



This cover picture was taken from National Geographic.



Why are we here?

- Over the last four years, NCTC and DHS have travelled the country to discuss how people become radicalized or recruited by terrorist organizations.
- We have heard from communities of their desire to learn more about the phenomenon of people leaving their homes to fight in countries abroad. This issue is often referred as “foreign fighters”. Today, parts of the world are experiencing foreign fighter crises, most notably in Syria.
- The USG is becoming increasingly concerned by the number of foreign fighters in Syria and the number of people looking to travel to fight in Syria

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.



Pictures:

1. [Reuters] Devastation of barrel-bombing Aleppo.
2. [UN] Zaatari, now Jordan's 4th largest city with approximately 145,000 people, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
3. [Reuters] Refugees from the Yarmouk Camp, in Syria, waiting in a line to receive essentials. (<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html>)

Syria Timeline:

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May 2011 – Asaad deploys tanks to Homs, Darra, and parts of Damascus. Fighting escalates precipitously.

August 2011 – President Obama publicly calls on Assad to step down.

August 2012 – UN accuses Syrian Military of war crimes in Houla.

April – August 2013 – UK, France, US, and UN find credible evidence Syrian Military used chemical weapons.

Sources:

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

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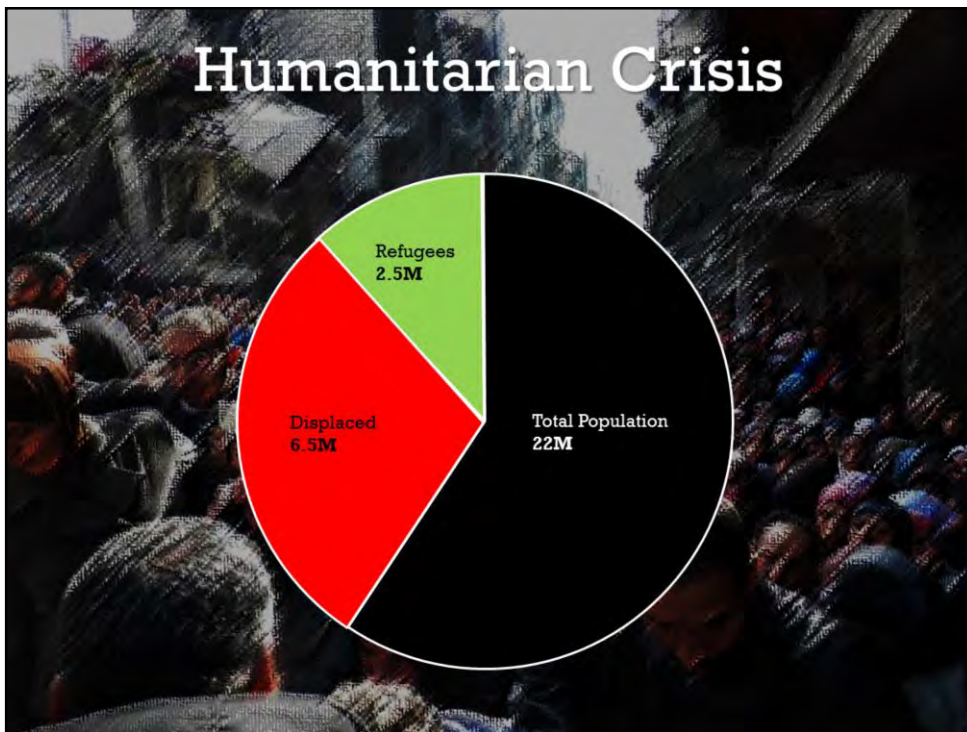
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Humanitarian Crisis – Numbers

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. That's 4 out of 10 Syrians in distress.

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.

