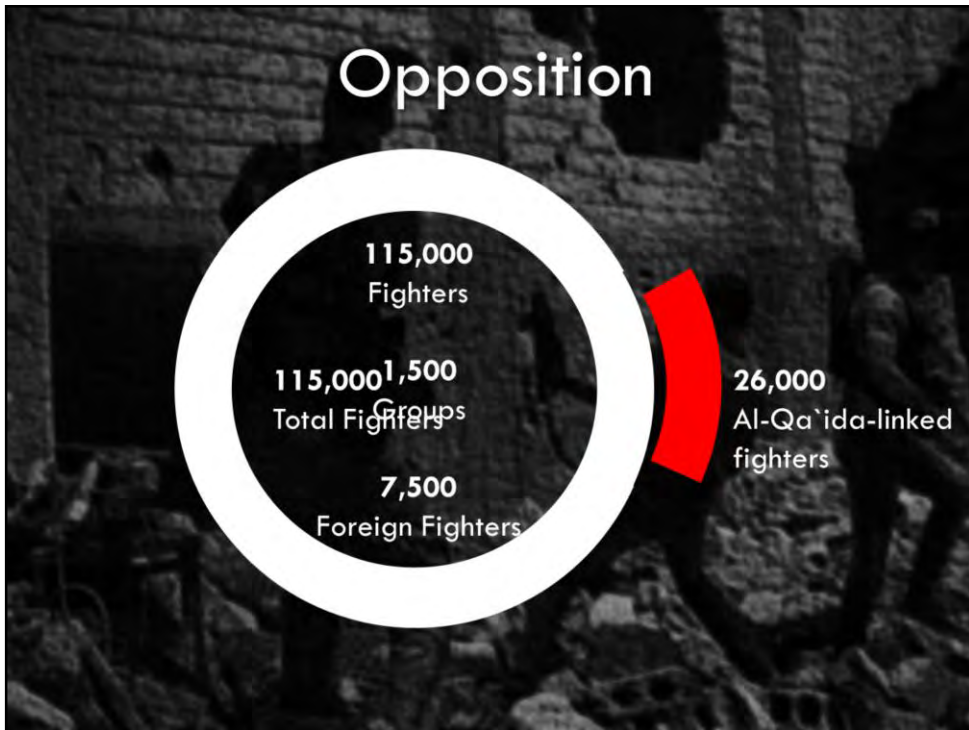
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2403312/Ruthless-brother-President-Assad-accused-chemical-weapons-attack-killed-1-200-Syrians.html>



This image shows rebels engaging Syrian forces.

**Picture Source:** Agence France Presse

<http://sun.com.na/sites/default/files/1505-2-1-syria%20rebels.jpg>



### Who is Fighting?

#### **Total Fighters: ~115,000**

As with any war, there are many uncertainties in estimating figures. According to the USG, there are an estimated 115,000 opposition fighters currently engaging the Syrian army in open combat. Much of the fighting has occurred in urban areas, such as Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs.

#### **Total Groups: ~1,500**

Of the opposition fighters, some 1,500 groups have emerged or identified themselves. Keep in mind, much of this is fluid.

#### **Total Number of Fighters From Other Countries: ~7,500**

Of the 115,000 fighters combating the Syrian army, nearly 7,500 have come from another country. These are often referred to as "foreign fighters".

#### **Total Number of Fighters Believed to be Affiliated with AQ: ~26,000**

Of the 115,000 fighters, nearly 26,000 are estimated to be affiliated with organizations that are or have been openly tied to al-Qa`ida. That is approximately 23%. We will discuss these groups later in the presentation.

