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Destination Syria: An Exploratory Study into the Daily Lives of Dutch 'Syria Travellers'

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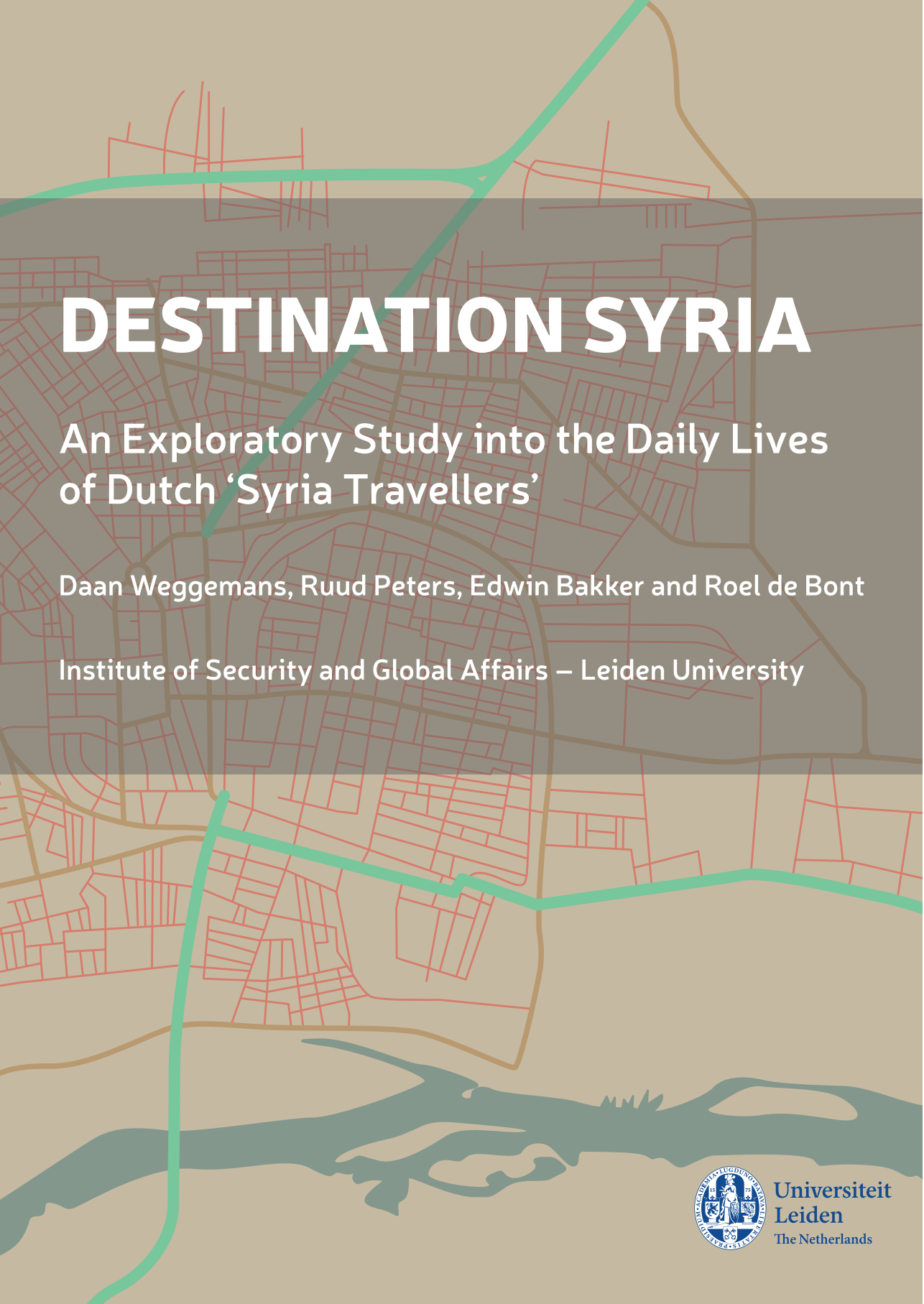
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DESTINATION SYRIA

An Exploratory Study into the Daily Lives
of Dutch 'Syria Travellers'

Daan Weggemans, Ruud Peters, Edwin Bakker and Roel de Bont

Institute of Security and Global Affairs – Leiden University



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9 November 2016

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List of abbreviations

AIVD	General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene inlichtingen- en veiligheidsdienst)
DTN	National terrorist threat assessment (Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland)
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JaN	Jabhat al-Nusra
JFS	Jabhat Fath al-Sham
NCTV	National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and Security (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid)
PKK	Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)
SMC	Supreme Military Command
YPG	People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)

Map of Syria



Source: University of Texas Libraries

1. Introduction

In March 2011, peaceful protests in Syria against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad were violently crushed. This event marked the start of a particularly violent civil war in which, according to estimates by the United Nations, more than 250,000 people have been killed to date.¹ In addition, millions of Syrians have fled their country.² At the same time, there is a considerable group of people who have decided to travel to the conflict area. Initially, it mainly concerned people from surrounding Arabic countries. They were soon followed by people from EU Member States, Turkey, Russia and even countries such as Australia, the United States and China. During the past few years, the number of foreigners has risen drastically. Current estimates of the number of people travelling to Syria and Iraq from the European Union range from 3,850³ to more than 5,000.⁴ The number of Dutch people is currently estimated at 260 men and women. They have been travelling to the conflict area since 2012.⁵ Some of them were killed in Syria or Iraq (42), while others (approximately 40) returned to the Netherlands after some time.⁶

These Syria travellers, as well as those who made unsuccessful attempts to travel to Syria, are high on the political and administrative agendas. A considerable number of national and international reports and publications focus on the backgrounds and motives of western fighters in Syria and Iraq. Their involvement in serious human rights violations has also been a point for attention. A subject much less written about is the daily lives of foreigners at or behind the front. One of the reasons for this is the dangerous situation in the country. Only a handful of journalists and scientists were brave enough to conduct local studies. Also, it is often not possible to come into contact with people in Syria by telephone or via the

¹ United Nations, 2015

² UNHCR, n.d.

³ Neumann, 2015

⁴ The Soufan Group, 2015:12

⁵ NCTV (2016)

⁶ Ibid.

Internet. Sometimes technology simply does not allow for it, in other cases it led to major safety risks for the people involved.

The limited picture of daily life in Syria is a big obstacle when trying to answer relevant social and legal questions. What is life like in Syria for the average Syria traveller? For instance, is leaving the country for Syria in practice equal to a life as a foreign fighter or are there other options too? These are some of the key questions addressed in this report.⁷

1.1 Explanation

The aim of this study is to get a picture of the living conditions of Dutch people in areas in Syria that have not been controlled by the al-Assad regime since 2014. This study is based on publicly available sources such as reports, media articles, social media (Twitter and Facebook) and weblogs. In addition, we analysed legal dossiers and interviewed academics, government employees, social workers, journalists, family members of Syria travellers and others who were able to give us an insight into the living conditions in Syria. Examples of themes that were discussed during these semi-structured interviews include the combat, working and living conditions, income, leisure activities and family life (see appendix B). The principal methodological deliberations in respect to this study are discussed in further detail in chapter four.

When reading this report, a number of important things should be taken into consideration. First, this is an exploratory study. This means that it is an initial, yet thorough exploration of a research topic for which there exists little literature. Although the researchers feel that in general, the picture of life in Syria and the activities of Syria travellers are properly substantiated, some subjects were more difficult to report on. In some cases, there was not enough information available or it would have demanded more time to reveal certain aspects of the daily lives of Dutch Syria travellers. Given the limited time frame of this study (from October to

⁷ This publication of this report does not include the paragraph with the formal study assignment.

December 2015), this proved impossible. The report explicitly states when information proved to be insufficient in order to reach certain conclusions, or when sources contradicted each other.

Second, it is important to keep the dynamic nature of the conflict in mind. Since 2011, the position of nationalist or secular rebels who revolted against corruption and human rights violations by the al-Assad regime has weakened considerably, partly in view of the emergence of Islamic groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN)⁸, the Islamic Front and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁹ In addition, the Kurds in the north of Syria now also play an important role and various countries and organisations outside of Syria have (directly or indirectly) started to get involved in the fight. The primary focus of this study lies on the calendar year of 2014. One central development during that year was the formation of the caliphate by ISIS. In the summer of 2014, the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura) of ISIS proclaimed a transnational 'Islamic state' on the territory of Syria and Iraq, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as caliph. Muslims from across the world were called to settle in this area (*hijra*) and to contribute to the continued building and expansion of this state. The formation of the caliphate had major consequences for life in these areas. Life in the caliphate is subject to strict rules. Various institutions have been set up too, for instance for the daily government of the territory and the enforcement of new laws. This makes it possible to paint a relatively uniform picture of local daily life in some areas. It is a lot less easier for other areas and organisations. This may be because rebel groups form part of joint coalitions or because government does not have priority (yet) and people are primarily engaged in defending or conquering territory.

⁸ On 28 July 2016 the leader of JaN announced that the organisation was henceforth called Jabhat Fath al-Sham (The Front for the Conquest of Syria). This implied a change of strategy, which will be discussed in chapters 2 and 10. Given the fact that the primary focus of this report is the year 2014, we will predominantly refer to the organisation as Jabhat al-Nusra.

⁹ This organisation has been referred to in various ways during the past few years (examples include: 'Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant' (ISIL), 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria' (ISIS), more recently as 'Islamic State' and in Arabic as '*ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fi 'l-'Irāq wa-sh-Shām*' shortened to Da'ish or Daesh). For the sake of readability of this report, the authors have opted to consistently use the abbreviation ISIS.

Third, and in part related to the above, living conditions in 2014 can considerably differ depending on one's exact location (both at the frontline and in the hinterland). We have tried to pay attention to this in our study as much as possible. We must note however, that we only discuss areas where Dutch nationals are reasonably likely to stay. A similar choice was made with regard to the treatment of specific organisations in this report (see chapter three).

Fourth, for this study we have decided to use neutral terms such as 'Syria travellers' for persons who left the Netherlands for Syria since 2011 with the intention of joining the armed conflict and/or to live there. While realizing these terms do not always fit the contemporary security discourse, these terms do offer scope for studying the probability of certain roles of foreigners in Syria. The term foreign fighter will be used only when it explicitly concerns people who are directly involved in the armed conflict. We have explicitly avoided the emotionally charged term 'terrorist' in this report.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that the initial study paints a general picture of the daily lives of Syria travellers in 2014. The reason for this is that the report was written for specific court cases of Dutch nationals who left for Syria in the year 2014. This means there may be specific current situations for which our findings do not apply. However, in this translated version we regularly refer to the current political and military developments (for example in paragraph 2.4).

1.2 Note on the authors

For this study, Professor Ruud Peters (professor emeritus in Islamic law, University of Amsterdam), Professor Edwin Bakker (professor in (counter)terrorism, Leiden University) and Daan Weggemans MSc.(doctoral candidate, Leiden University) were appointed expert witnesses by the District Court in Rotterdam. The role of Roel de Bont MSc. (Leiden University) in this project was that of researcher. The authors would like to thank those who were prepared to share their knowledge and experiences with us. The authors would also

like to thank Ruben Kon and Noora Kinnunen for their supporting work during this project.

1.3 Reader's guide

This report consists of two parts. The first part of this study relates to a general description of the conflict in Syria and the principal parties involved (*chapter two*), and the phenomenon of Syria travellers (*chapter three*). We will also discuss the research methodology (*chapter four*).

The second part of the report gives an overview of the main empirical insights we obtained about daily life in Syria. After a general introduction, the administration and prevailing laws and regulations in areas under the control of certain organisations are described (*chapter five*). The next chapters provide a picture of various other aspects of the daily lives of Dutch people in Syria, in areas controlled by ISIS. *Chapter six* for instance, deals with the initial period after Dutch Syria travellers have arrived in Syria and their subsequent deployment by the various groups there. *Chapter seven* discusses the social aspects of life under ISIS. The next chapter focuses on the way in which Syria travellers support themselves (*chapter eight*), before moving on to things such as infrastructure and other facilities in these areas (*chapter nine*). In *chapter ten* we make a comparison with life in areas that are controlled by other organisations (Jabhat al-Nusra in particular). The main findings are summarised in the conclusion (*chapter eleven*).

2. The map of the conflict

In 2011, peaceful protests in Dera'a against the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad were violently crushed. This event proved to be a milestone in a process that would ultimately result in a civil war with hundreds of armed parties.¹⁰ In addition, many foreign states have also become directly or indirectly involved in the conflict over the years. The regime of Bashar al-Assad for instance is supported by Lebanon, Iran and, recently, Russia. Opposition parties on the other hand receive support from Saudi Arabia, the United States, Turkey and Qatar, among others. As Saudi Arabia and Iran are arch enemies, the conflict in Syria also shows all sorts of aspects of a war by proxy.

Another important factor in the conflict is the emergence of salafi jihadist groups such as JaN and ISIS. In 2013, the latter extended its activities from Iraq to Syria, which in 2014 resulted in the creation of a caliphate in parts of both countries. Because of the role of the Sunni jihadist movements, the conflict also has a sectarian character, with Sunnites standing opposite Shiites and non-Islamic minorities.

The Kurds also play a particular role in this war. During the conflict, they managed to capture an area in the north of Syria. However, given the focus of this report, we will not discuss this any further. Finally, the conflict is characterised by the large number of foreigners travelling to the conflict area. This is discussed in more detail in chapter three. The remainder of this chapter will generally discuss the political and military aspects of the conflict in Syria and Iraq that are most important for this study.

2.1 The run-up to a civil war

At the end of 2010, the population of Tunisia revolted. Other Arabic autocracies soon followed. This series of revolts and protests later came to be known as the Arab Spring. The first 'successes' occurred at the start of 2011: the Tunisian

¹⁰ See also Cafarella & Casagrande, 2015; Blanchard et al. 2014:3

president, Ben Ali, fled the country and Egyptian president Mubarak stepped down. This context offered the Syrian population an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction. Syria, which had been under the control of the al-Assad family since 1970, had been characterised by high unemployment figures, high inflation, limited vertical mobility, corruption, restricted political freedom and a tough government for many years.¹¹ Nevertheless, the prevailing opinion was that the Syrian police state on the one hand and the fear of the population for sectarian violence on the other would prevent an uprising.¹²

Indeed, attempts by young activists at the start of 2011 to start a revolution fell on deaf ears. The protests were fuelled when a group of students were arrested and tortured in Dera'a in March 2011 for scrawling an anti-regime motto on the wall of a school building. Protests also started in other cities more or less around the same time. Heavy-handed police action was the standard answer of the Syrian authorities. This caused the protests to spread to neighbouring regions. A month later, protests that started off as confrontations with local state representatives had turned into a national protest against the Syrian regime as a whole.¹³ Despite a number of promised concessions by the Syrian government, the population continued its protests. In response, the Syrian army was deployed on a large scale to crush the protests in April 2011. This heralded a new phase of the conflict: armed resistance started to overshadow unarmed resistance.¹⁴ Syria entered a civil war, with various rebel groups fighting government troops – and each other – for the control over villages, cities and the countryside.

2.2 Oppositional factions

The oppositional factions mainly consist of nationalists, jihadist movements and local groups.¹⁵ The nationalists are mainly represented by the Free Syrian Army

¹¹ Sharp & Blanchard, 2012:1

¹² Ibidem

¹³ Ismail, 2014:539

¹⁴ Kahf, 2014:556

¹⁵ Benotman & Naseraldin, 2014:1. For an approach of the opposition parties, see also: Cafarella & Casagrande, 2015

(FSA). This movement, which was formed in July 2011 by deserters from the Syrian state army, was the first party to fight against the Syrian regime. From that moment, other opposition parties also picked up their weapons. The organisation subsequently faced competition mainly from emerging jihadist groups. An armed uprising offered jihadist movements the opportunity to increase their influence in Syria, especially given their, up to then, virtually negligible role in the relatively peaceful revolutions of the Arab Spring.¹⁶ The jihadist camp in Syria now comprises various groups waging jihad against the al-Assad regime. However, there are large differences among these groups. Relationships between the groups are characterised by both collaboration and infighting.

In addition to salafi jihadist movements, ethnic groups are also involved in the conflict. The Kurds play a key role in this category. The Peshmerga, PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*) and YPG (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*) have won (back) terrain from ISIS on several fronts, with their role in liberating the Yazidis and recapturing Kobane probably being among their best-known actions.

The oppositional factions in Syria, can be divided into two groups on the basis of their ideology and strategy: the *thawrî* (revolutionary) groups and the salafi jihadist groups. Both categories aim to overthrow the current regime of Bashar al-Assad. The *thawrî* groups also want to realise their objectives within the existing boundaries of Syria and are prepared to accept assistance from foreign states. This in contrast to the salafi jihadist factions, which ultimately pursue a Sunni Islamic transnational order and who are not or barely prepared to accept help from existing states, because those states also form part of the transitional order that is being fought.¹⁷ The areas where these coalitions and militia operate are discussed in more detail below. For a better understanding of the geographical positions and changes, a number of maps are included in appendix C.

¹⁶ Benotman & Naseraldin, 2014:1

¹⁷ The classification is based on International Crisis Group, 2014

Thawrī groups

The composition of the *thawrī* camp is highly fragmented and fluid. It concerns relatively small groups that form fragile coalitions. One of the most important movements is the Free Syrian Army (FSA, Al-Jaysh al-Suri al-Hurr) which was set up by deserted officers in the summer of 2001. In September that year, the group merged with a similar organisation: the Free Officers Movement (Harakat al-Dubbat al-Ahrar). The FSA supported the Syrian National Council since its formation at the end of 2012. A large number of militia fight under the standard of the FSA, with a reasonable degree of autonomy. The majority of fighters are Sunnis (estimated at 90%), but there are also Alawite, Shiite and Druze militia. Until February 2014, the FSA was led by Salim Idris, followed by Abdullah al-Bashir. In 2013 and 2014, when JaN and ISIS gained considerable victories, a sizeable group of FSA fighters deserted to these organisations. There are few foreigners who fight within the FSA. There are a couple of Arab fighters and some mercenaries from the Balkan (Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo). The FSA is active in the west of Syria, particularly in the south and north, near Aleppo. Their main aim is to overthrow the al-Assad regime. Given the ambitions of ISIS, FSA militias often face battle against ISIS fighters too. Guerrilla tactics are often used in the fight against the regime, which are not aimed towards the goal of occupying territory, but rather at weakening the state army by attacking supply lines and undermining army morale.¹⁸

In the north, the *thawrī* factions collaborated in the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, in which the Supreme Military Command (SMC) played an important role. In southern Syria, *thawrī* factions collaborated in Al-Jabha al-Janūbiyya (Southern Front). These ‘umbrella organisations’ comprised factions of various ideologies. Some have only one conviction: that the regime needs to be overthrown. Others clearly have Islamic ideas they want to realise within the boundaries of today’s Syria – with or without the support from other states. Such organisations include Jaysh al-Islam (Army of

¹⁸ Enders & Landay, 2012

the Islam)¹⁹ and Ahrar al-Sham (full name: Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Movement of the Free Men from the Levant).²⁰

Among other things, the power of the umbrella organisations over the individual militias with regard to operational planning, coordination and collaboration lies in their contacts with other states – and as such their ability to get military equipment into Syria. In the south, this is coordinated with Jordan. In the north, military support comes from various countries, via Turkey. In contrast with the border between Jordan and Syria, the border between Turkey and Syria is porous. Militia and coalitions of militia continuously fight over the control of that border.

The power of the National Coalition and the SMC weakened in the autumn of 2014, also as a result of the agreements made by the US and UN to free Syria from chemical weapons. The US applied pressure on the SMC to take part in the negotiations, which were also attended by the regime of al-Assad. This undermined the legitimacy of the SMC and as such that of the National Coalition. Also, it now became clear that the US were not prepared to support the opposition with military interventions. In response, anti-Western Islamic groups within the *thawrī* factions gained more supporters and became increasingly influential. Furthermore, many *thawrī* groups were more prepared to work alongside an organisation such as JaN. Eventually, in late November 2014, a number of important Islamic factions set up their own umbrella organisation: al-Jabha al-Islamiyya (Islamic Front). Participants included important Islamic factions, some of which used to be associated with the SMC, such as Liwa al-Tawhid (the Banner of Monotheism), Jaysh al-Islam (The Army of Islam), Suqur al-Sham (the Falcons of the Levant) and Ahrar al-Sham (The Free Men of the Levant). The Islamic Front is anti-Western, aims for application of the sharia, collaborates with both *thawrī* and salafi jihadist groups

¹⁹ A coalition of Islamic militia that are mainly active in the area around Damascus, until recently led by Zahran ‘Allush, who was killed recently. The organisation is assumed to receive financial support from Saudi Arabia (Oweis, 2013).