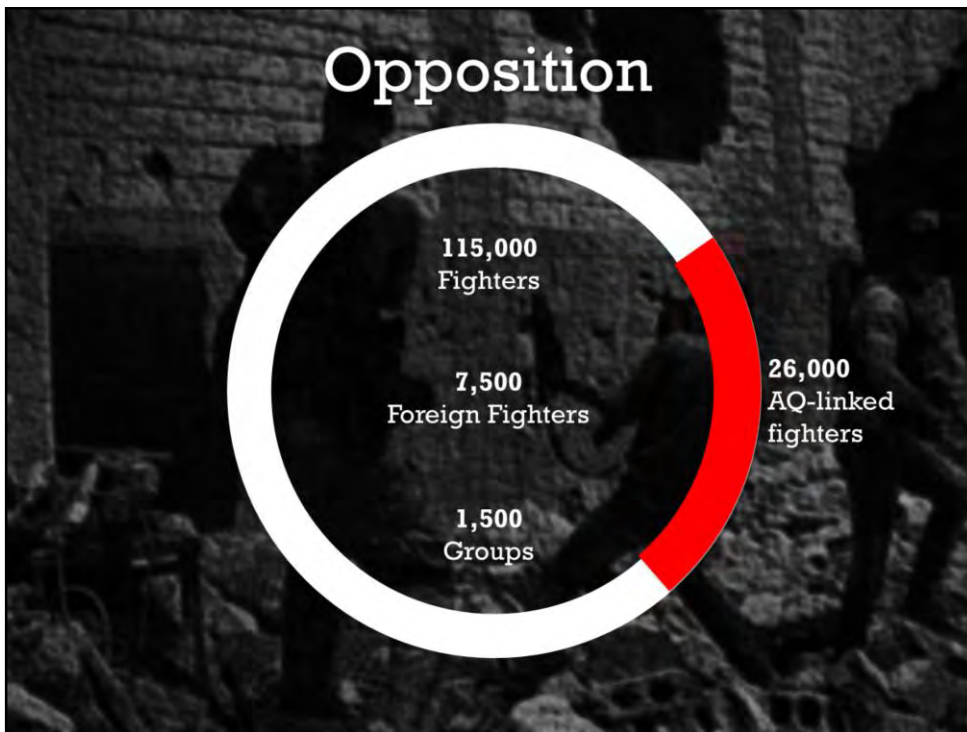
Source: USAID - <http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria>



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 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 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 Believed to be Affiliated with AQ: ~26,000

Of the 115,000 fighters, approximately 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

OTHER NUMBERS

We are also concerned about those whom have left their home countries to fight for the Assad regime or groups affiliated with them, which we will discuss later in the presentation.



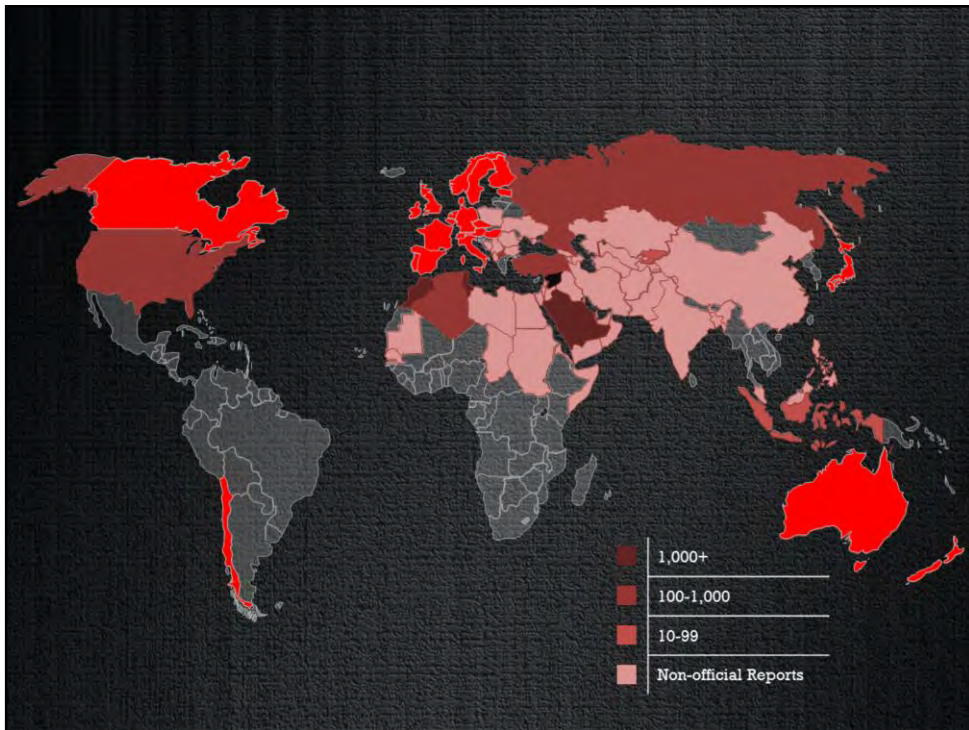
AQ-Linked Groups

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

Hezbollah

We are also concerned about individuals whom are leaving their home countries to fight for the Assad Regime and organizations that support the Regime, such as Hezbollah.