*Source:* DNI James Clapper, Current and Future Worldwide Threats to the National Security of the United States, Senate Armed Services, Feb 11 2014  
[http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/WWTA%20Opening%20Remarks%20as%20Delivered%20to%20SASC\\_11\\_Feb\\_2014.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/WWTA%20Opening%20Remarks%20as%20Delivered%20to%20SASC_11_Feb_2014.pdf)

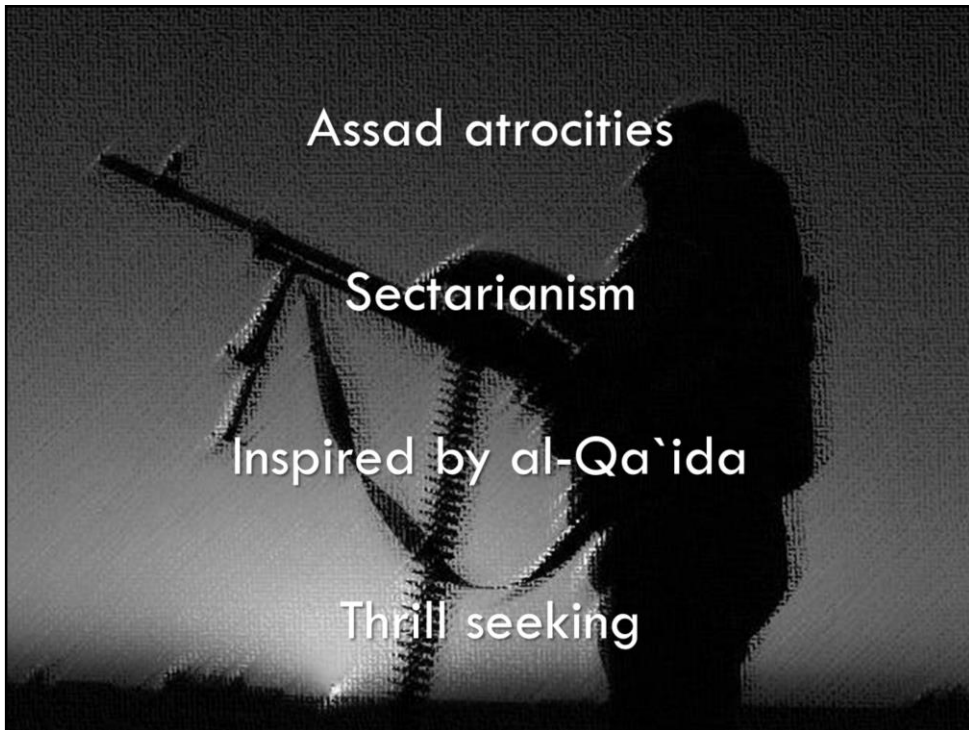


**Where are these Foreign Fighters Originating From?**

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy estimates that foreign fighter have originated from 50 nations. Most of those have come from the Middle East and North Africa, but a significant number (~1,000) have also come from Europe. The United States, Canada, and even Australia have had citizens leave to fight in Syria.

*Source:* Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Aaron Zelin, "Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria; Steep Rise Among Western Europeans "

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/up-to-11000-foreign-fighters-in-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans>



**So why would someone want to go to Syria to fight?**

**Foreign Fighters**

People who leave their home to travel to Syria go for many reasons. We have boiled these various reasons into four principal buckets.

**Assad Atrocities**

Some could be motivated by the atrocities committed by the Assad regime and feel a sense of duty to support the Syrian opposition. We learned earlier about how the Assad regime reacted quite forcefully against the initial Arab Spring protests, killing several civilians. And we also learned of the continued onslaught against civilians, including the use of chemical weapons.

**Sectarianism**

Some people may feel certain sects are being persecuted by the Assad regime, and therefore feel an obligation to defend them. You may recall Syria has a diverse population that includes several ethnicities, religions, and historic tribes.