²⁰ A coalition of Islamic militia, the numbers of which are estimated at 10,000 to 20,000 men, and which is one of the most important coalitions in addition to the FSA (The Economist, 2013).

and opposes any negotiations initiated by the West.²¹ Therefore, at first glance, the difference between *thawrī* organisations and salafi jihadist groups has become less clear in various aspects.

Salafi jihadist groups

The salafi jihadist camp consists of ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra (full name: Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham [Front for assistance to the population of the Levant]) and a number of smaller militia associated with Al Qaeda. The best-known group within this camp, ISIS, controls large parts of eastern Syria and the north-west of Iraq. What we now know as Islamic State has undergone several name changes over the years. The origins of the organisation lie in the movement set up by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 1991, Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Group of the Monotheism and the Jihad). After that, continuous organisational changes caused the organisation to change its name from Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and finally Islamic State (IS). In 2010, control of ISI – which was quite weak by then – fell into the hands of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Under his regime, the organisation managed to secure large parts of north-west Iraq. In order to gain control in Syria, he allowed Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani to set up a local department of Al Qaeda in that country at the end of 2012. This new movement would be known as JaN (also known as al-Nusra Front [or support front]). This military organisation was successful from the start, conquered considerable parts of Syria and received support from the population. Soon there were frictions between ISI and JaN. In 2013, al-Baghdadi announced the formation of ISIS; a new movement that originated from the merger between the Iraqi ISI and the Syrian al-Nusra Front. This unilateral announcement was renounced by al-Jawlani. Al-Jawlani distanced himself from Baghdadi by swearing allegiance to Al Qaeda which had also taken up a critical position towards ISIS. As a result, JaN is also regarded as the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda. This rift did not stop ISI's advance to Syria however; al-Baghdadi sent reinforcements from Iraq and was supported by

²¹ International Crisis Group, 2014

defecting al-Nusra fighters – ISIS was a fact. The rift between JaN and ISIS resulted in fights, with JaN being driven out of east Syria and ISIS gaining control of the cities of Raqqa and Deir-al-Zor. During that same period, the latter also captured the Iraqi city of Mosul.

JaN, which had become active as an independent organisation after the rift, shifted its activities to the west: the Aleppo region, the province of Idlib, the city of Damascus and the Golan Heights. It attacked Syrian government facilities and nationalist or secular rebel groups that were being supported by the United States. JaN collaborated with the important Islamic rebel group Ahrar al-Sham and units of the FSA. In 2014, JaN controlled dozens of cities, set up sharia law courts and granted social facilities only (see paragraph 5.7). Although at certain times in 2014 there still was some form of collaboration on the battlefield between JaN and ISIS, it had gone by 2015.²² The flaring battle between these two parties was not just a battle for power and territory; it was also a battle of two strategies. Both organisations ultimately wanted to set up an Islamic state. ISIS wanted to do this by first capturing an area, establishing an Islamic administration and then overthrowing the regime of al-Assad. For JaN, the latter has first priority – which means the movement finds it easier to work alongside other opposition groups. As a result – see also the previous paragraph about the rapprochement by *thawrī* groups to JaN – JaN plays an important role in the north. Additionally, support for these groups is biggest among the Sunni population – most of whom live in this region. JaN's support is smaller in the south. Nevertheless, the organisation still is of importance there as well. For instance, structural suicide attacks ensure that JaN appears to have a bigger effect than other (*thawrī*) groups, which shy away from such actions. Another aspect is that JaN has considerable assets of its own. It is not restricted by political demands from other countries, so it can carry out most of its own plans. Thirdly, JaN receives a lot of local support, because many of their leaders (and troops) are Syrian. This stands in contrast to ISIS, whose leaders (and

²² Stanford University, n.d.

troops) are mostly ‘foreigners’. And finally – even though this applies to many other groups as well – it has emerged that the leadership of the al-Nusra Front is flexible and prepared to enter into ad-hoc coalitions when this is favourable from a military standpoint.²³

On 28 July of 2016 JaN’s leader al-Jawlani announced in a video message that the organisation henceforth would be named Jabhat Fath al-Sham (JFS) Front for the Conquest of the Levant) and that the bonds with Al Qaeda had been severed. This made it easier for JaN to cooperate with other oppositional groups. Moreover, they probably hoped that this would result in its acceptance as a bona fide rebellious group by the US and that the latter would stop attacking them.²⁴

Another important player in the jihadist field is ISIS. During the past few years, ISIS has been capturing territory in order to establish an Islamic state there. If other groups are in control in such areas, ISIS will try and eliminate them. The fact that an Islamic state is more important to ISIS than overthrowing the al-Assad regime is demonstrated, among other things, by an overview of the battles fought by ISIS in 2014: in 13% of the cases they were fighting the state army, in 64% of the cases they were fighting other oppositional militias (and in 23% of the cases it was different or not specified).²⁵ June 2014 is a milestone in the history of ISIS: the Consultative Council of ISIS appointed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi caliph and ISIS territory was now a caliphate. The caliphate was given a new name, ‘Islamic State’, to underline its general character. This increased ISIS’ appeal for foreign volunteers. Proclaiming the caliphate went hand in hand with a call to Muslims to come to this state and to reinforce it (*hijra*).²⁶ This gave foreign volunteers a religious justification to come to Syria. Through expanding, Islamic State also got

²³ International Crisis Group, 2014

²⁴ Beemsterboer, 2016

²⁵ Omar & Vinograd, 2014

²⁶ *Hijra* means emigration. According to the sharia, Muslims are recommended to leave the area of non-believers and to emigrate to an area controlled by Islam. If they cannot practise their religion, such emigration is compulsory (Peters, 1982).

hold of areas that were home to minorities such as Christians and Yazidis²⁷. The legal scholars of ISIS based themselves on the classical texts of Islamic law to find rules how to treat these groups. As for the Christians, the new regime looked for answers in the sharia rules of the *dhimmīs*. People could either convert to Islam or stick to their own faith, on the condition however that they would accept ISIS' authority, were prepared to pay a special tax and complied with all sorts of restrictive laws.²⁸ The situation for Yazidis was even worse: they were given a choice between conversion to Islam or death for men. Women and children were regarded as slaves and allocated among the fighters who had captured their territory.²⁹ Although ISIS has lost territory since the second half of 2015 to Kurdish organisations in the north of Syria and to regime forces in the west (such as around Palmyra) and in Iraq, they still control large, populated areas.

2.3 The sectarian conflict

From 2006 until his death in 2010, ISIS, under the name of Islamic State of Iraq, was led by Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi. He published a pamphlet entitled 'Our Credo' (*ʿAqīdatunā*), which mainly consisted of a list of groups that should be regarded as apostates (i.e. those that could not anymore be regarded as Muslims and could as such be killed). They were not just the police officers and soldiers employed by the Iraqi state and persons who took their disputes to the secular courts (not to sharia courts), but also all Shiites (consistently referred to with the pejorative term *al-Rāfida*, the Renouncers [of the true teachings]). This is still a fundamental document for Islamic State (see also paragraph 5.1).³⁰ Due to the important role of

²⁷ A Kurdish-speaking religious group in northern Iraq of some hundreds of thousands of people. Although their religion is influenced by Islam, Yazidis are not regarded as Muslims. Under Ottoman regime, they were regarded as *dhimmis*, just like the Christians.

²⁸ The non-Islamic subjects of the Islamic state who had to pay a special tax, *jizya*, in exchange for protection. ISIS imposed rules on the Christian minority of Raqqa, which rules were mostly based on the agreement between the second caliph of the Islam (Omar ibn al-Khattab, r. 634-644) with the residents of Jerusalem (Peters, 2015:207-210).

²⁹ ISIS does not acknowledge the Yazidis as *dhimmis* (see: Dabiq, 2014). For the ISIS document about the treatment of female slaves, see Peters, 2015:211-216.

³⁰ For an English translation, see Peters, 2015:196-200. In 2015, a new Credo (*Hādhā ʿaqīdatunā wa-manhajunā* [this is our credo and our programme]) appeared, discussing the theology in more detail, but still calling the Shiites and supporters of secular ideologies deserters (see Al-Tamimi, 2015e).

the Sunni salafi jihadist movements, the civil war in Syria was getting a more and more sectarian character. From the first actions of Islamic State in Iraq, it was clear the Shiites were regarded as the main enemy. There was an important political reason for this: under Saddam Hussein's regime, the Sunnis had been in power, despite the fact that the Shiites formed a larger part of the population. After the occupation by the US and the military coalition, the Shiites came to power. They monopolised the most important administrative and army positions. The government, dominated by Shiites and led by Shiite Nuri al-Maliki (prime minister from 2006 until 2014), generated high levels of animosity among Sunnites and as such it created a breeding ground for Sunni jihadist movements. By now, a large number of important military and administrative positions in the Islamic State were taken up by Ba'ath administrators and former officers from the Iraqi army.³¹ There were frictions between Sunnis and Shiites in Syria too, something JaN and ISIS exploited. The al-Assad regime is rooted in the Alawite minority group and the repressive administration of the state was and still is dominated by Alawites. This led to tension between Sunnites and Alawites. As the regime is now supported by Shiite Iran and the Shiite Hezbollah movement from Lebanon, the Sunni militia also have a tendency to regard all Syrian Shiites as the enemy.

2.4 Notes on the conflict post 2014

Since 2014, the fighting in Syria has continued tenaciously. During this period, ISIS has been steadily losing ground in Syria, mostly to Kurdish forces in the North. In contrast, JaN – which, since July 28, 2016, operates under the flag of Jabhat Fath al-Slam – has gained territory in the West. Meanwhile, the US-led coalition has continued its air campaign, with Russia following similar steps by starting its own³². In contrast to the US-led coalitions' efforts, the objective of the

³¹ Abu Haniyeh, 2014; Atwan, 2015:140; Fromson & Simon, 2015

³² After the Russian Parliament approved the Kremlin's decision, the first air strikes were carried out above Syria on September 30, 2015. Moreover, in August 2016 Russia intensified its campaign by agreeing with Teheran to use the Hamadan air base in northwest Iran to execute its operations. See: Cockburn, 2015; Bertrand, 2016.

Russian air campaign is to support the Assad regime, which ostensibly includes the targeting of rebel groups backed by the West.³³

Due to increasing pressure from Russian-backed Syrian regime forces, Arab-Kurdish alliances backed by the US-led coalition, and rebel forces, ISIS has lost 14% of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2015. This development continued in the first half of 2016, where a further 12% was lost.³⁴ Whereas ISIS once controlled 126 key cities and facilities in Syria and Iraq, it has lost almost over half of these locations over the past year. For example, since 2014, ISIS has lost nearly all its positions near the Turkish Syrian border.³⁵ Furthermore, it has also lost multiple cities and plants in the South and East.³⁶ However, in the summer of 2016, the organisation still had a nearly continuous hold along the Euphrates river in the North and East of Syria. In the meantime, it is trying hard not to lose strongholds like Deir al-Zour and Raqqa which are subject to frequent attacks by Syrian regime forces.

Possibly due to the US-led coalition's focus on ISIS, JaN has been very effective in 2015, seizing the city of Idlib, Jisr al-Shughur and surrounding towns in the same province. This allowed them to disrupt regime supply lines.³⁷ By changing its name to Jabhat Fath al-Sham, JaN allegedly broke all affiliations with any external entity. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to say with certainty what the effect of the secession will be. It also remains to be seen to what extent the secession will generate any distance between the new organisation and its parent organisation al-Qaeda, given the complex ideological, historical and personal links between them.³⁸ According to experts the secession might facilitate Jabhat Fath al-Sham's efforts to create new alliances.³⁹

³³ Bellingcat, 2015; The Guardian 2015b; The New York Times, 2015; Entous, 2016; Loveluck, 2016.

³⁴ The Guardian, 2016

³⁵ Among others Tell Abyad, Kobane, Manbij, Tel Hamees and the Tishreen Dam. See: Almkhtar, 2016.

³⁶ The most important are Palmyra in the Southeast, the Badia Cement plant in Southern Syria and Hasaka and the close by Kabiba Oil Field in the East of Syria. See: Almkhtar, 2016.

³⁷ Stanford University, n.d.; Dearden, 2015.

³⁸ Alami, 2016.

³⁹ Alami, 2016

Meanwhile, Kurdish forces have been able to carve out a considerable piece of land at the Syrian-Turkish border, overtaking many ISIS- and government-controlled cities. YPG's political wing has subsequently claimed the Northern area of Syria as the autonomous federation of Rojava.⁴⁰ Since 2016, this region has had to defend itself from multiple threats, including jihadist groups, Syrian government forces, and endure Turkish shelling. More recently, it had to defend against a Turkish invasion near its borders.⁴¹

In the north, the city of Aleppo remains a vicious battleground for government-, rebel- and jihadi forces. Described as a 'circle of hell'⁴² it is currently the centre of a large humanitarian crisis.⁴³ Homs remains primarily under Syrian government control, although fighting continues in the east of the city. In the capital city of Damascus fighting also persists, although the Assad regime seemingly controls the largest part of the city.

In terms of collaboration, new coalitions emerged after 2014 in both the *thawrī* and salafi jihadist camps. For instance, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was established on 11 October 2015, with its own political wing, the Syrian Democratic Council. Made up of, amongst others, the Kurdish YPG and YPJ – the female wing of the YPG – and the Arab Liwa Thuwar al-Raqqqa, the SDF became the official defense force for the autonomous region of Rojava and is supported by the US-led coalition. In March 2015, the Army of Conquest was set up as a joint command center of Islamist rebels in organisation such as JaN – now Jabhat Fath al-Sham – and Ahrar al-Sham are taking part.

On a final note, while the civil war continues in Syria, it seems as if there is also a proxy war being fought between the US and the Gulf States – supporting moderate rebels – on one side and Russia, Iran and Hezbollah – supporting ISIS – on the other. Since the beginning of the US-led air campaign in 2014 until February 2016, 23.000 targets have been struck and between 26.000 and 27.000

⁴⁰ Aljazeera, 2016a

⁴¹ In August of 2016 Turkey launched military assault on in northern Syria, around Jarablus. See: Turbeville, 2016; Aljazeera, 2016b

⁴² Amnesty International, 2015

⁴³ Tahhan, 2016

ISIS fighters have been killed, with approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of these losses taking place in Syria.⁴⁴ In March 2015, this estimate was much lower at 8,500 killed ISIS fighters.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, n.d.

⁴⁵ Starr, 2016

3. The phenomenon of Syria travellers

One of the typical characteristics of the Syrian conflict is the large number of foreigners that have joined one of the fighting parties. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR, affiliated with King's College in London) estimated the number of foreign fighters at more than 20,000 in 2015.⁴⁶ According to American intelligence, that number rose to almost 30,000 by the third quarter of 2015.⁴⁷ As such, the conflict in Syria and Iraq has created the biggest mobilisation of foreigners since 1945. The majority of these *muhajirin* (emigrants) come from the Middle East. A significant minority of these emigrants originate from the West (about 260 of them are Dutch⁴⁸).

The majority of Dutch Syria travellers join salafi jihadist organisations⁴⁹ – ISIS and JaN (and affiliated groups) in particular.⁵⁰ A number of Dutchmen and Belgians were initially involved in smaller jihadist militia.⁵¹ After some time, many of them joined the ranks of ISIS or JaN. Sometimes because they decided to defect, other times because their group ceased to exist, or because their group became part of these organisations in their entirety, in the form of close coalitions or otherwise.⁵² Dutch former soldier Salih Yahya Gazali Yilmaz swapped his position at Jund al-Aqsa, a party affiliated with JaN at the time, for a position with ISIS, because he felt this organisation was much more transparent and sincere.⁵³ Since the caliphate was proclaimed by ISIS in June 2014, there are only few signals of Dutch and Belgian travellers that subsequently travelled to Syria and did not join ISIS.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Neumann, 2015

⁴⁷ Schmitt & Sengupta, 2015

⁴⁸ NCTV, 2016

⁴⁹ Barrett, 2014; General Intelligence and Security Service, 2015:18; Database De Bont et al., 2015.

⁵⁰ Gates & Podder, 2015; Database De Bont et al., 2015; Database and correspondence Van Ostaeyen; NCTV, 2014

⁵¹ Such as Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen, Suqur al-Sham and Jabhat Ansar al-Din (Database De Bont et al., 2015; Database and correspondence Van Ostaeyen)

⁵² International Crisis Group, 2014; Benotman & Blake, n.d.

⁵³ Terrorism Monitor, 2015

⁵⁴ Database De Bont et al., 2015; Database and correspondence Van Ostaeyen

Nationalist or secular rebel parties (see also chapter two) such as the FSA found it hard to manifest themselves as a decisive alternative. In contrast, the aforementioned jihadist organisations have for instance more money and other resources at their disposal. Their ideology also has a global character (fighting for a global community and, in the case of ISIS, global expansion – which is reflected in the motto *baqiya wa tatamaddad*: [ISIS] continues to exist and expands), which for many foreigners seems more appealing than group that are more locally focused, such as the FSA.⁵⁵ This may explain why, as far as can be detected, no Dutch people have been active in the FSA.

Further down in this paragraph, we will discuss possible explanations for the phenomenon of Syria travellers. The aim is not to conclude the heated social and scientific debates about this subject with an all-encompassing explanation. We only try to map out the factors regarding these people by means of a number of existing insights.

3.1 Reasons for travelling to a conflict area

Many studies have been conducted that try to identify possible factors that could explain why people travel to faraway areas of combat. Nevertheless, there is no clear-cut answer to the question of what motivates people to decide to leave for Syria or Iraq to fight or live there. Many possible explanations for fighting are derived from literature about the causes of terrorism – another subject that causes a lot of discord. We know less about what motivates travellers to leave for reasons other than for fighting or to be involved in a combatant group – for instance about the growing number of women who are travelling to the area of conflict.⁵⁶

The main thing is that there is no unambiguous profile of ‘the Syria traveller’.⁵⁷ A person can often have various motives for travelling to Syria. Nevertheless, certain shared patterns can be detected, from which we can derive

⁵⁵ Barrett, 2014; Gates & Podder, 2015

⁵⁶ See for instance Bakker et al. 2015

⁵⁷ Among other things, see Weggemans et al., 2015; De Bont, 2015; Bakker et al., 2013

apparent factors that play a role when it comes to ‘travelling’. When mapping out these factors, we make a distinction between push and pull factors. Some of the reasons for travelling to Syria or Iraq are events and circumstances that prompt people to leave their home country (push factors). On the other hand, international conflicts and incidents may have a major appeal (pull factors). These international dimensions mean that many of the causes for travelling to Syria or Iraq are outside the Dutch context. Ultimately, the choice to leave for Syria or Iraq mainly seems to be the result of a combination of social, ideological and practical factors – which are not necessarily the same for everyone and which can have both a repelling and appealing effect.

Focusing on these factors, it seems setbacks and problems experienced in daily life and a perceived lack of future perspective are recurring themes. Various researchers and other professionals have detected circumstances among Syria travellers such as growing up in deprived areas, a low or low to average social economic background, an average or lower level of education, trouble at school or work, a difficult integration process, brushes with the law, having been under the supervision of youth care, and having experienced or perceived all sorts of injustices towards them.⁵⁸ These kinds of experiences of political social injustice may cause a person to feel that, as members of a certain social group, they are not *allowed* to belong (discrimination) and are not *able* to belong (unemployment, poverty and oppression) and then decide they do not *want* to belong.⁵⁹ Leaving for Syria or Iraq may offer a way out. Nevertheless, it appears that the social economic profile of a person alone is not enough to explain why someone leaves for Syria or Iraq⁶⁰ – not only because this decision is not always related to a lack of integration or a perspective of a positive future, but also because there are a lot of individuals with the same profile who decide not to go to Syria or Iraq.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See for instance Weggemans et al., 2015; Malfait et al., 2014; De Graaf, 2014

⁵⁹ Schuyt, 1997:21

⁶⁰ Coolsaet, 2015

⁶¹ Van San, 2015

Other factors seem more relevant in this context. They may be related to a search for a sense of purpose (such as looking for an identity or goal) and selective incentives (such as wanting to belong or the need for excitement, violence and adventure).⁶² Jihadist groups can fulfil such strong internal motives. In addition to the appeal of combating groups in Syria or Iraq, the social dynamics of groups in the immediate environment can also play an important role. People are strongly influenced by their social environment. Ideas, feelings and behaviour are, for an important part, determined by the interaction with this environment.⁶³ The choice to join the jihad can be the result of group pressure or group think. One example of this, is the story of a group of friends from Wolfsburg, Germany of whom an estimated 20 individuals decided to leave for Syria in 2013.⁶⁴

Also, in many cases, religious or ideological motives play a role. A lot of Syria travellers mention the moral obligation to protect the ‘*umma*’ (the global Islamic community), the duty to obey the caliph and live in the caliphate (*hijra*), and to strive for martyrdom.