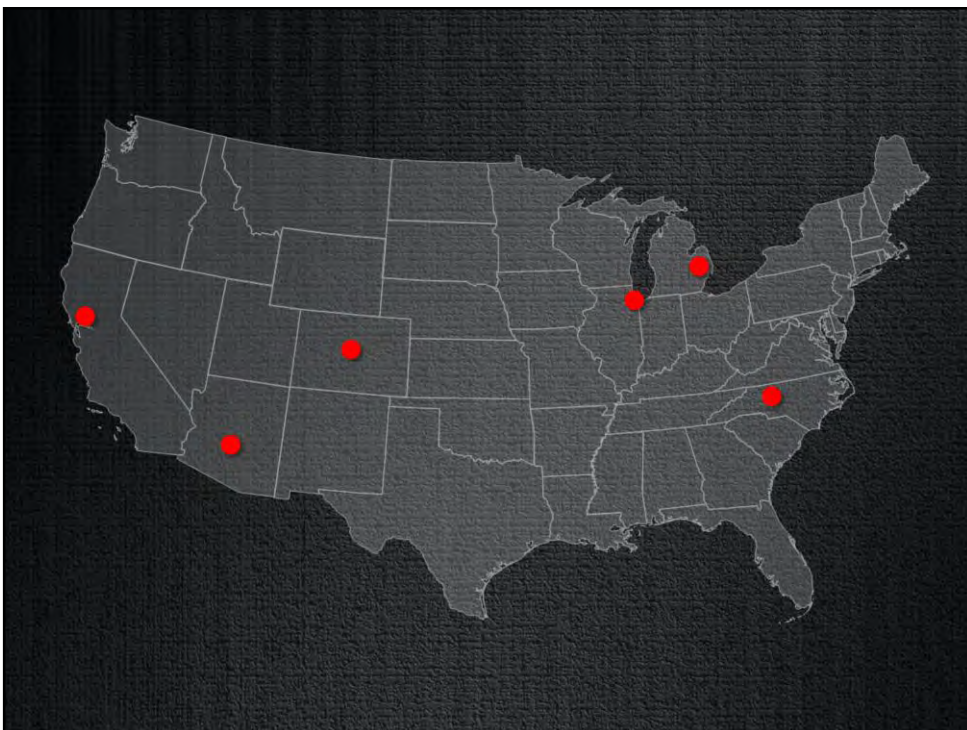
Where are these Foreign Fighters Originating From?

The Soufan Group has estimated fighters have originated from at least 81 countries. It broke out the various countries by officials or reported numbers, and then by countries that have simply reported fighters either through comments by officials from the originating countries or through social media. <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf>

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>

You will note, several of the countries that have either confirmed or reported foreign fighters within Syria are participants in the Visa Waiver Program with the United States.



James Comey has indicated over a hundred Americans have either attempted or successfully traveled to Syria.

Those depicted on this map were indicted for material support.



EASE OF TRAVEL

One of the chief concerns regarding fighters travelling to Syria is the ease of which they can get there. Unlike perhaps some other countries that have had foreign fighters, entry into Syria has been made easier due to the unrest in Iraq and the numerous facilitators in Turkey. As reporting indicates, most fighters are originating in countries that have easy access to the region, especially Turkey (Soufan Group, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf>)



THERE ARE BROAD CONCERNS WITH THIS CRISES

(1) ROMANTICIZING VIOLENCE

One of our chief concerns is how rapidly and widely this crises has become promoted through primarily social media. And much of the content comes from those supporting the conflict, which means that the messages tend to aggrandize the fighting to make it appealing.

(2) FLOW OF FUNDING (From the US Treasury Department)

There are concerns over how funds are being used by various organizations, some of which claim to be operating in Syria or surrounding areas for humanitarian purposes. For example, ISIS claims to have a consumer protection arm (which we will discuss later) and provides various aid to civilians in deep conflict zones. Another element of this issue are the private funders who are providing these funds mostly through mobile-to-mobile transfers. In various countries throughout the region it is not uncommon to see billboards requesting such transfers with the name of a charity and a mobile number to wire funds.