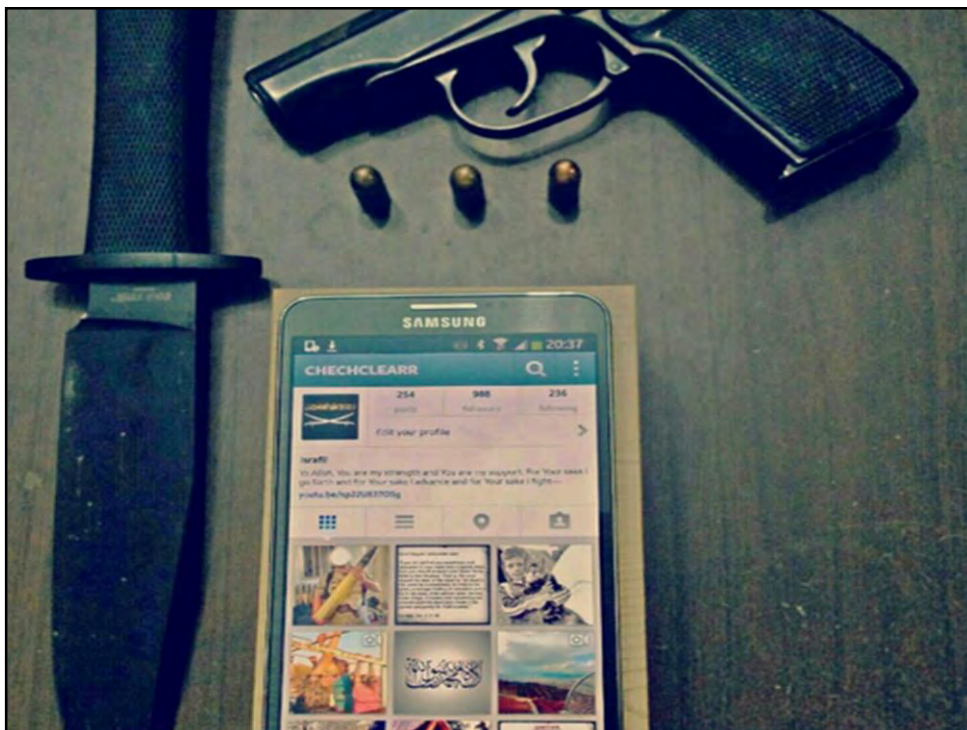
**Inspired by AQ**

Some individuals may be radicalized to violence and therefore inspired by calls from al-Qa`ida-linked groups and foreign terrorist organizations to come to Syria and fight against perceived enemies. (Russia and Iran support the Assad regime).

**Thrill Seeking**

Some individuals, believe it or not, may go to Syria looking for an adventure or simply to engage in violence, and do not necessarily do so for ideological reasons.

**Source:** Various themes identified in DOJ Indictments and Criminal complaints of HVEs (Harroun, Sheikh, Tounsii, Teasant) who attempted or did travel to Syria.



Slide images to reinforce that FTOs see media as important as weapons.

According to the International Centre for the Study of Radicalism report, foreign fighters are using social media to document their activities in real time.

- The official Twitter accounts of FTOs are less important as sources of info than "disseminator accounts" run by sympathetic individuals who lend moral and political support to those involved in the conflict. These accounts spread real-time information from the battlefield, publish links to new videos and official statements, and share photographs of battles, equipment and meetings.
- There are question-and-answer sessions, chats, pictures and videos on Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, AskFM, and apps such as Whatsapp and Kik. Youngsters post pictures of themselves in the desert or in hotel courtyards in Syria, in shades, brandishing Kalashnikovs and inviting friends to join them.