The above analysis – although it is not suitable as a basis to make predictions or for profiling purposes – to some extent seems to apply to both travelling to Syria or Iraq with the intention to take part in the armed jihad and to a potential departure without violence-related motives. On the one hand, many of these factors can act as a breeding ground for violent radicalisation.⁶⁵ Persons will be susceptible to (indoctrination of) jihadist ideology and they will be increasingly open to a role as fighter with a jihadist group. In that case, the armed conflict (*jihad*) is regarded as a manifestation of opposition and resistance against injustice, as a way out, but also as a means to realise certain personal wishes. On the other hand, the factors set out above can in theory also result in a growing ideological orthodoxy and social alienation, but to a lesser extent in the need to use violence in

⁶² Stern & Berger, 2015

⁶³ Veldhuis & Staun, 2009:42

⁶⁴ Die Welt, 2015; Neumann (personal correspondence following presentation [‘Jihadistische dreiging tegen het Westen. Is er een weg naar een oplossing?’] on 16/12/2015 in Rotterdam)

⁶⁵ Weggemans & De Graaf, 2015

the realisation of his or her goals.⁶⁶ Seen from this perspective, the same ideological and social ideas, social processes and social and personal needs could also result in (the desire for) a journey to Syria with a goal other than taking direct part in the armed jihad – such as a desire to form part of an Islamic community where the sharia is observed. Regardless of someone's motives when travelling to Syria, the central theme is the increased distancing from the usual social ties and ideas.

3.2 Why go to Syria or Iraq?

One explanation why the Syrian civil war has mobilised so many foreigners is a combination of typical characteristics of this conflict.⁶⁷ First, the repressive actions of the Syrian government towards the population play a role. Relatedly, the failure of the international community to take action against this, media reports and the moral duty to protect the *umma* as referred to earlier are also of relevance in this regard, contributing to the influx of travellers to Syria. Secondly, it had been relatively easy to get to Syria.⁶⁸ Crossing the border from Turkey was simplified as jihadist parties controlled parts of the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border. This however no longer applies. In the current situation, the border regions in Syria are under the control of Kurdish and other oppositional forces. Third, as the rebels have control over considerable parts of Syria and Iraq, it is quite conceivable that no fighting takes place in all of these areas. This offers the opportunity to (partially) avoid violence, and it makes the destination attractive for a bigger group (such as women, children or others who are not directly suitable to take part in the combat). Fourth, from a historical and theological perspective, Syria is quite important. In Islam, Syria (the town of Dabiq) is regarded as the place where the world will end (*Malahim*). Add to that today's reality of the caliphate and the duty to swear allegiance to the caliph. As a final point, the conflict in Syria and Iraq

⁶⁶ Weggemans, 2013

⁶⁷ Hegghammer, 2013

⁶⁸ Boeke & Weggemans, 2013; Gates & Podder, 2015

(following previous international conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya) provides an opportunity for jihadi around the world to bring their ideals into practice.⁶⁹

These typical characteristics of the conflict act as powerful pull factors. The total number of push and pull factors are set out in the paragraphs above and are often mentioned in propaganda. This is also another explanation for the large number of foreigners involved in the Syrian conflict: more than ever before, the jihadist parties use (social) media to distribute propaganda material.⁷⁰

3.3 The role of the media and propaganda

The use of (social) media by the fighting parties has been discussed a lot. Larger organisations such as ISIS, JaN and to a lesser extent (members of) the Islamic Front⁷¹ have an extensive media strategy. ISIS' official media channel *al Hayat* and JaN's official media channel *al Manarah al Bayda* mainly produce propaganda in the form of professionally edited HD videos. For instance, ISIS produces an average of 2.5 videos each day.⁷² ISIS also regularly releases a magazine in English (*Dabiq*) and it produces songs (*nasheeds*) and videos, news items, photo reports and audio messages.⁷³ ISIS also has its own radio and TV station.⁷⁴

In addition to official channels, information about ISIS, JaN and affiliated parties is also distributed online by individuals. For instance, (foreign) fighters or locals who live in areas controlled by these organisations share information about their lives on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, Tumblr and Telegram.⁷⁵ Their posts may be related to their daily lives, such as eating and recreation, but also to the fight that they are part of.⁷⁶ For instance, in September 2014, a Dutch

⁶⁹ De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2014

⁷⁰ Benotmann & Naseraldin, 2014

⁷¹ Islamic Front is mainly known as a coalition of militia, which means the material of the coalition is aimed at combat rather than at other aspects of daily life.

⁷² Respondent 3

⁷³ Gates & Podder, 2015. ISIS also publishes Turkish, Russian and French translations of the English magazine *Dabiq*. See also: Gambhir, 2014

⁷⁴ Withnal, 2015; The Telegraph, 2015

⁷⁵ Khayat, 2015

⁷⁶ Grol et al., 2014

member of JaN in Syria posted a video on his Facebook page, criticising the American aerial war in Syria and enticing people to “forcefully act against the Dutch government”.⁷⁷ Such videos may have a considerable impact on Dutch sympathisers.⁷⁸

The content of the official media campaigns (often videos and photo reports) of ISIS and JaN is, in general term, rather similar.⁷⁹ First, a substantial part of the messages from ISIS and JaN have themes such as violence and war.⁸⁰ Images from the front line, reports of battles, beheading, executions, burnings and drownings are regular features in the videos.⁸¹ The Quilliam Foundation analysed the media output of ISIS for a month, and concluded that about 40% of the material is highly violent or military.⁸² JaN also regularly releases videos with images from the front lines.⁸³ Foreign fighters are often given prominent roles in these videos. They are called to contribute to the battle.⁸⁴ Al-Baghdadi for instance used an audio message to call Muslims around the world to emigrate to the caliphate and take up arms.⁸⁵ Muslims who are unable to move to the caliphate are urged to plan attacks in their countries of residence.⁸⁶ Also, many of the videos and photo reports offer (positive) insights into local daily lives. Such scenes can be subdivided into (1) economic issues (images of food production, corn fields, markets), (2) social issues (social facilities such as hospitals and clean drinking water), (3) spare time and relaxation (friendships among fighters, close family ties, parks, playgrounds with children, people swimming and playing football) and (4) religious activities (images of mosques, sharia schools, singing fighters, Koran studies).⁸⁷ One

⁷⁷ Reedijk, 2014

⁷⁸ Berger & Morgan, 2015

⁷⁹ Respondent 3

⁸⁰ Important videos for ISIS’ propaganda are ‘Salil al-Sawarim’ (‘The clattering swords’, four parts, made between mid-2012 and mid-2014), ‘A Message for America’ (June 2014) and ‘A Message for the Allies of America’ (October 2014). These and numerous other videos were uploaded to YouTube and other social media.

⁸¹ Ali, 2015; Abu Haniyeh, 2014; Stern & Berger, 2015:101-126

⁸² Winter, 2015b

⁸³ Zelin, 2015

⁸⁴ NCTV, 2015a

⁸⁵ MEMRI, 2015

⁸⁶ NCTV, 2015b

⁸⁷ Respondent 3

example is the 8-part ISIS documentary, with the captured British reporter John Cantlie showing there is hardly any crime, that hospitals are good and that daily life is busy and cheerful.⁸⁸ Although ISIS has been devoting attention to these subjects since mid-2014, JaN did not structurally start until 2015.⁸⁹

ISIS and JaN try to reinforce their legitimacy as controlling party in Syria by means of the aforementioned forms of propaganda. On the one hand, they produce images of a violent nature and on the other, their videos show how the organisations introduce structure and justice to the country.⁹⁰ Videos and photo reports with insights into daily life gained popularity particularly after 2015. Popular videos such as Al Hayat's series 'Stories of the land of the Living', Al Hayat's series of documentaries with John Cantlie and Al Hayat's popular video 'Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah' were all released in 2015. Propaganda about daily life often still contains violent elements. Videos often contain images about daily life and images of executions or the front line.

⁸⁸ The Guardian, 2015a

⁸⁹ Respondent 3

⁹⁰ Gates & Podder 2015

4. Methodological approach

This chapter describes the methods and approach of this study. It sets out the process of data collection (how and which data was collected) and discusses the validity of the study.

4.1 Background and focus of the study

The conflict in Syria (and Iraq) has received a lot of attention from journalists, non-governmental organisations and scientists since 2012. The formation of the ISIS caliphate in 2014 intensified this attention. Newspapers, TV broadcasts, study reports, scientific magazines and social media regularly report about the role of violence in daily life in Syria in general and the caliphate in particular. In addition, there was a lot of interest in the role of foreigners in this conflict. What prompted them to move to this area of conflict and what threat do they pose for the local population abroad and for their previous countries of residence?

Compared to the subjects mentioned above, other aspects of daily life in Syria, the organisational structure of ISIS and JaN and other aspects of life in areas no longer under the control of Assad's regime receive a lot less attention. There are several reasons for this lack of publication about daily life. The most significant one may be that local sources (journalists in particular) have been running an increasingly bigger risk since 2012 and most of them have left the areas of conflict by now. A second possible explanation is the nature and scope of the violence. The highly violent images and stories from Syria and Iraq receive large amounts of attention and as a result, there is limited attention for other aspects.

As such, this study is of an exploratory and descriptive nature. Based on a small number of publications available and a limited number of interviews with experts, we have tried to paint a picture of daily life in Syria. We focus on the 2014 calendar year. Although the conflict in Syria is closely related to the situation and developments in Iraq, this study primarily aims to describe the situation in parts of Syria. The exploratory nature of this study means that it is not an exhaustive study,

but an initial picture of the situation. Despite the fact that a considerable number of sources have been consulted in a relatively short research period (between October 2015 and mid-December 2015), it still concerns a limited number. This has to be taken into account when drawing conclusions from this report.

4.2 The research method

Destination Syria is a qualitative study. Based on open sources, a number of legal dossiers and in-depth interviews, we aim to paint a picture of daily life in Syria. Among other things, the information from open sources can be traced to newspapers, government reports, scientific literature, weblogs and social media (Twitter, Facebook and Telegram). This also includes sources in Arabic. The (five) legal dossiers we studied form part of previous court cases that related to alleged attempts to travel to Syria or Iraq or to alleged involvement in terrorism. Studying these dossiers yielded (very) limited useful information for this study.

A series of ‘semi-structured’ interviews were also held. Semi-structured interviews are held on the basis of pre-set questions, but at the same time they allow for enough space to table additional questions and subjects. The order of questions asked in the interviews did not follow a pre-determined structure (for a list of questions and topics, see appendix B). Semi-structured interviews make it possible to talk about complex and sensitive subjects. The researcher can probe when relevant information about a certain theme is discussed. This method offers the opportunity to vary the way in which certain questions are formulated. Because we interviewed people with different social, cultural and professional backgrounds for this study – in both English and Dutch – it is possible that certain words and concepts have different meanings for the respondents. The possibility to deviate from a certain question makes it possible to take these different backgrounds into account.⁹¹ The analysis of the interviews ultimately focused on their latent content

⁹¹ Harell & Bradley, 2009; Weggemans & De Graaf, 2015:19

(the underlying meaning) rather than their manifest importance (the specific use of words and definitions).

4.3 Selection of respondents

The respondents for the interviews were selected on the basis of their experiences and expertise. We looked for respondents who were living in Syria in 2014, as well as for individuals or organisations that were in direct contact with people in Syria during this period. In some cases, these individuals were found in our own networks. In other cases, we were able to contact them on the basis of information from the media, or we came into contact with relevant discussion partners through others (convenience sampling). Other contacts were made via social media such as Twitter, Facebook and weblogs.

During the organisation of the interviews, the short time window of the study and the willingness to cooperate proved to be major restrictive factors. Some people we interviewed were afraid of the publicity and others feared that by taking part in the study, they may become the subject of a legal investigation (after all). Some relevant organisations feared for their name as impartial players. Also, the number of returning potential Syria fighters (approximately 40) is still limited. Making contact with people who are currently in the region also led to problems. And, given the dangerous situation in Syria, conducting fieldwork locally was not an option.

Nevertheless, we conducted a considerable number of interviews with national and international experience experts for this study. The total amounts to 26 (for an overview of respondents, see appendix A). The backgrounds of the respondents vary from scientists with an extensive network in Syria or among Syrians and people currently staying in the area of conflict, to people with a lot of local contacts (whether or not affiliated to one of the combating parties) and individuals who lived in Syria for their entire lives and fled the country or otherwise.

4.4 Validity of the study

The sources used for this study paint a picture of the living conditions in Syria in 2014 from different perspectives. During the data gathering, the researchers often encountered moments of recognition: fragments that gave an insight into daily life had already been discussed during other interviews or encountered in other sources. Insights confirmed by several sources may be proof for a bigger validity of the findings of this study. In addition, based on the expertise of the respondents, we can also derive confidence in respect of the validity of the findings.

At the same time, such a study is subject to various restrictions. First, it is a study into a situation in the past. Although much of the data is also recorded in other sources, the risk of the interviews is that the reconstruction of the situation in 2014 contains incorrect elements. People may have forgotten things or stored them incorrectly. A second potential restriction is that interviews do not tell you all about a person's precise ideas and experiences. A person may have various reasons for intentionally telling or sharing a different version of the story on social media than the actual event. This study recognises the relative value of the interviews conducted. By means of triangulation (combining different methods and sources) we have tried to prevent these problems for the validity of the study.

While conducting this study it became clear that the amount of information and knowledge on the different organisations in Syria greatly diversified. For instance, there are relatively many sources about life in the areas controlled by ISIS. This is not a disadvantage for this study, as most Dutch people in the region (especially after June 2014) have joined ISIS. In contrast, less is known about life in the areas controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra. As JaN works alongside many other parties and, for now, primarily focuses on the continued combat (and as such to a lesser extent focuses on rebuilding a state), daily life in the various areas may differ strongly. Nevertheless – insofar as the collected data allows for it – we will paint a general picture about the living conditions in areas that are under the control of this organisation. In the conclusion, we will also make statements about the different roles that persons within these organisations may assume.

Less is known also about the living conditions in areas that fall under smaller salafi jihadist militias or the Free Syrian Army. Yet given the limited role of Dutch nationals within these rebel movements, most of these movements fall outside the scope of this study. Hence, the lack of information on such living conditions in these areas constituted no major obstacle.

Summary part I

A characterising feature of the Syrian conflict is its complexity. There are many combating parties with different goals and tactics. The position of nationalist or secular rebel movements has weakened considerably following the emergence of well-organised salafi jihadist groups. Organisations such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN) and affiliated militia fight not only against the regime of al-Assad, but also against the formation of an Islamic state. For ISIS, the latter takes priority. For the time being, JaN and the coalition of rebel groups it cooperates with primarily concentrate on overthrowing the al-Assad regime. Because of these different interests and strategies, there have been regular bloody confrontations between these movements.

Since 2012, foreigners have been playing an increasingly important role in the conflict. Among them are an estimated 260 Dutch men and women. The majority of Dutch Syria travellers have joined salafi jihadist groups. Apart from ISIS, it mainly concerns Jabhat al-Nusra and sometimes affiliated (smaller) militia (such as parties affiliated with the Islamic Front). Many of those who used to be members of smaller rebel groups joined JaN or ISIS at a later stage. As far as we know, no Dutch men have joined the Free Syrian Army or settled down in areas that were under the control of this opposition movement.

In literature, we can distinguish different reasons to travel to the area of conflict. They include ideological, social and practical reasons. A lot of Syria travellers feel it is their duty to contribute to protecting the Islamic community (*umma*) and the armed conflict (*jihad*). In addition, travelling to Syria offers prospects of a life full of adventure and camaraderie. Social processes and needs

often also play an important role. When the Consultative Council of ISIS named Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi caliph in June 2014, this was another important reason. Some Muslims say it is their moral duty to obey this caliph, to settle in this caliphate (*hijra*) and to contribute to the development and expansion thereof. Since this ISIS caliphate was set up, a large majority of Dutch Syria travellers joined ISIS, according to various sources (or: ‘Islamic State’, as the organisation called itself from that moment). Social media may also have played an important role in this.

Finally, this first part of the study set out the research methodology used.

Part II

The armed conflict can be felt throughout Syria. Attacks, public executions and fights have given daily life a violent character in many places. At the same time, the situation can vary strongly depending on location and time.⁹² For instance, from August 2014 onwards, ISIS was hit by air strikes carried out by the international coalition.⁹³ This changed the living conditions in the areas controlled by ISIS considerably. Until then, it was mainly the men who died while fighting on the front line. Women and children who stayed at home – or men deployed behind the front line – were relatively safe in that initial situation.⁹⁴ As such, during the period prior to the bombings by the coalition, any danger for ISIS mainly manifested itself around the front lines. As the coalition started to deploy fighter jets near such front lines, such as Kobane, Hasaka and Deir el-Zor, the danger only increased. However, the bombings were not restricted to just the front lines. Towns and cities outside these regions were also targets of air strikes, such as Al-Bukamal and Raqqa. As a result, daily life and activities such as buying food in the shops in regions that were initially relatively safe were now much more dangerous.⁹⁵ Hence, more than before, also women and children fell victim to the violence.⁹⁶ Due to these bombings, the difference of what forms part of the front line and what does not has faded considerably. Unsafety as a direct consequence of the war has therefore been perceived throughout the entire caliphate since August 2014.⁹⁷

The second part of this report discusses the living conditions in areas that are not controlled by the al-Assad regime – both in front of and behind the front lines. Although we said earlier that the difference between life on and behind the front line has faded in many areas, we can still identify a number of differences.

⁹² Respondent 2; Respondent 6; Respondent 7; Respondent 18; Respondent 19; Respondent 20; Respondent 23; Respondent 25

⁹³ The army of the regime of Bashar al-Assad also bombed rebel movements in the preceding period, but due to the involvement of this international coalition (consisting of, among others, the United States, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and various European countries), the bombings of ISIS in Syria and Iraq were strongly intensified.

⁹⁴ Respondent 2

⁹⁵ Respondent 25

⁹⁶ Respondent 2

⁹⁷ Ibid.

For instance, duties behind the front lines may differ from those on the front, where the emphasis lies on the armed conflict. Regions on the front line are also more often faced with a lack of water and power cuts, and the economic consequences of the conflict are more significant here. This will be discussed in the next couple of chapters.

Part I showed that most Dutch men and women ended up in areas that are controlled by ISIS. The next chapters will therefore start with a discussion about the various aspects of the living conditions in ISIS territory. Then, on two occasions (at the end of chapter 5 and throughout chapter 10) we will make comparisons with daily life in the regions that are under the control of JaN and its affiliated organisations. This choice is also based on a practical reason, as discussed in chapter 4: based on the amount of information available, we can elaborate more on life under ISIS than under other groups.

5. Administration and policy in rebel area

In order to understand the daily course of affairs in an area, it is important to have an idea of the administration, the laws and regulations that apply in that area. This chapter will discuss the way in which ISIS and JaN administer the areas they dominate. We will devote attention to aspects that are relevant to the daily life of the population in general and foreign fighters in particular. They include matters such as the organisation of the central administration, legislation, the administration of justice, maintaining law and order and the military defence of the area. We have already indicated that (areas under the control of) the Free Syrian Army (FSA) has a limited appeal to Dutch Syria travellers. We will therefore not discuss the areas under the control of this organisation and other organisations that are not relevant to this study. During this study, we also established (as noted in chapter 4) that there is a substantial amount of knowledge and information about (areas under the control of) ISIS compared to JaN and affiliated organisations. This chapter will therefore start with a description of the administration and policy in areas under the control of ISIS. In addition, we will, for each subject and when possible, make a comparison with the state of affairs in areas under control of JaN and affiliated organisations.

5.1 Background of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

Islamic State stands out from other rebel movements in the Syrian civil war in that setting up an Islamic state takes priority for ISIS. Although Salafi jihadist organisations such as JaN or the Islamic Front also ultimately strive to proclaim an Islamic state, their efforts are mainly focussed on the battle against the regime of Bashar al-Assad and other enemies (such as ISIS). ISIS, in contrast, conquered areas not to serve as a basis for military operations against the regime, but as a target in itself. This ambition is one of the explanations for the uncompromising

and aggressive attitude of ISIS towards other groups that had settled in the same areas.⁹⁸

ISIS pursues a state that is established on the basis of a highly orthodox Sunni religious doctrine. The sectarian religious substantiation was published in a document entitled 'Our Credo' (*`Aqīdatunā*). This document was written by the leader of the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Iraq, Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi, who was killed in 2010 and who was the predecessor of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Eight out of the nineteen articles in this document declare that certain groups of Muslims should be regarded as apostates and that they deserve to die. Among others, it concerns Shiites, people who submit their disputes to secular state courts, persons who support secular, nationalist and Ba'ath ideologies and individuals who collaborate with the (American) occupying forces. The forces of the Iraqi army and police are also regarded as apostates, as are all rulers of the states in the Islamic world. As for the non-Islamic minorities, the document states that they violated their original protection treaty (*dhimma*) and that they are not entitled to life, freedom and property until they have declared to acknowledge the authority of ISI. Based on this document, it was religiously legitimate to fight and kill nearly all Iraqi civilians.