CHARITABLE SECTOR VULNERABILITIES (Note: The terms NGOs/NPOs/charities are used interchangeably although there are distinctions within the charitable community)

- NGOs enjoy the public trust and access to considerable sources of funds and innocent donors
- Often cash intensive with a global presence and can move funds easily; funds passing in a charity can be difficult to trace
- Provision of legitimate cover and grass roots support; can move people, money and commodities with little scrutiny, providing logistical and operation support
- Often subject to little or no effective government oversight and low entry barriers
- There is a demonstrated history of NGOs being used to provide support to terrorist organizations in high-risk, conflict jurisdictions.
- **NGOs often operate in areas where humanitarian needs are most pressing, including areas of armed conflicts and natural disasters**
- **NGOs may wittingly or unwittingly receive funds from or provide support to terrorist groups or their supporters**

METHODS OF TERRORIST FINANCING USING NGOs

- **Raising Funds** – using charitable and humanitarian relief efforts as a fundraising technique from donors
- **Moving Funds** – using humanitarian/charitable front to easily move funds among branches and within intertwined infrastructures (eg, shared leadership)
- **Using Funds** – using funds for (i) terrorist operations, training, recruitment, and (ii) organizational support, welfare, travel, logistics, social and humanitarian services, etc.

FORMS OF ABUSE

- **Diversion:** NGO funds that have been diverted from the stated mission of the organization to support violent extremism/terrorist activities instead. Largely considered fraud and easier to detect.
- **Exploitation:** NGO support for legitimate charitable and/or social services but in the name of a terrorist organization, which supports radicalization of vulnerable populations. Terrorist exploitation of NGOs is more difficult to identify and stop since legitimate charitable/social services are often being delivered but through or on behalf of terrorist organizations.

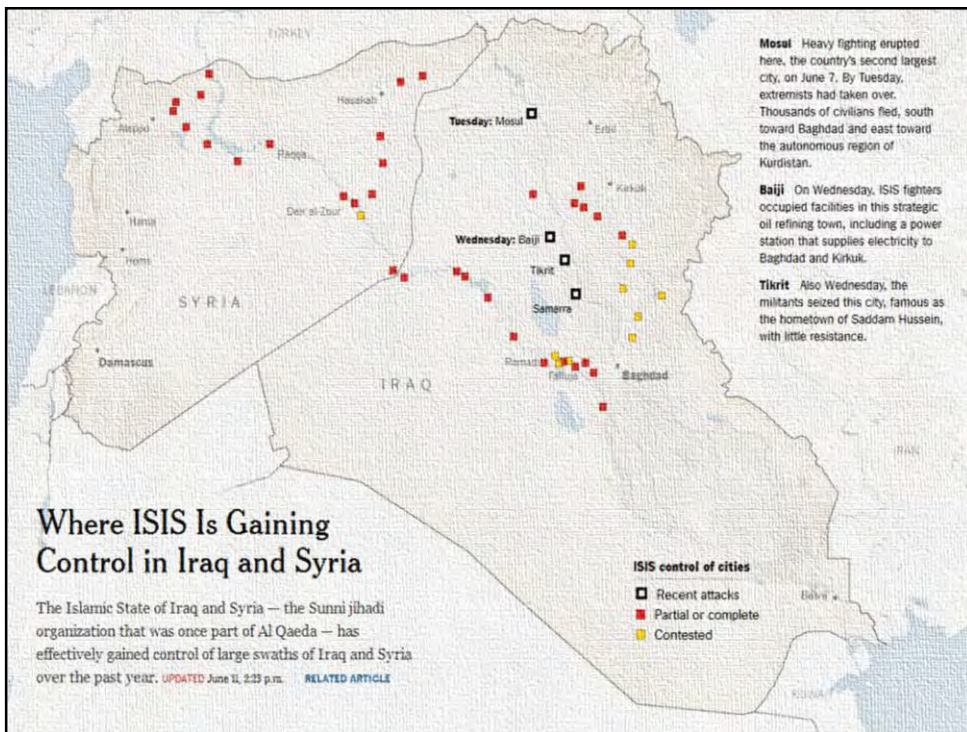
(3) SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

Naturally there are security concerns about those who are leaving their home countries to fight in Syria, and especially for those who return. Shortly after returning from fighting in Syria, French authorities arrested Mehdi Nemmouche (Pictured) for killing four civilians at a museum in Brussels, Belgium, raising the specter some fighters may return to commit violence. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/french-suspect-held-in-belgian-jewish-museum-shootings-spent-a-recent-year-in-syria-prosecutor-says/2014/06/01/d27e0428-e9c2-11e3-93d2-ed44b1f5d9e_story.html)

(4) REGIONAL CONFLICT

Another concern is how the flow of fighters affects the region. We are already seeing how some of these nefarious groups have taken the conflict into Iraq and have

destabilized that country.