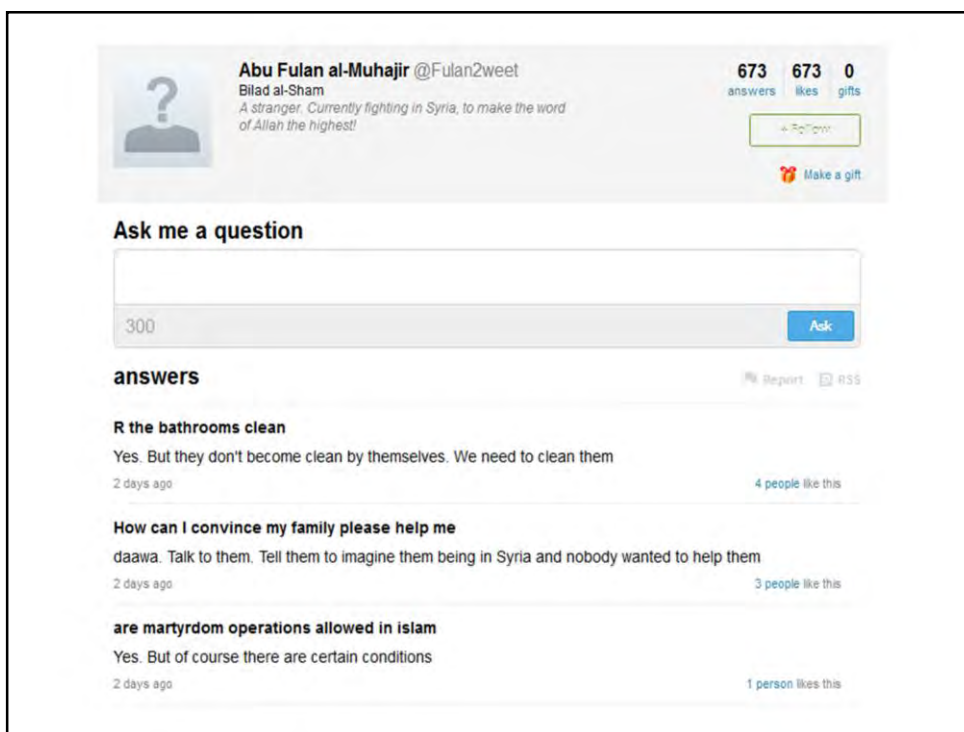
Sources:

<http://icsr.info/2014/04/icsr-insight-inspires-syrian-foreign-fighters/>

[http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/a-dutch-jihadist-in-syria-speaks-and-blogs/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_r=1](http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/a-dutch-jihadist-in-syria-speaks-and-blogs/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=1)

EUR2014041645611269 London *BBC Online* in English 15 Apr 14 Middle East

**Image Source:** <http://chechclear.tumblr.com/>



#### Ex's of postings on Ask.fm

- "Is it possible to do jihad half a year?" asks one would-be recruit, apparently seeking to join a rebel group in Syria on a short-stay basis. The question is directed at a man on the Ask.fm website who describes himself as "a stranger currently fighting in Syria." He advises that it is still possible to cross the border from Turkey "but tougher than earlier". He deals, too, with a proposal of marriage, saying he is not looking for a wife.
- Other questioners seek advice on how easy it is to cross the border into Syria from Turkey and the best way to persuade parents to allow them to go.
- They also want to know: "How much is a Glock pistol?" "Which is the best rebel group to join?" "Is there training in jujitsu?"
- One of the key questions is his motivation. "What keeps you motivated to fight and go on?" Referring to barrel bombs widely used in Syria, he replies: "When you see a little girl killed by barrels or an old man crying cuz his house was bombed."

#### Sources:

"The Facebook jihadis seeking action in Syria," by Ewen MacAskill and Leila Haddou The Guardian, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/15/facebook-jihadis-action-syria-terror>

Guardian article links to the ask.fm site. <http://ask.fm/Fulan2weet>



#### **AQ-Linked Groups**

At present, several extremist groups, including the AQ-linked al-Nusrah Front and ISIL are fighting against the Assad regime. ISIL founded al-Nusrah Front in late 2011 to act as its operational arm in Syria, although the two groups split following a public dispute in April 2013. Al-Nusrah Front has mounted suicide, explosive, and firearms attacks against regime and security targets across the country; it has also sought to provide limited public services and governance to the local population in areas under its control. Many moderate opposition groups fight alongside al-Nusrah Front and other Sunni extremists in Syria and depend on extremists for resources, including weapons and training.