When the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, ISI soon set its sights on Syria too. To that end, Jabhat al-Nusra was set up in 2012. However, after a while conflicts arose between ISI on the one hand and JaN and Al Qaeda on the other. This ultimately prompted ISI to actively get involved in the conflict in Syria and to change its name to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. However, the principles and rules previously formulated by Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi continued to be authoritative.⁹⁹ In time, various groups and individual deserters of Islamic militia joined ISIS.¹⁰⁰ The organisation refused to cooperate any further with other

⁹⁸ Fromson & Simon, 2015; Al-Tamimi, 2015a

⁹⁹ Translated text and explanation, see Peters, 2015:196-200

¹⁰⁰ For instance, in 2013, the militia *Usud al-Sunna* (Lions of the Sunna) defected to ISIS and hundreds of fighters from Islamic groups deserted (including approximately 1,000 from Suqur al-Sham) to ISIS in the summer of 2014 (Weiss & Hassan, 2015:158-162; Atwan, 2015:127).

movements such as JaN and the Islamic Front. The ties with Al Qaeda also came under strain as time went by and they were permanently severed in January 2014.

5.2 Strategies of ISIS and state bodies

At the start of 2013, ISIS had absolute rule in a number of areas in Iraq and Syria. It set up its own state organisation in these parts, it fulfilled a number of government tasks and provided government services. In addition, it imposes sharia standards on the population. In other parts of Syria however, ISIS had to share power with other groups. It tried to side-line these other organisations. They also organised *da`wa* (mission) meetings in order to spread ISIS Islam and to make contact with local notables. Leaflets were distributed, events were organised for young children and schools with an Islamic curriculum were set up for older children. Girls were (and are) given the opportunity to go to school in these areas (in other words: there was no ban such as the one imposed by the Taliban), although boys and girls are strictly separated. In order to gain more support from the population, ISIS set up sharia courts, which can impose not just severe sentences such as the death penalty, but can also settle civil disputes. As crime and a general feeling of being unsafe were wide spread, many people welcomed these sharia courts, in the hope of them bringing law and order. ISIS also tried to win the hearts and minds of the local population by distributing free or low-priced bread, where necessary.¹⁰¹

This way, ISIS gradually built up a state structure; managed centrally, but with a reasonable extent of autonomy for the local authorities. From 2010, the organisation was led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in his capacity of emir (*'Amīr*; leader or commander) and the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura). The Consultative Council, with nine to eleven members appointed by al-Baghdadi, deals with proposals about appointments of commanders and governors of provinces, about policy, crucial issues (such as those in relation to war and peace)

¹⁰¹ Al-Tamimi, 2014c; Caris, 2014

and other current affairs. The Council can only make proposals for that matter; it is the emir who makes the ultimate decisions.¹⁰²

In order to increase the Islamic legitimacy of the state, the Consultative Council decided to appoint the leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as caliph in 2014 and to name the areas under his control caliphate. This implied that ISIS was the only legal Islamic state and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi the only leader of the Muslims.¹⁰³ In the address¹⁰⁴ in which the caliphate was announced, Muslims were ordered to acknowledge al-Baghdadi as the only legal ruler and to take an oath of obedience (*bay`a*).¹⁰⁵ In addition, Muslims were obliged to travel to the caliphate and to contribute to the conflict or the development of the caliphate (see also paragraphs 2.2, 3.1 and 6.2).¹⁰⁶ An appeal was made to the Islamic notion of *hijra* (emigration): an obligation – interpreted in different ways for that matter – for Muslims who do not live in an Islamic society to emigrate to an Islamic state. The combination of proclaiming the caliphate, with the call to emigrate, participation in jihad and the development of a true Islamic state are factors that caused ISIS to become an appealing to destination for emigration of many Muslims from abroad.

In the course of 2013 and the first half of 2014, the state structure became more pronounced and ISIS carried out more and more state duties via ‘ministries’ (*diwans*). The number of ministries grew in the course of time.¹⁰⁷ There were a total of 14 in the summer of 2014.¹⁰⁸ An overview (see footnote 108 and the paragraphs below) of the duties of these ministries gives an impression of the

¹⁰² Abu Haniyeh, 2014

¹⁰³ For the notion of caliphate, see Bunzel, 2015a

¹⁰⁴ For an English translation, see SITE Intelligence Group, 2014

¹⁰⁵ For the term *bay`a*, see Wagemakers, 2015

¹⁰⁶ Caris, 2014; Fromson & Simon, 2015

¹⁰⁷ Al-Tamimi, 2015a; Caris, 2014; Haniyeh, 2014

¹⁰⁸ With a view to the importance of Islam and sharia for the legitimacy of the caliphate, no fewer than five ministries deal with religious affairs: the Ministry of Spreading of Islam, Mosques and Religious Foundations (*al-da`wa wa-l-masajid wa-l-awqaf*), the Ministry of Administration of Justice and Complaints (*al-qada' wa-l-mazalim*), the Ministry of the Religious Police (*al-Hisbah*), the Ministry of Fatwas and Islam research (*al-ifta' wa-l-buhuth*) and the Ministry of Education (*al-ta`lim*); there are three that mainly deal with financial and economic affairs: the Ministry of Finance (*Bayt al-Mal*), the Ministry of Mineral Resources (*al-Rikaz*) and the Ministry of Agriculture (*al-zira`a*). There are two ministries for Warfare (*al-Jund*) and one Ministry of Security (*al-Amm al-`Amm*); and finally four for specific government duties: the Ministry of Information (*al-'alaqat al-'amma*), the Ministry of Beduin Tribes (*al-'Asha'ir*), the Ministry of Public Health (*al-Sihha*) and the Ministry of Public Services (*al-Khidamat*).

underlying ideas and the way in which ISIS wanted to build the state. ISIS territory is divided into provinces (*wilayat*), where local departments of the ministries function. Bureaucracy is largely in the hands of non-Syrians. It concerns not just Iraqis who were involved with ISIS from the start, but many other non-Syrians, Saudis and Tunisians also have managerial positions.¹⁰⁹ Egyptians, Europeans and Chechen often fulfil secondary positions.¹¹⁰

5.3 Administration, legislation and enforcement under ISIS

The main characteristic of an Islamic state, in addition to a caliphate-type of state, is the application of the sharia. The organisation of ISIS shows that this is regarded as the *raison d'être* of the state. There are five ministries that deal with the sharia. The Ministry of Fatwas and Research deals with the theoretical side. It publishes leaflets about issues related to Islam and the sharia. It also issues fatwas about practical matters. These fatwas set out the sharia rules for specific cases in the fields of law, religion and ethics. There are fatwas about taxation, the law of war (treatment of prisoners of war), travelling, games, the behaviour of women, smuggling, prescribed clothing, rituals and organ transplants.¹¹¹

On a religious level, the Ministry of Education is also important. This ministry 'purges' the curricula of schools of non-Islamic matters and it develops study programmes that mainly consist of the conveyance of religious and sharia knowledge. The Ministry of Spreading of Islam, Mosques and the Religious Foundation ensures there are no preachers with ideas that violate ISIS' Islam. There are two ministries for the direct application of the sharia: that of the religious police (*hisbah*) and the administration of law and complaints.

The religious policy falls under the sharia courts and deals with public morality and religious behaviour. For instance, police officers check if shops are closed during prayer, that people wear demure clothing and that random men and

¹⁰⁹ Caris, 2014

¹¹⁰ Al-Tamimi, 2014b; Caris 2014:23

¹¹¹ Bunzel, 2015b

women do not engage with each other in public.¹¹² There is also a special female police corps called the *Al-Khansaa* brigade. This brigade mainly checks that women wear the prescribed clothing and that they behave decently in public. Women who fail to obey the rules may be arrested or flogged on the spot.¹¹³

All non-religious courts have been banned on ISIS territory and have been replaced with sharia courts. These courts are authorised to settle civil and family disputes and they deal with criminal cases. Sharia courts are known for their verdicts that impose corporal punishment such as amputation, stoning and crucifixion.¹¹⁴ In addition to resources to fight crime, these courts are also a tool to safeguard the power of ISIS.

Protection of public order and security and the collection of data is the duty of the security services, which fall under the Ministry of Public Security (*Diwan al-Amn al-`Amm*, often referred to as *Amni* or *Emni*). More than other ministries, this ministry is dominated by officers from the former security services of Saddam Hussein. This organisation is responsible for the security of the caliph, it checks the implementation of his decisions and the execution of criminal sentences of the sharia courts. Departments for communication with the central government can be found in each province. There are also units for political murders, kidnappings and extortion.¹¹⁵ The police and the security organisation seem to be using the same torture methods that were applied under Saddam Hussein.¹¹⁶ According to reports of several Western Europeans intelligence agencies, seen by New York Times, the Ministry of Public Security of ISIS, since mid-2014, has been recruiting and sending fighters abroad for terrorist actions. This activity seems to have been headed by one of the most influential leaders of ISIS, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani¹¹⁷ – who is reported to have died late August 2016.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Atwan, 2015:129, 139

¹¹³ Winter, 2015a

¹¹⁴ Van Ostaeyen, 2013, 2014a, 2014b

¹¹⁵ Abu Haniyeh, 2014

¹¹⁶ Amnesty International, 2013

¹¹⁷ The New York Times, digital edition, 3 August 2016.

¹¹⁸ Schmitt & Barnard, 2016.

Although the sharia is the law of Islam applied by the state, state bodies are allowed to issue their own laws and decrees in certain fields. This concerns details that are not provided for in the sharia, such as regulations about public health, the distribution of medication, education, traffic and economic affairs. ISIS has issued legislation in all of these fields.¹¹⁹ There are known state documents with regard to regulations about fishing rights, payment of electricity, excavation permits, payment for refuse collection, coordinated Friday lectures, vaccinations and determination of housing rent.¹²⁰

5.4 The ISIS army

There are widely varying estimates about the size of ISIS' army. They range from 20,000 to 31,500 mid-2014 (CIA estimate¹²¹) to 200,000 (according to Kurdish sources¹²²). After the early bombings of ISIS targets in Syria in September 2014, the ISIS army suffered great losses. According to some sources, it concerns thousands of ISIS fighters, including, according to an Iraqi analyst, 17 of the 43 high commanders. However, these figures are disputed and deemed to be high.¹²³

The ISIS army is managed by the Minister of the Army and a military council (*Al-Majlis al-`Askari*), chaired by the minister. There is also a head of the general staff. The council consists of the commanders of the various regions – each of which accommodate about three battalions of about 300 to 350 men – and of the commanders of logistical and specialist departments. The council deals with all military issues, such as strategic planning, preparing attacks and field battles, monitoring the execution of operations by commanders, management of equipment and the distribution of the war booty. Many of the commanders of the second and third echelon are officers who originate from the army and security services of

¹¹⁹ Al-Tamimi, 2015a

¹²⁰ Al-Tamimi, 2015c, 2015j, 2015k

¹²¹ Sciutto et al., 2014

¹²² Cockburn, 2014

¹²³ Fromson & Simon, 2015

Saddam Hussain. These regular soldiers have left a deep mark on what can be regarded as a perfectionist education for recruits (see also paragraph 6.1).¹²⁴

The equipment of ISIS was largely obtained on the battlefield. Between 2012 and the summer of 2014, ISIS seized a number of weapons and other equipment. A considerable amount of the equipment consists of heavy weapons, such as tanks, light and heavy artillery, Humvees and portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft rockets. Some observers have reported that ISIS also had a number of MIG fighter jets. The Syrian air force says it downed two such aircraft in October 2014. The United States for that matter declared that there were no indications that ISIS had indeed conducted flights.¹²⁵

The main tactics of the ISIS army consist of strikes carried out by mobile infantry units. They have light vehicles such as pick-up trucks (often Toyotas) with artillery, motorbikes and vans to facilitate a quick advance. They also use car bombs, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide attacks.¹²⁶ One element of ISIS' tactics is the ruthless treatment of the enemy. In accordance with the religious beliefs of ISIS (see above), Shiites and members of the army and policy of the regimes in Iraq and Syria are regarded as apostates who should be sentenced to death. This justifies the mass executions, which are recorded on video and then distributed (see paragraph 5.4). Suicide attacks also form part of the tactical arsenal of ISIS. This too has religious aspects: those who carry out a suicide attack believe they become martyrs (*shahid*) and that they will end up in the highest ranks of paradise. In addition, the suicide attacks and the ruthless nature of ISIS' fighting method had a major shock effect on the enemy who, in 2014 in particular, at times fled en masse, fearing certain death if ISIS got hold of them.

ISIS' army consists of fighters from different backgrounds. The majority of soldiers are Iraqis and Syrians, but in addition to these local fighters, there are also volunteers who have arrived from outside this area. It is assumed that these foreign fighters make up about a third of the entire army. The largest contingent is made up

¹²⁴ Abu Haniyeh, 2014; Atwan 2015:140; Fromson & Simon, 2015

¹²⁵ Westall, 2014

¹²⁶ See for instance Fulmer & Rice, 2015; Gutman & Zakaria, 2015; Asher-Schapiro, 2015

of Arabs (Saudis, Tunisians, Moroccans and Jordanians). There is also a growing group of Russian citizens (Chechen, Dagestani) and Central Asians. Finally, there are also some thousands of western Europeans (see chapter 3). The military contribution of these foreigners is highly diverse. Some are hardened fighters with a lot of experience in war, like Bosnia, Afghanistan and Chechnya, but others lack fighting experience.

There are also major cultural differences. This diversity has positive and negative consequences for the army's effectiveness. The positive consequences arise from the fact that these foreigners are highly motivated and are stronger from an ideological point of view than local fighters.¹²⁷ They have left their countries with the sole aim to support ISIS. Also, it is in the interest of ISIS that these foreign fighters have no local loyalties and ties, but only want to serve the interest of ISIS. There is a downside to this however: there is a distinct difference between foreign and local fighters in terms of motivation. This may lead to an organisational and cultural rift in the army (see also paragraph 7.4). This is a challenge for ISIS management. There are stories of clashes between local and foreign fighters.¹²⁸

5.5 Media

As mentioned earlier in this report, ISIS makes clever use of mass media in order to realise its objectives: the 'electronic jihad'. There is a special Ministry for Information (*Diwan al-`Alaqqat al-`Amma*), managed by a Media Council. This ministry manages more than 10 media centres and institutes that produce videos and organise the use of social media. A lot of videos are intended for Muslims for the west and are in English. The message in many videos is twofold: to intimidate the enemy by showing them they will be crushed and that the fate of prisoners of war is terrifying. On the other hand, they paint a picture of an ideal society ruled by the caliph and the fact that the state gives priority to the well-being of its subjects.

¹²⁷ Gates, 2015; Fromson & Simon, 2015

¹²⁸ Ibid.

That side is mainly intended for potential recruits.¹²⁹ Apart from making videos, ISIS is also active on Twitter. Tweets reach thousands of followers and as such they are a good way of spreading its propagandist messages. Hackers of ISIS have also developed viruses that cause Tweets from recipients to be forwarded on unknowingly.¹³⁰ Fighters also send tweets. Nearly all of them have smartphones. Still, the organisation does seem to control this in some cases¹³¹ (see also paragraph 3.3).

5.6 ISIS' finances

Since 2014, ISIS has mainly served as a state, and more precisely, a belligerent state. This means its expenses are considerable, both for warfare and the public administration. Furthermore, there are costs for the infrastructure and social benefits. This is compensated by substantial sources of income. The Ministry of Finance (*Diwan Bayt al-Mal*) takes care of state finances, which increased considerably after the capture of Mosul and other areas in Iraq and Syria. In January 2015, the first state budget was published, with € 2 billion in estimated income.¹³² Most of the state's income comes from the extraction and selling of oil, selling and taxation of antiquities, ransom for prisoners, taxes and extortion, immovable property rentals and gifts.

Oil

At the start of 2015, ISIS had a number of important oil fields under its control. The running thereof falls under the Ministry of Mineral Resources (*Diwan al-Rikaz*), which also deals with the selling and taxation of antiquities. ISIS' income from oil is generally overestimated. The oil fields could yield about 80,000 barrels per day, but it is considerably less under ISIS' control. Important factors that reduce production levels are the air strikes and problems with system maintenance.

¹²⁹ Farwell, 2014

¹³⁰ Stern & Berger, 2015:147-176

¹³¹ Farwell, 2014

¹³² Abu Haniyeh, 2014; Atwan, 2015: 141

ISIS has tried to hold on to or recruit experienced oil engineers by offering them high wages and privileges, but they only succeeded to some extent. In addition, it is hard to get hold of spare parts.

Most of the extracted oil is used internally: as cheap fuel for the state, the army and civilians. Any oil that is not consumed domestically is exported. However, as ISIS does not have access to the formal oil market, it is sold by smuggling, below market prices. With a view to the risky aspects of oil extraction, ISIS is increasingly inclined to hive off the running of the oil fields, to lease the oil sources and to levy tax on oil sales.¹³³

Antiquities

Although ISIS has destroyed numerous antique buildings for reasons of publicity, a lot of antique objects were saved for economic reasons. These objects are sold on the illegal market. It is unclear to what extent ISIS itself sells antiquities. The government does not conduct excavations for antiquities but does give civilians a licence to dig them up. These licensees can only sell the antiquities within the territory and they have to pay tax on them¹³⁴

Ransom

There are now several examples in which ISIS is responsible for kidnapping people (especially employees of international organisations and western journalists), before they are released in some cases, against payment of a ransom. According to estimates, this increased ISIS' cash flow by 20 to 30 million dollars in 2014. The extent of the ransom is often negotiated for insurance companies by specialist companies. Sometimes the state of Qatar plays a role. According to plausible rumours, it pays a ransom for subjects of certain states, in exchange for political favours. The state has not acknowledged that link. Nevertheless, it was striking that Qatar was able to open an embassy in Bern, shortly after it had paid 30 million

¹³³ Hansen-Lewis & Shapiro, 2015; Fromson & Simon, 2015; Belli et al., 2014; Al-Tamimi, 2015i; FATF, 2015

¹³⁴ Tamimi, 2015i; Belli et al., 2014; Hansen-Lewis & Shapiro, 2015; Haniyeh 2014; FATF, 2015

dollars to free a Swiss citizen who had been taken hostage by ISIS.¹³⁵ Also, ISIS often demands ransom for imprisoned members of minorities, such as Christians and Yazidis.¹³⁶

Taxation and extortion

The boundary between taxation and extortion by ISIS is often vague. ISIS imposes the Islamic *zakat* on Muslims (wealth tax of approximately 5%) and the *jizya*¹³⁷ on Christians. In addition, ISIS levies tax on fuel, cars, antiquities, and on transported goods, also when they are in transit. A considerable source of income for the state is formed by the tax on withdrawing cash from bank accounts. Many Iraqi and Syrian civil servants are allegedly still being paid by Baghdad and Damascus, via banks outside of ISIS territory – although there are also sources that say that the Iraqi government stopped this in July 2014.¹³⁸

When those civil servants return to ISIS territory with the money they have withdrawn, they will have to pay a considerable amount in tax. Like other states, ISIS also asks for payment for certain services, such as education and the collection of domestic waste. ISIS demands payment from many industrial and financial companies (such as private banks), businessmen and shopkeepers. It looks a lot like extortion, because the extent of the payments is often arbitrary.¹³⁹

War booty: Immovable property

After conquering Iraqi or Syrian territory, all state property falls into the hands of ISIS. This concerns for instance agricultural land, buildings and state-run enterprises such as state-owned banks. After conquering Mosul, the bank accounts

¹³⁵ Belli et al., 2014

¹³⁶ Belli et al., 2014; Abu Haniyeh, 2014; Hansen-Lewis and Shapiro, 2015; FATF, 2015

¹³⁷ *Jizya* is the tax payable by non-Muslim subjects of Islamic states. It is an amount that has to be paid by every family each year, in exchange for protection and limited freedom to exercise their faith.

¹³⁸ Coles, 2015

¹³⁹ Belli et al., 2014; Hansen-Lewis & Shapiro, 2015; Abu Haniyeh, 2014; FATF, 2015; Shishani, 2014

of Christians, Yazidis and Shiites were seized. The (agricultural) rent and business revenue also go to ISIS.¹⁴⁰

War booty: Movable property

ISIS distributes the movable war booty obtained after field battles and the conquest of areas in accordance with the rules of the sharia. Everything that is taken, is handed over to the commander by the soldiers. He (or a state representative) distributes this among the soldiers in equal shares (often in money, after selling the goods on the ‘war booty market’), after deduction of a fifth, which goes to the state. As ISIS acknowledges slavery, prisoners of war and captured women and children can form part of the war booty as slaves and they can be sold or distributed among the fighters.¹⁴¹

Financial support from abroad

There are contradicting reports about financial support from abroad. According to some authors, rich individuals send (or sent) considerable amounts of money to ISIS from the Gulf states.¹⁴²

5.7 Administration and policy under Jabhat al-Nusra/Fath al-Sham

In addition to ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra (now Jabhat Fath al-Sham, JFS) is also active in Syria as a salafi jihadist militia. Compared to ISIS however, the knowledge of JaN’s organisational structure and daily life in areas controlled by JaN is much smaller. This is in part a consequence of the fact that JaN is first and foremost a combat organisation. Its commander, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, heads the organisation in consultation with the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council).¹⁴³ There often is uncertainty about how the commando structure works. This is a

¹⁴⁰ Belli et al., 2014; Hansen-Lewis & Shapiro, 2015; Haniyeh, 2014; FATF, 2015

¹⁴¹ FATF, 2015; Neurink, 2015

¹⁴² Abu Haniyeh, 2014; Shishani, 2014. According to others, the support is not of such a great extent, see Fromson & Simon, 2015; Hansen-Lewis & Shapiro, 2015.