IRAQ

New York Times, June 2014 (<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/11/world/middleeast/isis-control-map.html>)



WHY ARE PEOPLE INTERESTED IN GOING 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.

Humanitarian Crises

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.

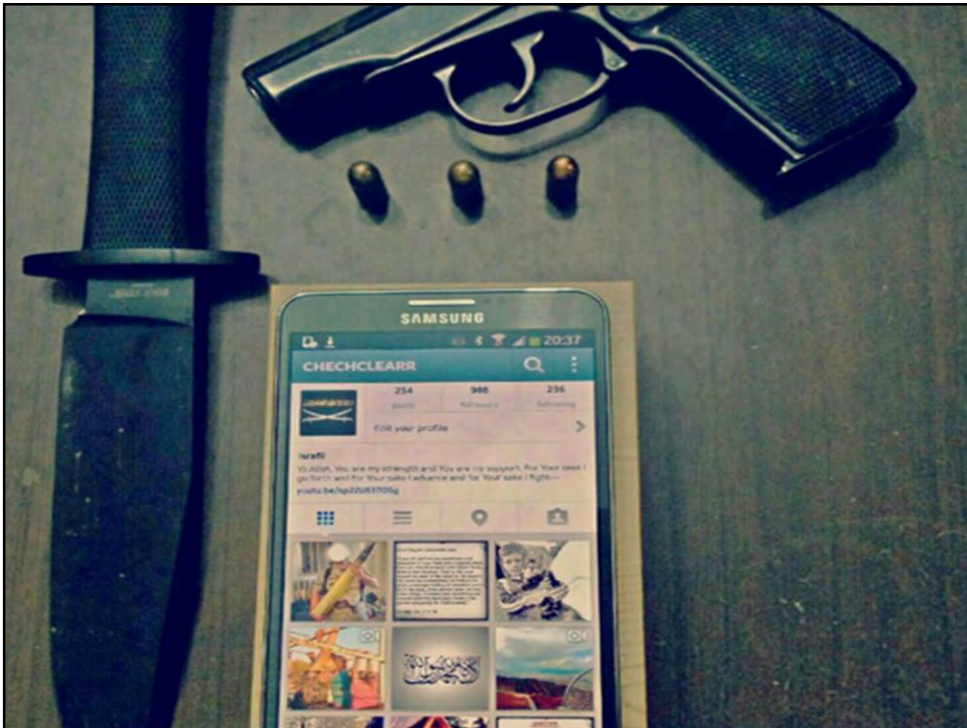
Inspired by AQ

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. These groups propagate the vision of creating an Islamic state, as defined by them. (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, Teausant) 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.

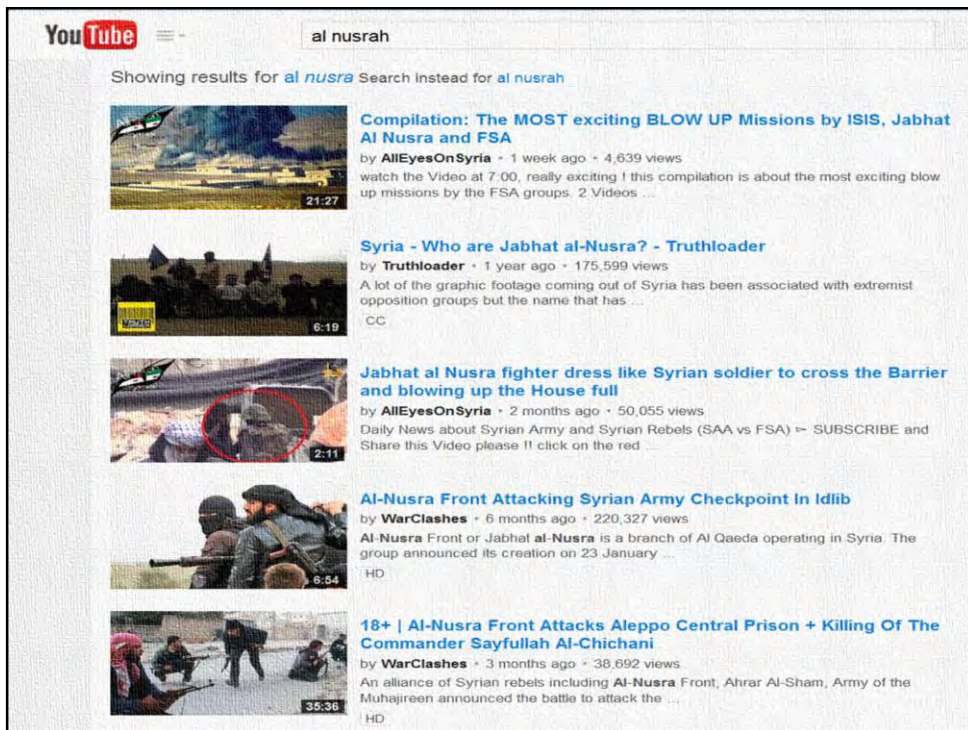
- The official Twitter accounts of FTOs are less important as sources of info than "disseminator accounts" run by sympathetic individuals who lend moral and political support to those involved in the conflict. These accounts spread real-time information from the battlefield, publish links to new videos 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