*Source: NCTC Director Matthew Olsen, Testimony to Senate Foreign Relations Committee*  
[http://www.nctc.gov/docs/20140306\\_SFR\\_ExtremismSectarianism\\_Syria\\_Iraq\\_Lebanon.pdf](http://www.nctc.gov/docs/20140306_SFR_ExtremismSectarianism_Syria_Iraq_Lebanon.pdf)

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**Source:** DOJ, "Former U.S. Soldier Charged with Conspiring to Use Destructive Device While Fighting with Al Qa'ida Affiliated Group in Syria"

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/vae/news/2013/03/20130328harrounr.html>

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**Source:** FBI, "FBI Arrests Suburban Chicago Man on Charge of Supporting Terrorism Overseas"

<http://www.fbi.gov/chicago/press-releases/2013/fbi-arrests-suburban-chicago-man-on-charge-of-supporting-terrorism-overseas>

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**Source:** FBI, "Individual Charged with Attempt to Provide Material Support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization"

<http://www.fbi.gov/charlotte/press-releases/2013/individual-charged-with-attempt-to-provide-material-support-to-a-foreign-terrorist-organization>

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**Source:** U.S. vs. Akbar Jihad Jordan and Avin Marsalis Brown, Criminal Complaint

<http://ftpcontent5.worldnow.com/wncn/pdf/raid.pdf>

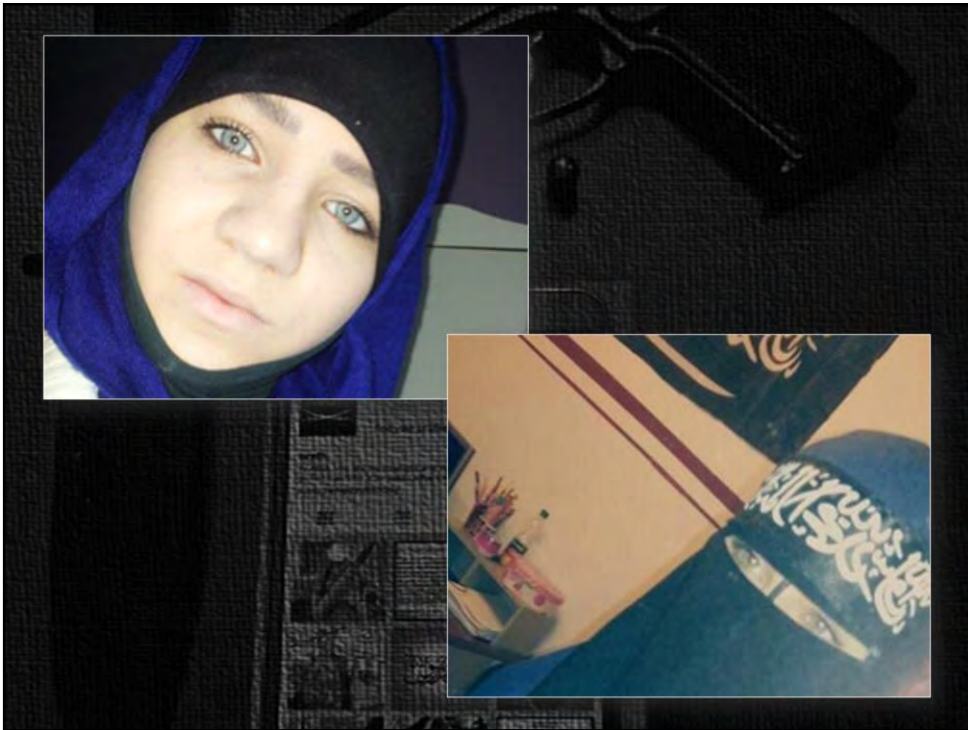
**Source:** FBI, "San Joaquin County Man Arrested at Canadian Border on Charges of Attempting to Provide Material Support to Foreign Terrorist Organization"