¹⁴³ Stanford University, n.d.

major difference to ISIS, which directly pursues the establishment of an Islamic state, with an administration structure that has to be transparent for civilians. That is one of the reasons why ISIS' media system is so extensive. That of JaN is smaller: it is less active on the Internet compared to ISIS. Also, their 'Bureau for the Spreading of Islam and Information' (*Maktab al-Da'wa wa-l-Irshad*), with media centres such as *al-Manara al-Bayda' li-l-Intaj al-i'lami* (The White Minaret for media production) and *al-Basira li-l-Intaj al-i'lami* (The Right Insight for media productions) mainly publishes printed brochures and leaflets.¹⁴⁴

The organisation of JaN is not initially focused on managing the people living in the areas under its control. In addition, these areas often do not form a single whole, rather consisting of different enclaves where multiple militias share power. In this section we will explain what is known about the organisation, strategy and activities of JaN as required background for the daily life of foreign Syria travellers.

JaN is a militia with an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 fighters. Most of them are Syrians who have gained fighting experience in Afghanistan, Iraq and Chechnya, for instance. There are also fighters from other Arabic countries, Turkey, central Asia and a small number from Western Europe. About 30% of fighters are said to be foreign.¹⁴⁵ JaN is regarded as one of the best equipped oppositional militia. The number of foreigners has fallen since the summer of 2014, because many of them defected to ISIS after ISIS proclaimed their caliphate.¹⁴⁶ JaN played a major role in conquering Raqqa and Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria. In 2013 and 2014, JaN was driven from these cities by ISIS. JaN became mainly active in western Syria (around the cities of Aleppo and Damascus). Important income of JaN is generated by selling oil from the oil wells under their control and by trading equipment and ammunition seized on the battle fields. Ransom may also be a source of income.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Al-Tamimi, 2015f

¹⁴⁵ Masi, 2015b

¹⁴⁶ Stanford University, n.d.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Both JaN and ISIS want to set up an Islamic state, but the difference in strategy is enormous. For JaN, the toppling of the al'Assad regime takes the highest priority, while to ISIS the establishment of an Islamic state comes first. Whereas ISIS tries to establish absolute rule in the areas it controls using all peaceful and violent means, as a starting point for expanding its state, JaN is prepared to work together with other opposition groups in order to end the al-Assad regime and to set up an Islamic state (see paragraph 2.2).¹⁴⁸ JaN is selective for that matter: together with other Islamic militants it attacked opposition groups – supported by the US – after the autumn of 2014.¹⁴⁹

Al-Jawlani's announcement of July 2016 – changing the name JaN to Jabhat Fath al-Sham and declaring to have no affiliation to any external entity – was not a clear break with the past when JaN was pursuing al-Assad's downfall and cooperated with other oppositional groups. In his address al-Jawlani emphasised these strategical objectives expecting that this would facilitate cooperation with other groups and hoping that the US would stop regarding JaN/JFS as a terrorist organisation and hence would stop attacking them.

In most areas, JaN shares power with other groups. Generally speaking, JaN is less ruthless towards civilians than ISIS. For instance, the front has declared not to intentionally kill the non-fighting members of unorthodox Muslims (Alawites and Druze).¹⁵⁰ Although JaN does not want to establish a state right away, it does try to offer the government provisions required when the central state disappears. Law and order are maintained by applying the sharia. JaN has set up sharia courts (*Dar al-Qada'*) in various areas, which administer justice, also in criminal cases. These courts are usually recognised by the other militia with whom JaN in many cases shares power over the area. Although JaN applies criminal law less ruthless compared to ISIS, JaN also pronounces and carries out cruel

¹⁴⁸ Al-Tamimi, 2015a

¹⁴⁹ Stanford University, n.d.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. (There have however been occasions where persons belong to these group were killed by JaN, such as the murder of a group of Druze, see International Crisis Group, 2014)

punishments (such as stoning).¹⁵¹ These courts can also issue local decrees: examples are the separation of boys and girls at school, the subjects to be taught at school, the closure of shops that sell billiards tables, table football games and computer games.¹⁵² They often correspond with the prevailing rules in areas ruled by ISIS, as a result of which life in areas controlled by JaN does to some extent show similarities with life under ISIS.

In the various areas under the control of JaN, it has set up departments of the Administration of Public Services (*al-Idara al-`Amma li-l-Khidamat*), which mainly organises the supply and distribution of drinking water and electricity.¹⁵³ JaN also distributes food and bread when necessary: in order to be able to guarantee the latter, it has opened a number of bakeries in Aleppo, for which it also supplies flour.¹⁵⁴ In the areas controlled by JaN, a considerable number of local people show support, other than is the case with ISIS. An important reason is that the JaN fighters are mostly Syrians and that its organisation is flexible when it comes to working alongside other militia. In addition, the application of the sharia has in some cases led to a certain degree of security, without the courts having pronounced numerous death sentences (as opposed to what has happened in ISIS territory). And concluding, the distribution of food is also positively rated.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Al-Tamimi, 2015g

¹⁵² Al-Tamimi, 2015f

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Stanford University, n.d.

¹⁵⁵ Stanford University, n.d.; Al-Tamimi, 2015a

6. From border crossing to deployment

This chapter discusses the first period after Syria travellers have arrived in Syria. More specifically, this chapter deals with the different processes followed by foreigners when they settle down in areas that are under the control of ISIS. What are their potential perspectives within this organisation?

6.1 Arrival in Syria: safe houses and training centres

Europeans travel to Syria via different routes. Most of them end with a crossing to Syria via Turkey. In many cases, this can be specified to a crossing via the Turkish city of Antakya or elsewhere via the Turkish province of Hatay¹⁵⁶ – a mountainous area known for its traditional smuggling routes. The exact recruitment process they then follow can differ. After setting foot on Syrian soil, Europeans are welcomed, often by a contact person whose name or telephone number they have.¹⁵⁷ This person takes them to an application centre, or safe house, of ISIS.¹⁵⁸ These centres are especially intended to receive foreigners and are generally situated just across the border from Turkey.¹⁵⁹ Where someone is taken depends on his or her nationality, origins and knowledge of languages. Dutch men and women (together with Flemish Syria travellers) are clustered and accommodated away from those from Tunisia, Morocco or France.¹⁶⁰ Upon arrival, men and women are separated¹⁶¹ and they have to surrender their belongings such as their passports, telephones, laptops and clothing. These are checked for chips and GPS equipment.¹⁶² They are given shelter, food and drinks.¹⁶³ For a maximum period of three to four weeks, men are interrogated about their backgrounds and their reasons for coming to Syria.¹⁶⁴ Questions referring to their names, origins, studies, degrees, skills,

¹⁵⁶ AIDe'meh & Stockmans, 2015; Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015

¹⁵⁷ Respondent 4; Respondent 18; Respondent 25

¹⁵⁸ Respondent 18; Respondent 25

¹⁵⁹ Callimachi, 2016

¹⁶⁰ Respondent 18

¹⁶¹ Groen, 2015

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Respondent 18

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

ambitions, goals, etc. The answers are filled out in ‘registration forms’, as illustrated by the mass leak of such documents in March 2016.¹⁶⁵ For precautionary reasons, the foreigners will be guarded during this period in the safe house.¹⁶⁶ An interviewee remarks:

“Can they be trusted? Do they have any [wrong] reasons for joining? Will they at one point want to break away from the group? So if they went out, there was always a third person going along to keep an eye on them.”¹⁶⁷

Despite such screening measures, this ‘application procedure’ – especially during the early period – can be labelled as an ‘open door policy’: it is relatively easy to join the ranks of ISIS.¹⁶⁸ However, the requirements to join have become considerably stricter over time.¹⁶⁹ Some Syria travellers have mentioned the need for a recommendation (*tazkiyya*). In other cases, Syria travellers seem to have joined the ranks of ISIS without such recommendation.¹⁷⁰ In general, the interviews take longer for someone who was involved in another local group prior to this period than for a ‘new recruit’. Those who used to be a member of another organisation have to complete a process of forgiveness or repentance.¹⁷¹

After their time in the safe house, the men are taken to training camps.¹⁷² Here, they will stay for consecutive midweeks, possibly with the exception of the weekends, when they can visit their wives and children (if applicable), who are housed elsewhere during this initial phase.¹⁷³ In the training camp too, they are still

¹⁶⁵ E.g. see: Ramsay, 2016; Dearden, 2016

¹⁶⁶ Respondent 17; Groen, 2015

¹⁶⁷ Respondent 17

¹⁶⁸ Respondent 1; Respondent 24. Due to this simplicity, one of the respondents describes ISIS and (to a lesser extent) Jabhat al-Nusra as “the world’s most infiltrated organisations” (Respondent 24).

¹⁶⁹ Respondent 24

¹⁷⁰ Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015

¹⁷¹ Speckhard & Yayla, 2015

¹⁷² Respondent 18

¹⁷³ Respondent 1; Respondent 24

being monitored out of precaution.¹⁷⁴ Other than in the safe houses, there is no clustering according to origin in the training camps. The Dutch, Belgians, Moroccans, Tunisians, etc. all train together. This encourages foreigners, insofar as they do not speak the language yet, to learn Arabic; the working language during the preparation and execution of military operations, among other things. In addition to a language course, these training sessions consist of theological and military curricula. Together, they form a “defined, well-organised and structured study programme.”¹⁷⁵ A training process starts with theological issues that set out the basis of the religion. The subject matter then turns more political. A defector states that he was taught the ISIS version of Islam: that non-Muslims have to be killed because they are the enemy of the Islamic community.¹⁷⁶ A lot of value is attached to this religious education.¹⁷⁷ A sharia exam is said to form part of this curriculum, and has to be completed successfully before someone can be fulfil a role for the organisation.¹⁷⁸ The military curriculum concentrates on physical development, dealing with hunger and cold, handling various weapons and carrying out combating techniques and strategies.¹⁷⁹ Weapon training seems to be particularly aimed at learning to use a Kalashnikov, RPG and hand grenades.¹⁸⁰ Other training includes the use of swords¹⁸¹ and sniper rifles.¹⁸² A standard day at training camp seems to start around 05:30 hrs, with morning prayer¹⁸³, followed by endurance training in the morning and a religious part in the afternoon, ending with weapon and combat training.¹⁸⁴ Lunch is consumed outside, so they can get used to the cold weather.¹⁸⁵ During this period, recruits are in principle not sent to the front

¹⁷⁴ Groen, 2015

¹⁷⁵ Respondent 18

¹⁷⁶ Weis 2015b

¹⁷⁷ Respondent 18; Respondent 24

¹⁷⁸ Respondent 24

¹⁷⁹ Respondent 18; Respondent 4; Respondent 19; Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015; Hassan, 2015; Al-Tamimi, 2015h

¹⁸⁰ Ministère de la Justice, République Française (2015)

¹⁸¹ Respondent 18

¹⁸² Respondent 19

¹⁸³ Ministère de la Justice, République Française (2015). Morning prayer (*salat al-fair*) takes place at the first break of day. This varies, depending on the season: during summer, it will be before 05:30 hrs.

¹⁸⁴ Respondent 24

¹⁸⁵ Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015

line. They can be deployed as guards in border areas or at checkpoints (*ribaati*) however.¹⁸⁶ This seems to be a compulsory final element of the training; a first form of practical experience with combat.¹⁸⁷

The above forms the basis of a training process. However, not every process is identical. Based on an assessment of the person's qualities and knowledge beforehand, he will (partially) follow an individual training process.¹⁸⁸ Many will eventually be deployed for duties that match their specific capacities.¹⁸⁹ This means the period spent at a training camp can vary considerably from person to person and it may extend from a couple of weeks to a year.¹⁹⁰ The average training process seems to take about a month and a half to two months.¹⁹¹ On the one hand, this assessment may result in a person having to follow more or fewer classes of a certain theme compared to someone else.¹⁹² On the other, it means that after the period at the safe house, people can (in addition or otherwise) specialise on the basis of their competencies.¹⁹³ A person's wishes may also play a role in this.¹⁹⁴ These wishes may relate to specific jobs, but also to the choice to carry out a suicide attack. In some cases, this seems to have been encouraged.

Others are asked to, instead of fighting for ISIS in Syria or Iraq, to quickly return to their home countries to plot attacks on their home soil. For that purpose, ISIS provides them with a shortened training to make the cover story of going on a holiday more credible.¹⁹⁵ In July 2016, the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service estimates that there are dozens of ISIS operatives in or on their way to Europe who might be(come) involved in preparing and executing attacks.¹⁹⁶ Thus, given the required 'output' of the training phase, both the content and the duration of the training might differ. In principle however, everyone follows military

¹⁸⁶ Respondent 18; The Hassan, 2015

¹⁸⁷ Respondent 18; Legal dossier

¹⁸⁸ Respondent 18; Hassan, 2015; Al-Tamimi, 2015h

¹⁸⁹ Gates & Podder, 2015

¹⁹⁰ Hassan, 2015

¹⁹¹ Respondent 4

¹⁹² Hassan, 2015

¹⁹³ Respondent 18; Groen, 2015

¹⁹⁴ Respondent 4

¹⁹⁵ Cllimachi 2016

¹⁹⁶ NCTV 2016

training and takes an oath of loyalty (*bay'a*).¹⁹⁷ In such an oath, a Syria traveller declares that he will carry out all duties assigned to him, regardless of whether he thinks they are acceptable or not. According to one of the respondents, this happens before the training period.¹⁹⁸

This separation between time spent at the safe house and time spent at a training camp is not always that explicit. In certain cases, both phases seem to take place almost simultaneously, with the 'recruit' being sent to a training camp immediately, where he is both interviewed and trained.¹⁹⁹ On average, this entire starting period between arrival and deployment, regardless of whether it can be divided into two phases or not, seems to take about two to three months. During that period, the life of a male Syria traveller consists of interviews and training on a closed site, where they are strictly monitored by the organisation. This period can be physically demanding, which is evidenced by stories from family members about Syria travellers losing a lot of weight during this stage.

6.2 Deployment of Syria travellers

Once the training has been completed, the men are placed in a battalion (*katiba*) led by an emir. These battalions are, for pragmatic reasons, formed on the basis of nationality, cultural similarities and language.²⁰⁰ However, lately ISIS has dissolved at least several of such 'national battalions' due to unintended consequences of having homogeneous groups and treating them different than local fighters (see paragraph 7.4).²⁰¹ This development however does not have seemed to affect the situation of Dutch and Belgian Syria travellers: they are currently still believed to be grouped together in the same unit(s).²⁰² Not only the fighters, but also those who, on the basis of their capacities and wishes are mainly deployed for duties other than fighting, end up in this military structure. The question as to 'what

¹⁹⁷ Respondent 13; Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015; Speckhard & Yayla, 2015

¹⁹⁸ Respondent 13

¹⁹⁹ Hassan, 2015; Legal dossier

²⁰⁰ Respondent 2; Respondent 8; Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015; Business Insider, 2014

²⁰¹ Weiss, 2015a

²⁰² Respondent 1

do they do there?’ has several answers. For instance, a Dutch young man reassured his parents by telling them he was only a chef, and not involved in any combat.²⁰³ Such statements are difficult to verify though, and in general they do not seem to reflect reality. On the other side of the spectrum, there are Dutch young men who carried out suicide attacks. In between, there is a wide range of other options. When asked what jobs you can do in ISIS’ caliphate, one Dutch Syria traveller said “anything you want.”²⁰⁴ Most of them will become fighters²⁰⁵, but the possibilities to do something else than fight seem to be diverse. Among other things, there are jobs in the media (‘mediajihad’) or communications, you can become an engineer, a technician, a hacker, a doctor or nurse, you can get a job with the religious police or sharia court or, when found unfit to fight, you can become a chef, gravedigger or driver.²⁰⁶ The need for such professions can be explained by the fact that many people have escaped the violence in Syria. This has resulted in a brain drain and a loss of specialist knowledge in the caliphate.²⁰⁷ This means there is a shortage of professionals and skilled people. This shortage is also clearly expressed in the first speech by Baghdadi, in which he called Muslims to emigrate to the newly proclaimed caliphate:

“We make a special call to the scholars, fuqaha’ (experts in Islamic jurisprudence), and callers, especially the judges, as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers of all different specializations and fields. We call them and remind them to fear Allah, for their emigration is wajib ‘ayni (an individual obligation), so that they can answer the dire need of the Muslims for them.”²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Bakker & Weggemans, 2016

²⁰⁴ Respondent 4 (about correspondence with local people)

²⁰⁵ Respondent 4; Respondent 5; Respondent 8; Respondent 11; Respondent 12; Respondent 17; Respondent 18

²⁰⁶ Respondent 4; Respondent 7; Respondent 18; Respondent 19; Respondent 22; Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015

²⁰⁷ Respondent 6; Respondent 23

²⁰⁸ Al-Baghdadi, n.d.

However, it is difficult to view such jobs separately from the armed conflict.²⁰⁹ When a person fulfils such a job, it means he can or will no longer be deployed for combat. Often it seems to concern a combination, being active in both the media and as a fighter.²¹⁰ Also, ISIS seems to apply conscription.²¹¹ Those who are not fighters, are reservists. The emir may stipulate they fight or undertake other combat activities when deemed necessary²¹², for instance as soon as a city enters the front line or when there is a shortage of fighters. The extent to which this happens, and particularly the extent to which a person is deployed to carry out brutalities, is hard to gauge. It appears to depend strongly on, among other things, the situations a person is confronted with and the commands of his emir. It does seem that in 2014, ISIS had less tolerance for those who were not actively committed to the armed jihad.²¹³ There are indications that weak or unwanted recruits were killed by ISIS.²¹⁴ They have to demonstrate they form part of ISIS and have to be decisive. A hesitant mentality will often be associated with possible espionage.²¹⁵ It seems that reaching a higher level (such as a position as emir or joining the religious police) can be particularly associated with cruelties. When someone is deemed ideologically suitable, has the right connections and his family has been ‘approved’, he can, according to an ISIS fighter, receive training on how to carry out executions. Beheading and shooting to kill at close range are practised on multiple persons. Such ritual executions seem ‘to count’ when someone wants to get higher up the ladder.²¹⁶ Given the fact that some Dutch Syria travellers are “in relatively interesting positions” within ISIS²¹⁷, this suggests that they are guilty of such cruelties. Some of the French Syria travellers are also known to have been at

²⁰⁹ Respondent 2; Respondent 24

²¹⁰ Respondent 18

²¹¹ Respondent 24

²¹² Respondent 18; Respondent 26

²¹³ Respondent 1

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Respondent 5

²¹⁶ Based on one of the interviews (respondent 13), a person who wants to become emir has to have beheaded at least 10 people. This information could not be verified elsewhere.

²¹⁷ Respondent 18

the head of a militia or formed part of the religious police.²¹⁸ There are also photos of Syria travellers in supporting positions, such as a Dutch employee at a sharia court, posing with amputated heads.²¹⁹

Although the majority of foreigners are deployed as fighters, it seems they do not fight continuously.²²⁰ On the one hand, this is because a considerable amount of a fighter's time is spent on other armed military tasks, such as guard duty and patrolling. This may involve combat activities as well as inflicting corporal punishment.²²¹ The *riba* for a large part consists of guard duty, something that can turn the role of fighter into a "very dull" one at times.²²² On the other, it is not possible to constantly fight, as periods of combat are followed by periods during which there is no combat, offering time off or to carry out another duty (such as guard duty or *da`wa*).²²³ The emphasis on fighting can particularly be seen on the front lines, where they fight against the regime or other rebel groups. In areas that lie further away from these front lines and are under ISIS' control, the emphasis is on various other duties. However, the violent dimension of the conflict applies here as well. Men, regardless of their position, are expected to carry arms.²²⁴ Certain jobs are also clearly linked to violence. Officers of the religious police (*al-Hisbah*, see paragraph 5.3) for instance, impose punishment for (suspected) violations. Allegedly, a Belgian has headed this religious police in Raqqa since early 2015.²²⁵ Westerners in general seem to take up a special role in ISIS in respect of contact with non-Arabic prisoners and receiving ransom.²²⁶

Although foreign women, like local women, usually take care of the household and do not fight²²⁷, the use of violence is not just a male affair. Mid-2015, one young Dutch woman told about her duty: lashing people. "A nice new

²¹⁸ Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015

²¹⁹ Respondent 22

²²⁰ Respondent 1; Respondent 2; Respondent 5

²²¹ Respondent 4

²²² Respondent 1

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Respondent 2; Respondent 24

²²⁵ RIBSS, 2015; Het Laatste Nieuws, 2015

²²⁶ Gates & Podder, 2015

²²⁷ Stoter, 2014

experience”, she states.²²⁸ Although the validity of this statement is difficult to gauge, it seems that it is mainly western women who fulfil a role with the *Al-Khansaa* brigade (see paragraph 5.3), and that this also includes women of Dutch origin.²²⁹ Other duties fulfilled by Dutch women who came to this area include “cooking for the brothers”²³⁰ and distributing online propaganda. Women have an increasingly bigger role in the latter in particular.²³¹ Among other things, they play an important part in convincing other women to travel to Syria. However, women are mainly responsible for looking after their families (see paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2).