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

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



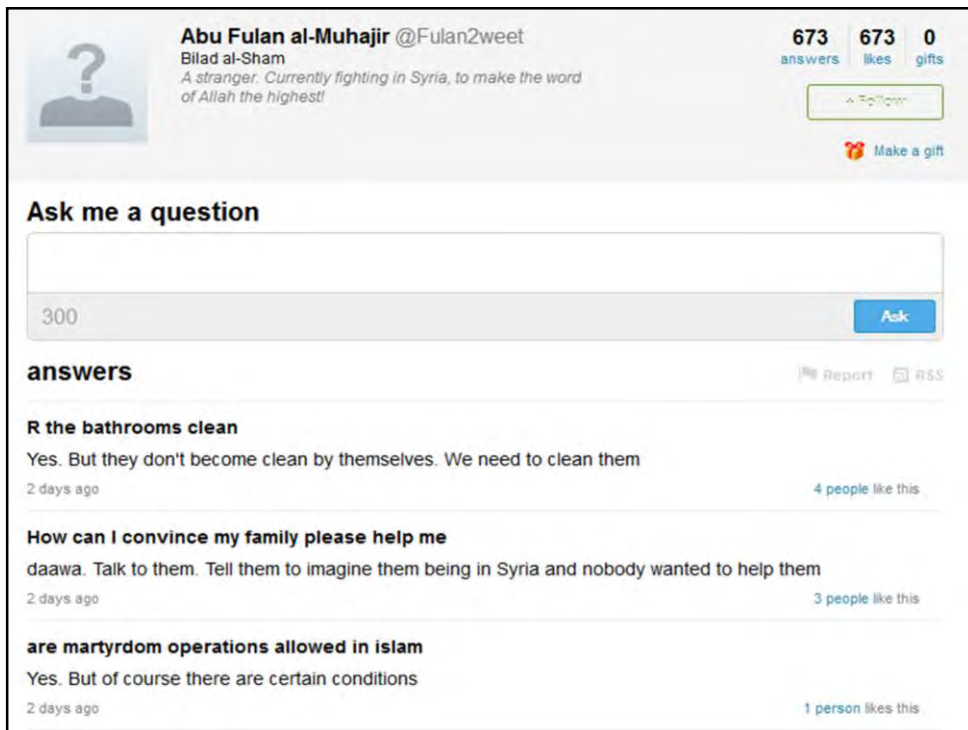
Ex's of postings on Ask.fm

- 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/Fulan2tweet>

Source: Open Source search "al nusrah" www.youtube.com



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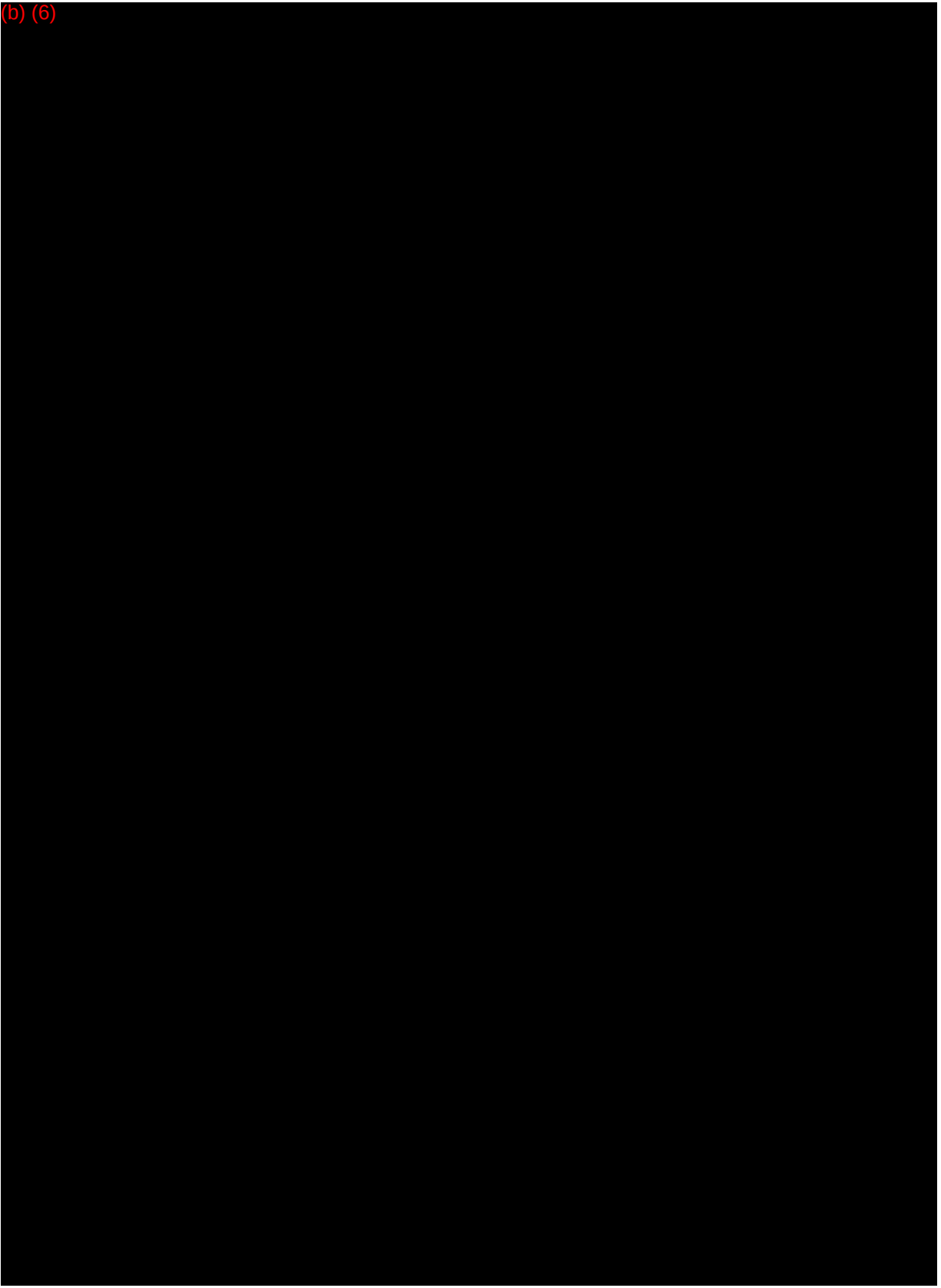
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<i>Myth</i>	vs	Reality
<i>Action & Adventure</i>		Harsh Environment. Western fighters used to better living conditions
<i>Embraced by the people</i>		Used for undesirable tasks: suicide bombing, mechanical repair, cleaning
<i>Making a Difference</i>		Syrian people don't want foreigners' help
<i>Defeating al-Assad</i>		Not fighting al-Assad, rather fighting and targeting other Muslims/minorities
<i>One Global Community</i>		There is much in-fighting among terrorist groups

MYTH VS. REALITY

Created in cooperation with DHS, via research taken from International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (<http://icsr.info/>)

(b) (6)