[http://www.justice.gov/usao/cae/news/docs/2014/2014\\_03/03-17-14Teausant.html](http://www.justice.gov/usao/cae/news/docs/2014/2014_03/03-17-14Teausant.html)

[http://www.justice.gov/usao/cae/news/docs/2014/2014\\_03/Teausant%20Complaint%20.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/usao/cae/news/docs/2014/2014_03/Teausant%20Complaint%20.pdf)

Pictures: Jordan Brown (WRAL Raleigh <http://www.wral.com/wake-terrorism-investigation-built-over-weeks/13496093/>) (WNCN Raleigh <http://www.wncn.com/story/25029610/fbi-raids-raleigh-apartment>)

# Back-up for Europe Audiences



Two Austrian teenage girls that authorities believe were tricked into travelling to Syria to fight for Islamist rebels are currently being searched for by Interpol.

- Samra Kesinovic, 16, and Sabina Selimovic, 15, disappeared from their homes in Vienna on April 10
- The girls' parents - who are originally Bosnian refugees who settled in Austria after the ethnic conflicts of the 1990's - found a slew of posts of social media networks that suggested that had gone to fight for a "holy war" in Syria. Photos on the girl's pages on social networking giant Facebook show them holding AK47 assault rifles.
- The fathers of the girls are said to be abroad looking for their daughters, who have not been in contact with their parents.
- In one posting, the girls announced plans to marry in order to become "holy warriors," and in another, they say that "death is our goal."

Sources:

"Interpol in hunt for Austrian jihadist teenage girls,"

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/04/18/Interpol-in-hunt-for-Austrian-jihadist-teenage-girls.html>



Y. and A. are 15 and 16 years old respectively, 10th graders in the southern French city of Toulouse. Over the course of a few weeks, they became convinced that they should go and fight. In just a matter of days, they organized and carried out their journey to a terrorist camp. But it didn't take long for them both to become disillusioned, and head back home to France – where they were met by police and now branded as “terrorists.”

- **Ease of getting to Syria:** In Syria, they had a contact who provided them with the roadmap. To find him, there was no need for a special network or underground movements. Facebook was enough. Thanks to the social network's auto-suggests, the two friends came across user Abou H., whose photo showed him bearing a rifle, and whose account described him as, “The fighter at Allah's service.” After communicating for a bit, he asked the two teenagers if they wanted to come to the country. No big sermon was necessary. The recruiter simply provided instructions and practical information.
- **Surprised they were fighting for a terrorist group:** Y. told investigators that he only realized they were enrolled in the al-Nusra Front days later. A week later, they were transferred to Idlib, because, according to Abou H., the FSA was approaching their village and wanted to kill the foreign fighters. The waiting in Idlib continued, along with around 20 other French-speaking members.
- **Encouraged to use social media to recruit:** Both regularly went to the village's sole Internet café to communicate with France. These exchanges were even encouraged by the group's leaders, who made the aspiring fighters pose with weapons before asking them to upload the pictures to their Facebook profiles, in order to “encourage people to come over.”
- **Disillusionment:** The two teens quickly felt lost. They found the other French speakers in the group to be “lame” thugs, and that a war between rebel groups formed an “illicit Jihad.” And being forced to stay out in the cold to get “used to it” was not really a pleasant experience. More mundanely, they simply missed their families. According to the teenagers, they were not harmed physically but they had to put up with constant “moralizing” rhetoric.

French intelligence officials welcomed them when they got off the plane. They did not return as heroes, or even wayward children, but as suspected terrorists.

Sources:

“To Syria And Back In 21 Days: Journey Of A Teenage Jihad,” Le Monde, <http://www.worldcrunch.com/world-affairs/to-syria-and-back-in-21-days-journey-of-a-teenage-jihad/syria-teenagers-jihad-journey/c1s15025/#.U1UvhCwXJU>