In 2014 and afterwards, the perception among Syria travellers with regard to their deployment in Syria appears to be strongly linked to what has been described above. According to numerous respondents, men join ISIS – regardless of their family situation – in the knowledge that the caliphate has to be defended by means of violence.²³² “No one is under any illusion that they can live a life without soon being deployed for combat, or having to use violence on behalf of IS.”²³³ To that end they will go on training and they know this in advance.²³⁴ “They know very well what they are getting themselves in to, which is taking part in the violent jihad.”²³⁵ The argument to travel to ISIS territory with the intention to provide humanitarian aid therefore seems highly improbable in 2014 and afterwards.²³⁶ In addition, Syria travellers are unable to provide humanitarian aid by themselves in the caliphate of ISIS; the organisation will ask them to deploy them for ISIS.²³⁷ Non-cooperation will be associated with espionage. Joining ISIS seems to be a condition for Syria travellers to travel around the areas controlled by ISIS (and to undertake activities, see for instance paragraph 8.1 about employment).

²²⁸ Stoter, 2015; Message posted on Twitter, archive 17 December 2015

²²⁹ Respondent 18

²³⁰ Respondent 22

²³¹ Respondent 1

²³² Respondent 4; Respondent 5; Respondent 17; Respondent 18; Respondent 24

²³³ Respondent 4

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Respondent 17

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Respondent 6

7. Daily life from a social perspective

This chapter discusses the social elements of daily life, starting with the role and position of men and women. Following on from this, we will discuss the family lives of Syria travellers, after which we will deal with the contrast with the daily lives of the local population. In conclusion, we discuss the integration issue.

7.1 The role of men and women

The role and freedoms of women have changed dramatically in the last few years. The *abaya* was often seen as early as 2013, but in addition, women also often wore make-up and they wore ‘modern’ clothes: showing bare skin at the arms and knees.²³⁸ This changed at the start of 2014. ISIS’ grip on society tightened from that moment and such scenarios gradually disappeared.

The role of a woman starts when she is old enough to get married, which can be as young as 9. From that moment, she is expected to serve society from behind the scenes.²³⁹ A woman's life is therefore primarily aimed at having children and looking after her family.²⁴⁰ To that end, women are obliged to stay at home; they live sedentary lives. The possibilities to go out alone are limited.²⁴¹ In such exceptional cases, they are obliged to wear a *abaya* and *niqab*.²⁴² They can go outside only under the supervision of an immediate male member of the family²⁴³, the only exception being an emergency. The male/female relationship within the family is typified by the man’s superiority and the woman’s duty to obey him (in the words of the *Al-Khansaa* brigade: ‘the honour of execution’).²⁴⁴ A woman can marry only one man, but a man can have several wives. Furthermore, a man can keep a *yezidi* slave as his concubine, also when he is married. In practice, women hardly seem to object to this, probably because of powerlessness or a fear for

²³⁸ Moaveni, 2015

²³⁹ Winter, 2015a

²⁴⁰ Respondent 5; Respondent 24

²⁴¹ Respondent 24; Winter, 2015a

²⁴² Moaveni, 2015

²⁴³ Respondent 11; Respondent 12

²⁴⁴ Winter, 2015a

domestic violence.²⁴⁵ The situation for these *yezidi* women is completely different from the wife's role set out above. They are regarded as unbelievers with whom no protection contract (*dhimma*) can be concluded and as such they can be treated as slaves. According to the sharia, the owner can have sex with his slaves, regardless of whether he is married or not.

Although it seems slightly ironic initially, working for the *Al-Khansaa* brigade is for some women a way of regaining some freedom of movement.²⁴⁶ Being allowed to work for this women's brigade is an exception to the principal ban for women to stay at home. Another exception is being allowed to work as a teacher or doctor, as both healthcare and education are separated according to gender (see paragraph 9.4).²⁴⁷ A woman can also study theology away from her home. The final exception is that a woman can independently leave home if she is expected to take part in the armed jihad through a *fatwa*.²⁴⁸ Because of these exceptions, more active women can also be regulated.

The roles of men and women start at a very early stage. Being a child seems to last for a short period only. Girls wear veils from a young age and, as said before, they can get married as early as 9. After their time in primary school and following training, boys can be deployed for the jihad. According to some sources, this is compulsory from the age of 14, although there are indications that boys as young as 12 are being deployed for combat.²⁴⁹ This training is organised in special training camps for children, where they are taught the sharia and receive weapon training.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ Neurink, 2015:83

²⁴⁶ Moaveni, 2015

²⁴⁷ Neurink, 2015:66

²⁴⁸ Winter, 2015a

²⁴⁹ HRW, 2015

²⁵⁰ Al-Tamimi, 2015h

7.2 Family life of Syria travellers

Looking at the marital status of Syria travellers, all possible patterns emerge. Single persons arriving in Syria are expected to find a partner soon.²⁵¹ Single women in particular have to get married as soon as possible after arriving in Syria in order to prevent their honour from being tainted.²⁵² Unmarried women are housed in a convent until a suitable man is found whom they can marry.²⁵³ During this period, they are not allowed to venture outside.²⁵⁴ Single women often already had contact with their future husbands via social media.²⁵⁵ Once married, couples move in together and they are expected to have children soon.²⁵⁶ The family lives of European Syria travellers are then in line with the above approach to the roles of men and women. Back in 2013 – in the area of Aleppo – Dutch women were able to sunbathe on a roof terrace and go to the market with other women.²⁵⁷ This seems to be a thing of the past, not least because many Dutch women are known to have settled in Raqqa over the course of time, where ISIS' influence is largest.²⁵⁸ Messages from a couple of Dutch and Belgian girls/women to their families back home show that adapting to the role of woman is often hard for them. Nevertheless, they show the will to stay²⁵⁹ – although there have been indications in 2015 that more and more women wish to return.²⁶⁰ In other cases they are highly positive in their contacts with the home front. It is difficult to determine to what extent this is true.²⁶¹

When the man leaves home to work in the morning, the woman stays at home.²⁶² Depending on how the man is then deployed, he could be back the same

²⁵¹ Respondent 25

²⁵² Neurink, 2015:114

²⁵³ Respondent 26

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Stoter, 2014

²⁵⁶ Respondent 25

²⁵⁷ Respondent 22

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Respondent 26

²⁶¹ Respondent 21

²⁶² Respondent 2

evening, or he may not return for a couple of days.²⁶³ In the absence of the men, women regularly look for each other's company.²⁶⁴ Dutch and Belgian women in Raqqa therefore form a very tight-knit group.²⁶⁵ However, they hardly ever go outside.²⁶⁶ The man often supplies them with food and drink, instead of the woman buying this during the day.²⁶⁷ Nevertheless, foreign ISIS women seem to enjoy more freedoms and benefits than women who form part of the local population – who are suppressed by ISIS.²⁶⁸ Examples are more access to the Internet and, when they do go outside, getting priority in the queue for bread and free care at the hospital.²⁶⁹ In the family however, the woman is subordinate to the man. If and how often women can call their parents in the west seems to depend on his willingness. The means of communication are kept by the men and they monitor the conversations held by the women. Women are also checked when the men are away from home. In that case, another man is charged with keeping an eye on the woman, to the extent possible.²⁷⁰

In complete contrast with the local population (see the next paragraph about the avoidance mentality), ISIS families tend to recreate away from home. They relax alongside rivers²⁷¹ or in the forest, for instance.²⁷² The Raqqa area in particular seems to be in use as some kind of retreat.²⁷³ Possibilities for recreation are strongly propagated by IS, although the extent to which this is reality remains unclear. The family largely depends on the man in order to be able to get outdoors. When the man dies, the possibilities for both his wife and children are very much limited. When the man dies, a woman tends to remarry fairly quickly, and become someone's second or third wife – on the one hand to create some freedom of movement for herself and her children and on the other because she does not want

²⁶³ Respondent 2; Respondent 24; Respondent 26

²⁶⁴ Respondent 22

²⁶⁵ Stoter, 2014

²⁶⁶ Respondent 4; Respondent 22; Respondent 24

²⁶⁷ Respondent 22

²⁶⁸ Respondent 26

²⁶⁹ Moaveni, 2015

²⁷⁰ Respondent 22

²⁷¹ Kouwenhoven, 2015

²⁷² Respondent 25

²⁷³ Kouwenhoven, 2015

to end up in a convent.²⁷⁴ Due to the limited amount of information available, the picture of Dutch and Belgian children is restricted to following classes at primary school and recreating outdoors under the supervision of the father and, if applicable, the mother. It is also striking that many Syria travellers have cats as pets.²⁷⁵

There are individual situations that leave the impression that men have a safer position in such family situations than men who left on their own.²⁷⁶ Looking at the overall picture however, the family situation seems to have few consequences for the deployment of Dutch men; “it's not as if men with family obligations are relieved from combat activities”²⁷⁷ This seems to be a general fact.²⁷⁸ The fact that everyone is expected to start a family and have children quickly supports this notion. In 2014, men know what can be expected from them (see the final section of paragraph 6.2). Also, the roles of fighter and husband seem to go well together, as evidenced by the many photos of fighters and their families, in which weapons often play a prominent role.

7.3 Social isolation of the local population

Other than with ISIS families, the local population is hardly able to recreate outdoors. Other outdoor activities are also restricted to a minimum as a result of the rules imposed and the strict enforcement thereof. Acts that violate ISIS' interpretation of the sharia are severely punished in the caliphate. It is often left to the accused to prove his or her innocence.²⁷⁹ Executions and other punishments take place in public on an almost daily basis. Sometimes in thoroughfares and parks, often on central squares.²⁸⁰ Local residents are often forced to watch the event.²⁸¹ A refugee says: “Seeing the beheading was the worst and we were forced

²⁷⁴ Respondent 21; Respondent 22; Respondent 26

²⁷⁵ Respondent 26

²⁷⁶ Respondent 17

²⁷⁷ Respondent 18

²⁷⁸ Respondent 5

²⁷⁹ Respondent 19; United Nations, 2014

²⁸⁰ Respondent 19

²⁸¹ Respondent 2

to watch. I had to watch them so often, sometimes every day again.”²⁸² So as to realise collective prevention, the result is put on display: heads are impaled and bodies are left visible for a couple of days, along with a note about the offence committed. These severe punishments, the arbitrary nature and simplicity with which they can be imposed, have resulted in a culture of fear among the local population in ISIS territory, with people being afraid to voice any criticism and trying to avoid all possible confrontations to the greatest possible extent.²⁸³ A sense of powerlessness – the inability to intervene when witnessing injustice – and the fear of being inducted also play a role. The daily lives of the local residents in ISIS territory largely moved indoors during the course of 2014.²⁸⁴ A refugee says: “During the past month and a half I’ve hardly been outside. Only for the compulsory Friday prayer and the executions they take us to afterwards.”²⁸⁵ As a result, the streets appear ‘empty’²⁸⁶ – something the large number of refugees who left have also contributed to.²⁸⁷ The people you see in the streets are mainly armed men who are employed by ISIS. They include traffic controllers, checkpoint guards and employees of the decency police. Many residents venture outside only when it is necessary, such as a visit to the doctor or to buy clothing or food. The rest, even when it would not pose a logical problem in public, is done indoors out of precaution.²⁸⁸ Doors and windows are closed and windows are covered to prevent people from looking in and to reduce inspections by the decency services to the greatest possible extent.²⁸⁹ Parallel to the increasing influence of ISIS on daily life in 2014, the lives of local residents in the caliphate was increasingly characterised by social isolation and the streets by emptiness – which is still the case today.²⁹⁰

²⁸² HRW, 2015

²⁸³ Respondent 7; Respondent 8; Respondent 20

²⁸⁴ Respondent 7; Respondent 8; Respondent 11; Respondent 12; Respondent 20

²⁸⁵ HRW, 2015

²⁸⁶ Respondent 7; Respondent 8

²⁸⁷ Respondent 15

²⁸⁸ Respondent 20

²⁸⁹ Respondent 8

²⁹⁰ Respondent 7; Respondent 8

7.4 Integration of Syria travellers

Arabic is the working language of ISIS, and as such it forms part of the permanent course material offered at training camp (see paragraph 6.1). After the period at training camp, the need to have a command of Arabic in order to be able to function seems to wane. By subsequently forming battalions with a shared language, it is possible to keep communicating in your own language. The Dutch often spend time with other Dutch people and with, for instance, Flemish people.²⁹¹ In addition, groups that leave for Syria together often end up in the same battalion. This makes integration within the unit relatively easy in principle. These units always have a number of people who understand and speak Arabic, and who can therefore communicate with leaders or other units.²⁹²

Integration outside the *katiba* appears to be more problematic, especially in respect of local ISIS units. Foreign *mujahedin* often enjoy a particular identity and status. This goes hand in hand with practical advantages. This has resulted in indications of small-scale internal armed conflicts between local and foreign fighters about issues such as differences in salary, living conditions and the perception that local fighters are disproportionately often forced to fight in the bloodiest of field battles.²⁹³ In order to remove this dispute, there are plans to draw a uniform line in treatment, regardless of origin. It seems that this has yet to be fully realized. However, the principle of homogeneous foreign battalions nowadays appears to be less advertised by ISIS²⁹⁴, and, as mentioned in paragraph 6.2, some homogeneous battalions have already been disbanded. On the other hand, language problems and cultural differences also form obstacles for integration.²⁹⁵ This particularly seems to form an obstacle when trying to integrate in the higher hierarchy of ISIS, as these circles are dominated by Arabs.²⁹⁶ According to Agence France-Presse, the highest positions in Raqqa are fulfilled by Iraqi, Saudi and, to a

²⁹¹ Respondent 2; Respondent 18

²⁹² Respondent 2; Respondent 18

²⁹³ Fromson & Simon, 2015

²⁹⁴ Respondent 6

²⁹⁵ Dechesne & Van den Berge, 2015

²⁹⁶ Respondent 2

lesser extent, Tunisian people. Egyptian, European, Chechen and Syrian fighters usually fulfil the lower positions.²⁹⁷ This is not an insurmountable problem however, as shown by the fact that some Dutch Syria travellers fulfil relatively high positions.²⁹⁸

The clustering according to language as is done with battalions can also be seen in how urban districts are occupied. In cities such as Raqqa, they appear to be inhabited by a specific European group of the population that speaks the same language.²⁹⁹ This also applies to the Dutch and Belgians, who often live in close proximity of each other in what one of the respondents referred to as “a kind of Camp Holland.”³⁰⁰ As a result, most foreigners are in general segregated from the rest of the Syrian population.³⁰¹ Consequently, the situation of integration in the local community is, on a local level, similar to that of integration in a battalion. However, when we look at it from a broader perspective and also take the mentality of the local population into account, we see a different picture. Some of the locals see foreign fighters as occupiers.³⁰² The local population also displays distrust towards foreigners for fear of espionage.³⁰³ This makes it hard to integrate in the community. Since, as described in the previous paragraph, residents are afraid of voicing criticism and the daily lives of the local population have increasingly shifted to the outdoors during 2014, the practical consequences of this mentality seem limited.³⁰⁴ In the longer term, the increasing normalisation of foreign families in cities could result in a better integration of foreigners in the local population.³⁰⁵ At the same time, we can see contradicting trends. In Raqqa for instance, there are Russian schools and shops for Chechen.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁷ Caris & Reynolds, 2014

²⁹⁸ Respondent 18

²⁹⁹ Respondent 1

³⁰⁰ Respondent 21

³⁰¹ Caris & Reynolds, 2014

³⁰² Respondent 1; Respondent 7; Respondent 8

³⁰³ Respondent 19; Respondent 20

³⁰⁴ Respondent 19

³⁰⁵ Al-Tamimi, 2014b

³⁰⁶ Caris & Reynolds, 2014

8. The economy of the caliphate

This chapter focuses on getting by in areas that are under the control of ISIS. It starts with an approach to the possibilities and impossibilities with regard to employment in these regions. We will then pay attention to the income of the local population and the strongly fluctuating prices since the start of the conflict. Developments in these fields mean that residents are increasingly forced to join ISIS. In conclusion we will discuss the financial position of people who have decided to join ISIS.

8.1 Employment

The emergence of ISIS does not so much constitute a full revision of administration and personnel on many fronts, but rather the deployment of personnel from the public sector who are already employed – either under threat of seizing their homes when they refuse. This means that a lot of people who used to work for the Syrian or Iraqi authorities, became employed at the *Diwan al-Khidamat*³⁰⁷ after the arrival of ISIS (see footnote 108). Shops have also opened and residents of ISIS territory are allowed to temporarily leave the caliphate to trade elsewhere, just like people from other areas are permitted to enter the caliphate for a business visit.³⁰⁸ Leaving the caliphate is subject to conditions, so as to discourage people from fleeing. Sanctions may be imposed when these conditions are violated. For instance, someone who exceeds the permitted period to temporarily leave the caliphate (for trading purposes, but also to withdraw money from a bank, for instance, see chapter 5 about state finances), runs a risk of losing all the possessions he left behind or endangering his family.³⁰⁹ Also, anyone can invest (by setting up your own business, for instance); in principle, you do not have to have joined ISIS to be able to do this. There are a number of exceptions. Investments in oil and gas fields are allowed only when a person has sworn

³⁰⁷ Al-Tamimi, 2015a

³⁰⁸ Respondent 6

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

allegiance to the caliph. Anyone can be employed at refineries however, and this is a source of income for many people. One important note to make is that it appears foreigners can only get such jobs when they join ISIS. In other cases, this will not be tolerated and the person in question will endanger himself – in part because of the distrust and fear for espionage and sabotage at ISIS.³¹⁰ This does in fact apply to all activities which foreigners may want to undertake in ISIS territory.³¹¹

Private businesses appear to pay more tax to ISIS than they used to have to pay to the Syrian or Iraqi authorities.³¹² ISIS levies taxes in accordance with the sharia and collects 2.5% of the capital of businesses and rich people. Farmers have to surrender 5 to 15% of their harvest. ISIS also levies taxes on businesses and farmers in other ways (see paragraph 5.6). Farmers for instance have to surrender not only a percentage of their harvest as tax, some the harvest is purchased by ISIS who then sells it when prices rise, while the transport of goods is also subject to tax. According to farmers and traders, ISIS benefits from the same harvest several times over.³¹³ As a result of such collections and missed profits, businesses are hampered in their growth and jobs are lost.³¹⁴ In addition, air strikes on oil refineries by the coalition have caused the loss of a lot of local jobs and as such led to a loss of income.³¹⁵

8.2 Poverty among the local population and the appeal of ISIS

In addition to those who have lost their income after losing their jobs, many people living in ISIS territory have lost their income despite holding on to their jobs. Syrian and Iraqi authorities for instance pay fewer pensions and salaries to public sector personnel living in ISIS territory.