<http://www.wncn.com/story/25029610/fbi-raids-raleigh-apartment>



Pics from NYT

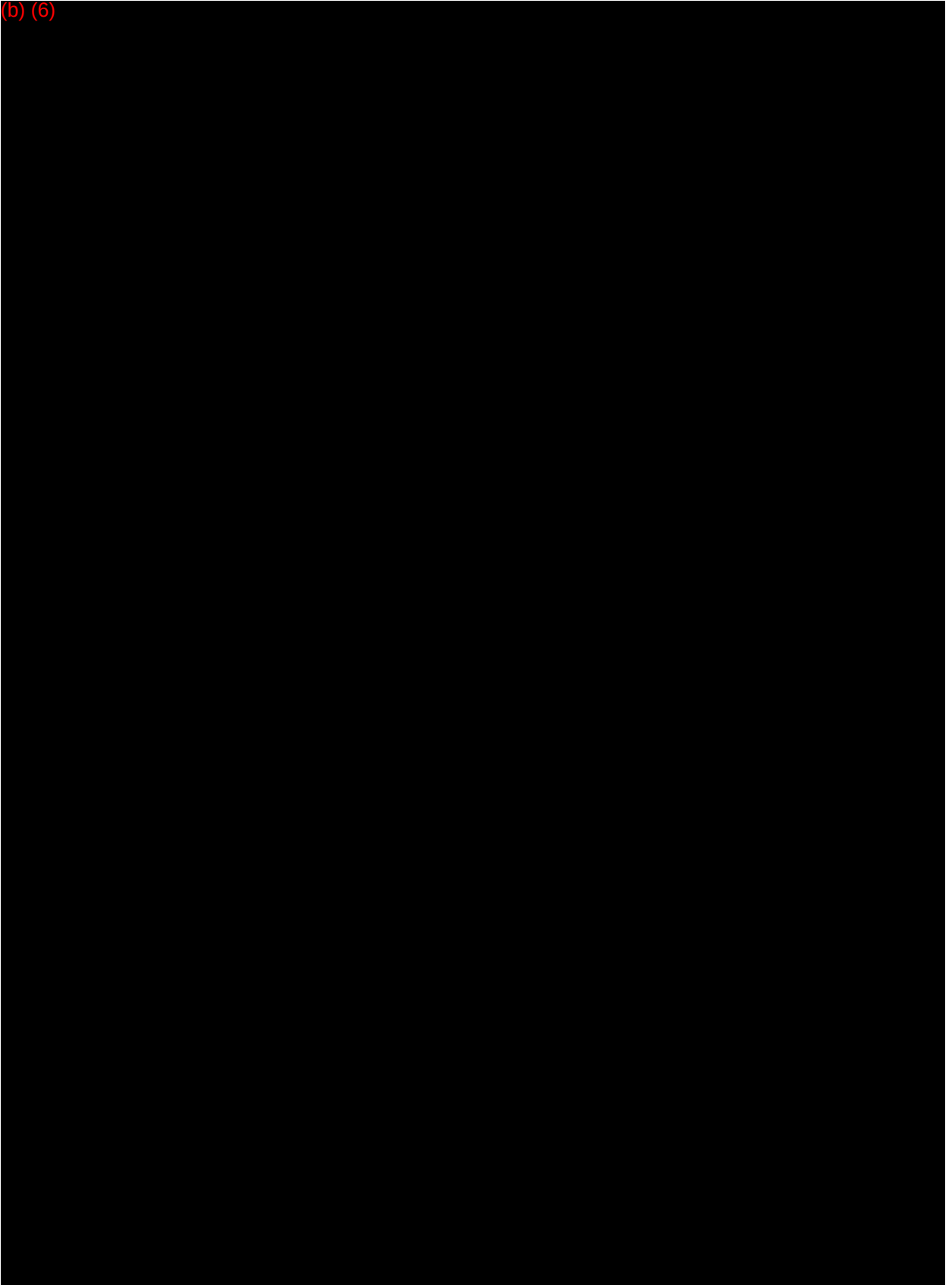


Moner Abu-u-Salla "Mo"

- Grew up in Vero Beach, FL, outside Miami in a gated-community.
- Went to Sebastian River HS and played basketball, where his teammates described him as "funny" and "outgoing".
- His Facebook page stated he liked basketball, football, the Miami Heat, and Eggo waffles.
- His mom worked with him to get him through high school.
- He told his family he was traveling to Jordan to study nursing.
- A video of him was later released online which showed him blowing up 16 tons of explosives at a regime checkpoint, killing a number of soldiers.
- His video was used for recruitment, specifically targeting English speakers.

Pics from NYT

(b) (6)



What
**Can you
Do?**

Know Your Charity Do plenty of research, ask around, see what reputation they have

Check with Treasury Check Treasury's website, such as the OFAC Risk Matrix, or the Voluntary Charity Guidelines, and general FAQs to better understand the threat and what to look for in a charity

Use Public Resources Look at Guidestar, the Better Business Bureau, or other self-regulatory organizations for background and ratings