³¹⁰ Respondent 2; Respondent 6

³¹¹ Respondent 6

³¹² Respondent 7

³¹³ World Economic Forum, 2015

³¹⁴ Respondent 7

³¹⁵ Sly, 2014

At the same time, prices in Syria have continued to rise. The gradual price increases up to the first half of 2013 then turned into an explosive price rise.³¹⁶ Prices in rebel areas rose fastest and are five to six times higher than in the areas under control of the Syrian regime.³¹⁷ In ISIS territory, prices tend to be highest.³¹⁸ This is partially the result of the risks involved in trading in ISIS territory. Fewer traders from outside are willing to enter the ISIS caliphate. Those who are, factor in the risks in the price of the products they offer.³¹⁹ In addition, the continuously rising price of petrol and oil also causes the prices of other products to rise, as the production and transport thereof also become more expensive.³²⁰ In some regions, the price of petrol has gone up to 18 dollars per gallon. The prices of gas, flour, bread and other basic products have risen correspondingly fast.³²¹ There are indications that ISIS has committed to lower the prices of such products. According to the organisation itself, ISIS offered lower prices for food in Aleppo (before ISIS left the city in January 2014) for families who shopped in certain stores. In March 2014, the organisation claimed that beef was offered at a reduced rate to poor people in Maskanah. Also, residents have indicated that ISIS lowered the price of bread and made it available in Raqqa in larger quantities.³²² However, more recent reports appear to show the opposite; ISIS increases prices for the local population in order to pressurise them to join the organisation. The regime does seem to ensure that shopkeepers do not artificially push prices up: all products intended for sale must be displayed. They are not allowed to create shortages and offer held-back goods when prices go up.³²³ Although the economic pressure can

³¹⁶ Respondent 7

³¹⁷ Respondent 20

³¹⁸ Respondent 23

³¹⁹ Respondent 23

³²⁰ Respondent 23

³²¹ Respondent 23; The Week, 2015

³²² ISW, 2014

³²³ Respondent 20

be felt throughout the caliphate – and everywhere in Syria – it seems certain front lines where battle is fought with the Syrian regime are hit hardest.³²⁴

Due to developments as referred to in paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2, the number of jobs fell in 2014 and poverty increased.³²⁵ In 2014, an average of about 20% of the population in Syria no longer had an income of their own or other assets. Specifically in the areas controlled by ISIS, this percentage appears to be slightly higher.³²⁶ Those who do have a job, earn an average of between 100 and 200 dollars a month.³²⁷ This money is supposed to maintain a family – which often has an average of five persons – and often other members of the family too.³²⁸ This increasing poverty is reflected in the rising number of residents who turn to soup kitchens.³²⁹ The long queues for the soup kitchens are a phenomena that has been characteristic for the scene in big cities such as Raqqa.³³⁰ This rising poverty is being exploited by ISIS. By offering perspective and benefits to those who actively support ISIS – and by disadvantaging others – the organisation tries to entice residents to join ISIS. Out of necessity, families send someone to join the group; the man or woman to work, a son to be trained or a daughter to marry a fighter. This offers families a way of getting an income, food and other resources such as electricity.³³¹

8.3 Income, compensations and expenses

Those who join Islamic State – either the local population or Syria travellers – can count on certain allowances. Nevertheless, the basic principle appears to be that they have to support themselves.³³² To that end they receive a monthly salary.

³²⁴ According to one of the respondents, the Syrian regime creates price increases by means of cordons on the front lines where it has a lot of control. The regime is alleged to capture checkpoints and stop any trade to the besieged area. The Syrian regime allows products to the area of conflict in a controlled manner, where, due to the shortages created, the products are sold at maximum prices. This way, financial resources are withdrawn from the besieged area. However, such practices could not be verified elsewhere.

³²⁵ Respondent 4; Respondent 7

³²⁶ Respondent 7

³²⁷ Respondent 7; Respondent 10

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Respondent 7; Groen, 2015

³³⁰ Respondent 7

³³¹ Respondent 7; Elsevier, 2015

³³² Respondent 25; FATF, 2015:22

Furthermore, Syria travellers often take their own money when they set out for Syria. Although perspectives with regard to income and allowances are more favourable for them – certainly so for Syria travellers – than for the local population that not effectively supports ISIS, they certainly do not live a life of luxury.³³³

Salary

ISIS is said to pay out higher wages than other rebel groups (see paragraph 10.3). Among the ranks of ISIS, foreigners are said to receive a higher financial reward than local fighters. As a basis they appear to receive twice the salary³³⁴ – something that is currently the subject of discussion (see also paragraph 7.4 about integration). Also, not all battalions of ISIS are equally close related to the organisation, so the salary can differ, depending on the battalion.³³⁵ The amount of salary seems to depend on, among other things, the position to be fulfilled³³⁶ and the location where a person is deployed.³³⁷ Regarding the former, those who are mainly responsible for supporting duties, such as cooking and administrative duties, receive a lower salary compared to fighters.³³⁸ With regards to the latter, recent financial constraints have caused ISIS to reduce salaries in Raqqa by 50 percent.³³⁹

Due to these independences, salaries can vary greatly. A local fighter allegedly earns between 200 and 300 dollars a month. This amount breaks down into a basic salary and some bonuses, geared to, for instance, the household situation (50 dollars when a man is married, 50 dollars for each female slave and 35 dollars per child).³⁴⁰ The findings with regard to the salary for foreigners at ISIS

³³³ Respondent 1; Respondent 17

³³⁴ Respondent 6

³³⁵ Respondent 25

³³⁶ Respondent 8

³³⁷ Groen, 2015

³³⁸ Respondent 8

³³⁹ Al-Tamimi, 2016

³⁴⁰ NOS, 2015

range from 75 to 1,500 dollars a month.³⁴¹ This amount is said to rise to 5,000 dollars a month for a job with the security service or emir of a battalion, for instance.³⁴² Such high amounts seem highly unlikely, however. On average, a salary appears to range between 300 and 800 dollars a month. Based on information about French Syria travellers, the salary of a traveller can also be geared to the size of his family, it seems. They were paid 100 dollars per month for each family member, for instance.³⁴³ Women who work for the *Al-Khansaa* brigade receive a monthly salary of about 200 dollars.³⁴⁴ It is highly likely that women in general will not earn more than men.

The salary of (Dutch) Syria travellers in many cases appear to be enough to support themselves in the caliphate.³⁴⁵ Still, people often appeal to the home front for financial help. In certain cases they do not seem to have enough financial means to support themselves.³⁴⁶ However, in many other cases this does not appear to be the case, and it seems they ask for money under false pretences in order to get more than they need.³⁴⁷

Food, drinks, clothing and other products

During the initial period (see paragraph 6.1), food and drinks are said to be taken care of for foreigners. It may also partially be provided when they are active in the field.³⁴⁸ In other situations, they are expected to support themselves. Some of the items are brought by Syria travellers, such as their own kit and – at the request of travellers already in Syria – warm blankets. Other items are bought after having arrived in Syria. It used to be relatively easy to get products from Turkey. As border posts have disappeared and you need permission to leave ISIS territory, this

³⁴¹ Respondent 1, Respondent 4; Respondent 6; Respondent 18; Respondent 25; Groen, 2015; The Hassan, 2015; Belli et al., 2014; NOS, 2015; Khatib, 2015

³⁴² Groen, 2015

³⁴³ Ministère de la Justice (République Française), 2015

³⁴⁴ TRAC, n.d.

³⁴⁵ Respondent 4; Respondent 18

³⁴⁶ Respondent 17

³⁴⁷ Respondent 22

³⁴⁸ Respondent 25

has become increasingly difficult as time passes.³⁴⁹ There are shops where products can be bought³⁵⁰ and restaurants where you can go out for a meal in ISIS territory³⁵¹ – although this has become more dangerous in the course of 2014 (see the introduction of part 2 about bombings). Restaurants in particular seem popular among ISIS fighters.³⁵² A special kind of market is the ‘booty market’. Seized goods are partially appropriated by the state, partially allocated to the fighters involved in the capture (see below, under ‘other allowances’) and partially sold by ISIS at such markets. “You can buy anything there: doors for your house, fridges, washing machines, cars, cows, furniture, ...” says a shopkeeper working close to one such market.³⁵³ This booty will cost less for ISIS fighters than for the local population, as can be seen in the table below, showing a number of products and corresponding prices.

Table 1: Approximate prices at ‘booty markets’³⁵⁴

Product	Price for local population	Price for ISIS fighters
Car	\$ 4,700	\$2,350
Motorbike	\$186	\$93
Table and chairs	\$34	\$17
LCD TV	\$143	\$72
Small power generator	\$257	\$129
Large power generator	\$714	\$357

Not all provisions are as readily available as the propaganda would like us to believe. Shops with Dutch products seem to be highly over-emphasised in such material compared to reality.³⁵⁵ Still, luxury products such as chocolate and crisps seem to be available. The range of products and the requirements they have to meet since the arrival of ISIS are highly regulated. Cosmetics have been banned from the

³⁴⁹ Respondent 21

³⁵⁰ Respondent 4; Respondent 19

³⁵¹ Respondent 4

³⁵² Respondent 5

³⁵³ World Economic Forum, 2015

³⁵⁴ Solomon & Jones, 2015

³⁵⁵ Respondent 17

shelves and related shops were closed.³⁵⁶ Cigarettes, drugs and alcohol are banned too – although there are indications that the smoking ban is not enforced as strictly everywhere and that the embargo on the sale of cigarettes has been reversed in certain areas in order to increase satisfaction and popularity.³⁵⁷

Housing

Houses whose original owners have fled or killed are appropriated by ISIS.³⁵⁸ Syrians who own a second home have to surrender one.³⁵⁹ These homes are made available to foreigners who join ISIS.³⁶⁰ They therefore live spread out across the cities³⁶¹, although there is a regular pattern where people of the same nationality are placed in the same district (see paragraph 7.4 about integration). Men and women are housed separately, unless it concerns a family; men who leave for Syria with their families – or get married there – can count on a house of their own.

Information about the extent to which Syria travellers have to pay rent is two-tiered. There are indications that accommodation is offered entirely free of charge³⁶², but we have also heard of scenarios where Dutch people were threatened with eviction if they did not pay the rent in time.³⁶³ As the conflict progressed, the picture that Syria travellers owe rent seems to come to the foreground more.³⁶⁴

Weapons

Weapons are made available by ISIS.³⁶⁵ In most cases, male Syria travellers will receive an old Kalashnikov or similar weapon. They are free to get more weapons themselves. They do have to pay for these though.³⁶⁶ Hiring weapons also appears to be an option. During a private interview, one young Dutchman says he got a

³⁵⁶ Respondent 19

³⁵⁷ Respondent 20; International Mezzofiore, 2014

³⁵⁸ Respondent 1; Respondent 18

³⁵⁹ Kouwenhoven, 2015

³⁶⁰ Respondent 1; Respondent 2; Respondent 17; Respondent 18; Respondent 19; Respondent 21; Respondent 25

³⁶¹ Respondent 16; Withnal, 2014

³⁶² Respondent 17; Respondent 18; Respondent 25

³⁶³ Respondent 24; Respondent 25

³⁶⁴ Respondent 25

³⁶⁵ Respondent 2; Respondent 17; Respondent 18

³⁶⁶ Respondent 2

weapon on loan on the market for a deposit of 700 Euros.³⁶⁷ As a standard, women are not armed, although ISIS does appear to give women the opportunity to get their own weapons.³⁶⁸ Apparently, they often carry a weapon in their bag.³⁶⁹ Women working for the *Al-Khansaa* brigade seem to be armed in principle.

Transport

In exceptional cases, Syria travellers can get a car.³⁷⁰ In general however, they have to pay for their own transport.³⁷¹ There are indications that it is possible to get a public transport allowance. One Dutch Syria traveller employed at a sharia court was able to make free use of public transport with a pass.³⁷² To what extent this applies to other (Dutch) Syria travellers or for others in the ranks of ISIS, is not clear.

Other allowances

Participants in a training camp for teenagers, which also included foreign Syria travellers, are alleged to have received smartphones and money.³⁷³ To what extent this is standard practice is not known. Furthermore, during periods of actual deployment, fighters can, in addition to their salary, also count on part of the goods seized after fights or after the capture of a town or city.³⁷⁴ Individual soldiers have to hand in the goods to their commanders, who will distribute these goods among the fighters after the end of the hostilities, and after deduction of a fifth share for the state. Non-military goods are sold at the aforementioned ‘booty markets’. Non-Muslim women who do not convert to Islam and who do not recognise the authority of the Islamic state by accepting the protection treaty, *dhimma*, (when it concerns Jews and Christians), can be turned into slaves and form part of the war

³⁶⁷ Respondent 19

³⁶⁸ Respondent 2; Respondent 24

³⁶⁹ Respondent 21

³⁷⁰ Respondent 19

³⁷¹ Respondent 23

³⁷² Respondent 22

³⁷³ Respondent 2

³⁷⁴ Belli et al., 2014

booty to be distributed. In addition to religious feelings, the prospect of the war booty may increase motivation for combat.

9. Infrastructure and facilities

Chapter 9 is the final chapter about daily life in the caliphate of ISIS. ISIS provides a range of services.³⁷⁵ The elements in the fields of administration, legislation, the administration of justice and enforcement have already been discussed in chapter 5. This chapter will focus on the availability of electricity and water (paragraph 9.1), the availability of the Internet and telecommunications (paragraph 9.2), transport within ISIS territory (paragraph 9.3) and the functioning of healthcare and education (paragraph 9.4).

9.1 Electricity and water

For a long time now in the Syria of al-Assad, electricity and water are not continuously available throughout the day. This is not much different in areas that have come into the hands of ISIS in the course of the conflict – often in a less favourable proportion.³⁷⁶ Among other things, the availability of electricity affects street lighting, lighting at home, the functioning of fridges, TVs, radios and hospital equipment. The availability of both strongly varies within the regions. The availability of water and electricity in areas of combat is particularly low.³⁷⁷ It appears that ISIS uses existing facilities and structures to provide services. Still, there is often a significant difference between the periods before and after ISIS' arrival.

Data of energy consumption in Iraqi territory under the control of ISIS shows that this consumption fell drastically after the arrival of ISIS – particularly in the three provinces where ISIS' influence is biggest.³⁷⁸ At the end of 2014 for instance, Mosul had no electricity for weeks, because the Iraqi government had taken the city off the electricity grid.³⁷⁹ The electricity supply in Syria is also restricted. In Raqqa for instance, periods of about two hours during which

³⁷⁵ For a map with facilities in ISIS territory in July 2014, see: Caris & Reynolds, 2014

³⁷⁶ Respondent 7

³⁷⁷ Respondent 19; Zwijnenburg & te Pas, 2015

³⁷⁸ For a graph, see: Shaver & Ensign, 2015

³⁷⁹ Belli et al., 2014

electricity is available alternate with periods of about six hours without electricity.³⁸⁰ At the same time, there are indications that there is no electricity for twenty hours each day.³⁸¹ Part of the inability to provide more electricity on a large scale lies in the fact that there is a lack of fuel.³⁸² Resulting shortages in electricity then resulted in higher prices of oil products and gas in the Iraqi province of Nineveh, for instance.³⁸³ So as to prevent such price increases and in order to be able to provide lighting, ISIS set up a service that monitors the use of electricity, lays electricity cables and organises workshops on how to repair such cables if they are faulty.³⁸⁴ The lack of fuel is in part compensated by letting generators run on unrefined crude oil directly from the well.³⁸⁵ Nevertheless, electricity in the caliphate is available on a limited basis only. As a result, large cities such as Raqqa and Mosul are covered in black (flags, clothing, etc.) not only during the day , but also at night.

As for electricity, as with many other subjects, we need to make a clear distinction between availability of electricity for ISIS and the availability of electricity for the local population. ISIS has its own generators which it uses to generate extra electricity and which ISIS alone benefits from. Still, in the latter case the electricity supply is not entirely stable either.³⁸⁶ This also means there are situations in which Dutch men and women have limited electricity, or have even spent consecutive periods without electricity.³⁸⁷

The situation is similar in respect of the availability of water – also because the water treatment process requires electricity. As such, hygienic water is often available in limited amounts. Since water has been available alternately in Syria for a long time now, a lot of homes are fitted with water storage tanks. This enables

³⁸⁰ Respondent 7

³⁸¹ Belli et al., 2014

³⁸² Shaver & Ensign, 2015

³⁸³ RFE/RL, 2014

³⁸⁴ Zelin, 2014

³⁸⁵ Belli et al., 2014

³⁸⁶ Respondent 24

³⁸⁷ Respondent 17

people to temporarily bridge periods during which no water is available.³⁸⁸ The lack of water is also in part compensated by active aid organisations. The Red Cross for instance supplies drinking water to ISIS territory, albeit not everywhere. According to director Yves Daccord, the Red Cross is able to provide about 85% of the Syrian population with safe drinking water. The residents of Raqqa are among the 15% that are not reached.³⁸⁹

9.2 The Internet and telecommunications

Access to the Internet appears to vary strongly. The connection is often weak and slow.³⁹⁰ When a signal gets stronger, everyone immediately makes use of it.³⁹¹ The use and availability of the Internet are, as with many other cases, increasingly regulated as the conflict progresses. Examples include orders for Internet cafés to ensure that wireless Internet connections are available only at those cafés, the order to disable Internet connections at times of prayer, and general bans on the use of the Internet until further notice.³⁹² In 2013, most Dutch Syria travellers seemed to have an Internet connection at home. However in the course of time, if people wanted to make use of the Internet – whether or not provided by Turkish providers such as in the northern territories of ISIS³⁹³ – they had to increasingly turn to Internet cafés.³⁹⁴ In general, you can “make ordinary phone calls” in the caliphate³⁹⁵, although in this case too, signal strength may vary. This often seems to be the case with Turkish SIM cards in the border areas with Turkey. This also applies to Dutch Syria travellers.³⁹⁶ They often have their own phones and other equipment, such as laptops or tablets.³⁹⁷ Certain peripheral equipment, such as GPS

³⁸⁸ Respondent 20

³⁸⁹ Straaten, 2015

³⁹⁰ Respondent 1; Respondent 4

³⁹¹ Respondent 1

³⁹² Respondent 22; Al-Tamimi, 2015b

³⁹³ Respondent 19

³⁹⁴ Respondent 22; Respondent 24

³⁹⁵ Respondent 4

³⁹⁶ Respondent 22

³⁹⁷ Respondent 24

and Apple systems have been banned since December 2014.³⁹⁸ A lot of Syria travellers are on social media such as Twitter, Telegram, Whatsapp and Facebook, which they use to make contact with their families or to post about their lives in Syria or about issues back in the Netherlands.

9.3 Transport

ISIS appears to make an effort to maintain roads. Examples include the repair of holes and bumps in the road network and sprucing up central reservations in order to make roads more attractive from an aesthetic point of view.³⁹⁹ This facilitates the transport of goods and persons within the caliphate.⁴⁰⁰ This way, ISIS provides a logistical service. Public transport makes it possible to travel within the borders of the area controlled by ISIS.⁴⁰¹

9.4 Healthcare and education

One of the consequences of the aforementioned brain drain and loss of specialist knowledge is a shortage of teachers and medical personnel. At the same time, medical facilities are scarce.⁴⁰² Other than providing water to parts of the population, the Red Cross is not able to reach ISIS territory for the supply of medicine.⁴⁰³ In practice, this has translated in several examples of people from ISIS territory – either ordinary civilians or those who effectively joined ISIS – leaving the caliphate to receive medical care. Examples include residents who (illegal or otherwise) leave ISIS territory to visit an eye surgeon in Kurdish territory, wounded fighters who are taken to Turkey for treatment and women who temporarily return to Western Europe to give birth.⁴⁰⁴ Although they can get medical care in ISIS territory, such examples imply that the quality and quantity of such care within the caliphate leave much to be desired. This includes Raqqa

³⁹⁸ Al-Tamimi, 2015b

³⁹⁹ Shaver, 2014

⁴⁰⁰ Respondent 4

⁴⁰¹ Respondent 11; Respondent 12; Respondent 23; Shaver, 2014

⁴⁰² Respondent 7; Sherlock & Malouf, 2014

⁴⁰³ Straaten, 2015

⁴⁰⁴ Respondent 2; Respondent 4; Respondent 23

hospital among others. It is shown in propaganda material about healthcare in the caliphate, but in reality it is operational to a minimum extent only, according to an aid worker with family members in the city.⁴⁰⁵ Many other hospitals have closed down. As those who effectively joined ISIS often seem to be given priority over ordinary citizens, the latter are hit extra hard by shortages.⁴⁰⁶ This can also be illustrated with indications that ISIS, in Mosul for instance, seizes medication to treat its own members.⁴⁰⁷ In addition to trying to attract medics from abroad, among other things, ISIS tries to professionalise healthcare by offering its own doctor training⁴⁰⁸ – to both men and women. The latter is required, as men and women are kept separate in healthcare.⁴⁰⁹ Apparently, “without female doctors, there would be no healthcare for women, and sick women would be unable to give birth or look after their families.”⁴¹⁰ A position as doctor is therefore among the few job opportunities for women in the caliphate (see paragraph 7.1).

To overcome the lack of professionals and people with specific skill in ISIS territory, ISIS does not only appeal to foreign⁴¹¹ (and domestic⁴¹²) expertise, but also offers education and training. The number of schools in the caliphate where classes are given has fallen dramatically during the past period though. Education in ISIS territory is structured on the basis of an ideological framework. In addition to rules such as girls having to wear a head scarf (*hijab*) from the age of five when they go to primary school (from about age 10 or 11) and that education has to be separated according to gender (which means education is one of the few places where women can find work: the education of female students requires female teachers⁴¹³), ISIS puts its stamp on the content of education too. The content of study programmes is banned, for instance, when it is seen as being in violation

⁴⁰⁵ Hubbard, 2015

⁴⁰⁶ Respondent 23

⁴⁰⁷ RFE/RL, 2014

⁴⁰⁸ Respondent 4

⁴⁰⁹ Respondent 11; Respondent 12

⁴¹⁰ Neurink, 2015:67

⁴¹¹ As illustrated by for instance Baghdadi's speech (see paragraph 6.2).

⁴¹² For instance, an experienced engineer who no longer received a salary from the Syrian government was enticed by ISIS to carry out the same work for ISIS for triple the money. See Hubbard, 2015

⁴¹³ Neurink, 2015:67

of the sharia. Examples include music, sports, philosophy and classes about subjects such as democracy. Education at ISIS primary schools mainly consists of Koran classes, Sunna classes and history classes about the caliphate of the Rashidun (7th century).⁴¹⁴ In addition, there are indications that maths classes are also given (which seemingly entails calculations with bombs⁴¹⁵) as well as English classes.⁴¹⁶ At the same time, terms such as ‘homeland’ and ‘Syria’ have been replaced with terms such as ‘the land of the Muslims’ and ‘Islamic State’.⁴¹⁷ According to Peter Neumann (ICSR), the aim of this educational system of ISIS is to indoctrinate children.⁴¹⁸ There is no such thing as a ‘normal school’ anymore.⁴¹⁹ For the sake of regulating this system, home schooling – which seemed possible in the early stages⁴²⁰ – is now banned.⁴²¹ Children are obliged to follow education at the Koran schools of ISIS.⁴²² Follow-up education has also been adjusted to the ideological framework. More specifically, this means that entire faculties have disappeared from universities – and with that the corresponding study programmes.⁴²³ An overview of the revised faculties in Iraq is given in table 2.

⁴¹⁴ Al-Tamimi, 2014c

⁴¹⁵ Respondent 26

⁴¹⁶ Respondent 24

⁴¹⁷ Al-Tamimi, 2014a

⁴¹⁸ Sullivan, 2015

⁴¹⁹ Respondent 7

⁴²⁰ Respondent 22

⁴²¹ Respondent 24

⁴²² Respondent 18

⁴²³ Al-Tamimi, 2015c; Al-Tamimi, 2014c

Table 2: Colleges and institutes in ISIS, Iraq⁴²⁴

No.	College/institute
1	Mosul Medical College (Medical Sciences University)
2	Ninawa Medical College (Medical Sciences University)
3	Dentistry College (Medical Sciences University)
4	Pharmacy College (Medical Sciences University)
5	Nursing College (Medical Sciences University)
6	Medical Technician Institute (Medical Sciences University)
7	Engineering College (Mosul University)
8	Sciences College (Mosul University)
9	Accounting and Mathematical College (Mosul University)
10	Veterinary College (Mosul University)
11	Agriculture and Forestry College (Mosul University)
12	Education College (Mosul University)
13	Economics and Management College (Mosul University)
14	Technical College (Mosul University)
15	Technical Institute (Mosul University)

⁴²⁴ Al-Tamimi, 2015b

10. Al-Nusra and affiliated organisations

About daily life in the areas that are under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra considerably less is known than life under ISIS. These regions therefore form a “grey area”. On the one hand, this is caused by the overwhelming attention for ISIS, which means attention for other organisations fades into the background. On the other, the al-Nusra front is more closed than ISIS, as a result of which it is more difficult to obtain information. Also, JaN regularly monitors the areas with the help of other organisations. The policy of JaN and daily life in the areas under the control of al-Nusra are therefore not always easy to map out.

This chapter discusses daily life in the areas under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra and affiliated organisations on the basis of the limited information that is available. This reflection will stick to the main structure as used in the explanation of daily life in ISIS territory.

10.1 From border crossing to deployment

Like ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra operates safe houses and training camps.⁴²⁵ Joining the ranks of Jabhat al-Nusra is not as simple as joining ISIS. Al-Nusra controls who can join to a greater extent.⁴²⁶ A growing suspicion of infiltration has led to a lot of value being attached to personal references and *tazkiyya*, which can be checked at the border.⁴²⁷ A new recruit has to be nominated by one or more fighters or commanders before being able to join al-Nusra.⁴²⁸ Furthermore, JaN has a larger number of local fighters among its ranks.

As al-Nusra and affiliated organisations in the regions under their control are dealing with the administration of these areas to a lesser extent than ISIS, joining such organisations seems in principle to result in the role as a fighter.⁴²⁹ According to the Quilliam Foundation, the first step to join the ranks of Jabhat al-

⁴²⁵ Respondent 18

⁴²⁶ Respondent 25

⁴²⁷ Respondent 1; Miller, 2014

⁴²⁸ Respondent 1; Benotman & Blake, n.d.

⁴²⁹ Respondent 5 (about correspondence with local people); Respondent 24

Nusra is to fight on the front line. This is how the courage, dedication and loyalty of potential recruits are tested.⁴³⁰

Still, in the case of Jabhat al-Nusra at least, there appear to be possibilities for other activities – albeit to a lesser extent compared to ISIS. A fighter in the region said that “JaN assumes its responsibilities towards the local population.” For instance, in a message in June 2015, al-Nusra announced it was looking for experts in the fields of electricity, water, mechanics, the environment, accountancy and media.⁴³¹ As there is a need for professionals in addition to fighters, al-Nusra documents the capacities of new recruits.⁴³² As with ISIS, these new recruits have to take an oath.⁴³³ The small number of women working at Jabhat al-Nusra appears to be responsible mainly for gathering information.⁴³⁴

10.2 Daily life from a social perspective

Other than ISIS, which imposes strict sentences for behaviour that violates the sharia, Jabhat al-Nusra tends to refrain from this (although we have heard stories about amputations and executions in the areas under the control of al-Nusra).⁴³⁵ In the areas under the control of al-Nusra and allied groups, the rules tend to be less strict, no *hudud* sentences are in principle imposed (punishment for behaviour in violation of the sharia) and people tend to have more freedoms than with ISIS. The situation of social isolation from the local population in ISIS territory, which expresses itself as empty streets (see paragraph 7.3), appears to occur a lot less often in these areas.⁴³⁶ This particularly applies for areas outside the front line, where daily life can to some extent be regarded as normal.⁴³⁷

Looking at the freedoms of women, the parallels with ISIS seem more transparent. Women with al-Nusra are said to be forced to wear a *hijab* and *abaya*,

⁴³⁰ Benotman & Blake, n.d.

⁴³¹ Al-Tamimi, 2015d

⁴³² Moses, 2013

⁴³³ Benotman & Blake, n.d.; Abouzeid, 2015

⁴³⁴ Abouzeid, 2015

⁴³⁵ Williams, 2015; Al-Tamimi, 2015f; Al-Tamimi, 2015g

⁴³⁶ Respondent 1; Respondent 20

⁴³⁷ Respondent 6

wearing make-up is banned and there are stories that women mostly have to stay indoors.⁴³⁸ In 2013, the Islamic council in Aleppo issued the following *fatwa*:

“Muslim women are not permitted to leave their homes without wearing a discrete dress, they are not permitted to wear tight clothing or to wear make-up on their faces. It is the duty of all our sisters to obey God and to observe the Islamic etiquette.”⁴³⁹

Still, women in rebel territory seem to have more freedoms than women at ISIS. A woman who had joined Jabhat al-Nusra said:

“I’ve worked for three years and I can work again now if I want to. (...) We’re not the same as the Qaeda of Pakistan or other places. Our society here is different. Look at Saudi Arabia, that’s not Al Qaeda, but their women have fewer rights than we have here. They can’t come and go as they please or drive a car. I can.”⁴⁴⁰

As with ISIS, al-Nusra also has the phenomenon of units with fighters of the same nationality or fighters that speak the same language.⁴⁴¹ With regard to integration, the situation seems to resemble that of Syria travellers at ISIS (see paragraph 7.4). A Belgian al-Nusra fighter told Belgian researcher Montasser AlDe’emeh the following during his visit to Syria: “We’ve got close ties with Dutch fighters. (...) It’s becoming like some sort of mini Europe here. We look each other up and communicate in Dutch.”⁴⁴²

⁴³⁸ Human Rights Watch, 2014

⁴³⁹ Solomon, 2013

⁴⁴⁰ Abouzeid, 2015

⁴⁴¹ Quilliam Foundation, n.d.

⁴⁴² AlDe’emeh & Stockmans, 2015:122

10.3 Getting by at rebel groups

Throughout Syria, residents are faced with rising prices and increasing poverty. This is no different for the people living in the regions controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra or other affiliated organisations. Among other things, al-Nusra supplies water and food to the people living in the areas it has conquered.⁴⁴³ The organisation also pays wages to the fighters.⁴⁴⁴ The extent of these wages varies between 100 and 300 dollars per month.⁴⁴⁵ In general, this is less than what Syria travellers earn at ISIS (see paragraph 8.3), but more than what the FSA pays fighters, for instance – which seems to vary between 35 and 95 dollars per month.⁴⁴⁶ A similar amount in salary is paid to fighters of the local Syrian ‘Northern Storm’ brigade (*Liwa `Asifat al-Shamal*)⁴⁴⁷ – which forms part of the Islamic Front. It is likely that fighters of Jabhat al-Nusra and affiliated organisations, like ISIS fighters, can also count on part of the battlefield booty. In areas such as Idlib and Azaz, where daily life is said to be relatively normal under the control of al-Nusra⁴⁴⁸ (as a result of which these areas attract relatively many displaced people), there appear to be more options to work and sell products compared to many other areas under rebel control – which often have a less favourable climate for activities compared to the aforementioned regions or even big cities in ISIS territory, such as Raqqa and Mosul.⁴⁴⁹

10.4 Infrastructure and facilities

In its controlled areas, al-Nusra Front provides for the administration of justice, education and basic facilities such as electricity and water, among other things.⁴⁵⁰ Education for children is, just as in ISIS territory, aimed at preparing young

⁴⁴³ Vice News, 2015

⁴⁴⁴ Masi, 2015a

⁴⁴⁵ Khatib, 2015; The Economist, 2014

⁴⁴⁶ Khatib, 2015; Lucente & Shimale, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2014

⁴⁴⁷ Respondent 6

⁴⁴⁸ Both areas fell under the (shared or otherwise) control of al-Nusra after 2014.

⁴⁴⁹ Respondent 6

⁴⁵⁰ Williams, 2015; Vice News, 2015

children for the jihad.⁴⁵¹ More specific information about infrastructure and facilities is scarce. We *can* paint a general picture of the rebel area. During the conflict, the electricity grid has increasingly become the target of attacks. As a result, the electricity grid in Syria is largely inactive. This particularly applies to rebel areas. In quite a lot of areas under rebel control, there is little to no electricity due to bombings, the inability of the rebels to maintain the grid and due to the Syrian government shutting off the rebel area from the electricity grid. As a result, families have to depend on diesel generators, causing demand for oil to rise and prices of food and other products to rise as well.⁴⁵² Shortages in electricity have also affected the functioning of water distribution and treatment plants. There also seems to be a shortage in medical supplies in all rebel areas.⁴⁵³ Some form of public transport seems to be in place in rebel areas – set up either by the controlling party or at the initiative of locals. Such services transport people within the boundaries of the territory of the controlling organisation.⁴⁵⁴

When making a comparison with ISIS, it emerges that Jabhat al-Nusra provides similar services to ISIS and the above and previous paragraphs imply that people living in areas of al-Nusra and affiliated rebel groups are faced with similar problems as people living in ISIS territory. Similarities with life in ISIS territory can also be seen in the ability of courts to issue local decrees, as already discussed in paragraph 5.7.

⁴⁵¹ Respondent 15; Vice News, 2015

⁴⁵² Lund, 2014

⁴⁵³ Respondent 7

⁴⁵⁴ Respondent 23

11. Conclusion

This study paints a general picture of the life of the average Syria traveller in certain parts of Syria. The exploratory nature of this study at the same time means that it is impossible to claim general validity. We can therefore not rule out exceptions to what is discussed in this study. It would require more time, more interviews and, ideally, local fieldwork. Nevertheless, the authors share the opinion that this report is the first publication to offer a thorough picture of various aspects of life of Dutch men and women in Syria. In this final chapter, the research questions will be answered on the basis of the insights described in this report. First, we will discuss a number of general issues about the conflict. We will then focus on the main practical aspects of daily life in Syria. In conclusion, we will talk about the probability of a number of assumptions about the situation of Dutch Syria travellers.

11.1 Insights into the conflict

Since 2012, a considerable amount of people from the west, including an estimated 260 Dutch men and women, travelled to the conflict area in Syria (and Iraq) – a figure that continues to rise. These people often join salafi jihadist groups or affiliated organisations (such as rebel groups under the Islamic Front). Such groups fight not only *against* the regime of al-Assad, but also for the formation of an Islamic state (in the long term or otherwise). Non-salafi jihadist groups such as the Free Syrian Army on the other hand, do not have any Dutch men or women among their ranks, as far as we know.

One look at existing literature tells us that the motives to join a movement such as ISIS or JaN vary wildly. For some, the wish to escape the Netherlands (for whatever reason) is an important reason to leave. Others are looking for adventure and excitement or feel attracted by a context of violence. The need to fight all kinds of injustice also is an important motivation to travel to Syria. Many feel they could be a *mujahid* and think they can fulfil their duty to take part in the combat (*jihad*)

that way. The social network also often plays a central role when travelling to Syria, as well as the organisation where they ultimately end up with. People may hear stories through friends or acquaintances about a certain organisation, sparking their interest. Also, organisations have become increasingly more careful about allowing foreigners to join their ranks. During our study, ISIS and JaN have been described as “the world’s most infiltrated organisations”. Having someone you know at these organisations is said to make it easier for people to join. At Jabhat al-Nusra, personal references and recommendations now even appear to be necessary in order to be able to join.

A more recent motive seems to be the desire to obey the religious appeal from al-Baghdadi to Muslims around the world to come to the caliphate and to contribute to the establishment and protection thereof (*hijra*). In his appeal, he indicated that the caliphate had a specific need for judges, doctors, engineers and people with administrative or military experience. Since the caliphate was established in 2014, the majority of Syria travellers settled down in the areas that are under the control of ISIS. Dutch Syria travellers are no exception. Some of the Syria travellers who at that time had joined JaN or one of its affiliated organisations defected to ISIS during this period.

In most cases it appears to concern a combination of various social, practical and ideological motives to go to Syria. The media reports by organisations such as ISIS, JaN and Islamic Front also pay attention to various practical, social and ideological matters. They themselves highlight various aspects of daily life in Syria – including the role of violence on and behind the front line.

11.2 Daily life in Syria

Some of the questions asked which were the focus of this study, are about the daily lives of people in the area of conflict. What is daily life like for these people? How do they support themselves on a day-to-day basis? What is life like in Syria for the average fighter? What do they get up to? The answers to those questions will be discussed below.

The daily administration, the financial situation and the prevailing rules have changed considerably in many Syrian areas as the civil war progressed. As it emerged, Syria travellers from Western Europe mainly join ISIS and, to a slightly lesser extent, Jabhat al-Nusra. The organisational structures of these organisations are of interest with regard to our questions, as the daily experiences of people are strongly related to them and can be understood better against that background. During this study, we paid attention to the main bodies of ISIS and the head of the state, appointed in June 2014 and announced Caliph by the Consultative Council. We also focused on other aspects of the administration, the law (the sharia and its application) and the enforcement of public order and safety. In all cases, we see that over the years, the areas under the control of ISIS have undergone major changes that also determine the position of foreigners (more about this later). In addition, in order to better understand the position of most Dutch Syria travellers, we have looked at the organisation and composition of ISIS' army. There are now enough primary and secondary written sources as well as interviewees that have enabled us to paint a fairly clear picture of the organisational structure of ISIS.

This is not so much the case for the administration in areas under the control of JaN and its affiliated parties. Given ISIS' rapid advance and the notion that most Syria travellers from Western Europe joined this group, for many, ISIS holds a spotlight position. Furthermore, JaN, primarily a military organisation, was in 2014 only to a limited extent willing to open up about, for instance, its organisational structure. Given the above, we found fewer interviewees that could answer questions specifically about JaN and affiliated parties. Another factor that complicates matters is that JaN shared power with other groups in most areas. Although JaN, unlike ISIS, does not want to establish an Islamic state right away, it does try to offer the government provisions that are required due to the disappearance of the central state. Reliable sources show that in JaN areas too, law and order are enforced through application of the sharia. Among other things, various sharia courts have been set up. In addition to application of criminal law,

these courts also issue local decrees, which are similar to the prevailing rules in areas that are controlled by ISIS (such as those about separating boys and girls at schools and the closure of shops). JaN also distributes food and bread where necessary and it supplies drinking water and electricity in various areas.

An important distinction must be made between the life of the local population and the lives of people who fulfil a job within these movements. Although JaN in particular maintains reasonable ties with parts of the local population, these civilians tend to live marginal lives.

Due to the persistent civil war, poverty in Syria was again on the increase in 2014. Many people lost their jobs or income and they were faced with price increases. The income of a Syrian family in ISIS territory – an average of 100 to 200 dollars (which is supposed to support at least five persons) – is not enough and many people are therefore forced to go to soup kitchens to get food. ISIS provides those it employs with wages, food (at a reduced rate or otherwise), medication and things such as electricity. This prompts families to let one or more family members join the ranks of ISIS. However, joining ISIS is something a lot of residents want to avoid. The violent and arbitrary way in which ISIS imposes punishment has caused fear for this organisation among many people. They try to avoid any confrontations with ISIS, as a result of which the lives of the local population have for a large part shifted to indoors. They venture outside only for necessary activities, such as buying or collecting food. Outdoor recreation seems to be a thing of the past now. Due to this social isolation, the streets of cities under strong control of ISIS, such as Raqqa, are relatively empty.

In areas where fighting still goes on (such as in cities on the front line), the economic pressure seems to be even more tangible. Traders often stay away and due to sieges and the resulting shortages, prices can rise even further. Electricity and water are usually also available to a lesser extent in these areas. However, the difference between areas on the front line and those behind it is generally a lot more vague since the coalition started its bombings.

The lives of foreigners

This study explicitly focuses on the situation of Dutch people in Syria. Europeans travel to Syria via different routes. In 2014, the majority ended up at ISIS or JaN (or an organisation directly affiliated to them). Upon arrival, men and women are separated, they are registered and the men are interviewed about their backgrounds and motives for coming to Syria. The men are then taken to training camps, where they receive military and theological training. Syria travellers also take an oath of loyalty or obedience (*bay'a*). With such an oath, a Syria traveller declares that he will carry out all tasks assigned to him. After having completed this training, foreigners can end up in various positions. Most of them will be deployed as fighters, but there are examples of people fulfilling other roles. This may be a job as a doctor, an engineer, a hacker or with one of the media channels of the organisations. ISIS and JaN urgently need people with such specific expertise, due to the brain drain that has hit many areas because of the continuing violence. The position someone will ultimately fulfil partially depends on his or her individual preferences, but also on his or her abilities (for instance, certain training or practical experience gained in the country of origin). Furthermore, a command of Arabic (the official language of ISIS) also seems to be an important condition for many jobs – such as the police or administration – within this framework. Those with a role other than fighter remain reservists for that matter – by virtue of the oath they took earlier – and can still be called to fulfil certain military or police positions. At ISIS, all men are in principle armed.

Foreigners receive a salary for the work they carry out. At ISIS, a Syria traveller is paid an average 300 to 800 dollar per month. At Jabhat al-Nusra the salary appears to be a bit lower in general. The salary depends on a number of factors, such as the position, location of deployment and the size of the fighter's family. In principle, Syria travellers are responsible for supporting themselves. The salary they are paid appears to be sufficient for this, also because of economic and medical privileges.

The Dutch are often put in houses whose original owners have fled, were evicted or have died. It is striking that the Dutch and Flemish often live near each other and form close-knit groups. The main explanation for this is the language they have in common. This makes it relatively easy for Dutch Syria travellers to integrate in their immediate housing environment. Since ISIS and Syria travellers are regarded as occupiers by some of the local people, communication and integration outside this immediate housing environment is more difficult. Foreign women in these regions generally look after the family. They care for their husbands and are responsible for bringing up the children. In some cases they also fulfil roles – through social media – in encouraging other women in their countries of origin to come to Syria too. A select number of foreign women also fulfil a number of other jobs. Some women are teachers, nurses, chefs or have joined the *Al-Khansaa* brigade, which ensures women dress and behave demurely.

The salary can be used to buy groceries and even luxurious items such as chocolate or crisps. Many foreigners have also brought their own money or they receive money from family, friends and acquaintances back in the Netherlands (with whom they are in regular contact via the Internet or telephone). ISIS fighters are furthermore entitled to some of the war booty. This is also the case at Jabhat al-Nusra.

The life of a fighter

According to our sources, the majority of foreign men travel to Syria to become fighters and contribute to the armed jihad. As indicated, life as a *mujahid* (fighter who takes part in the jihad) is an attractive prospect for many and therefore a big reason to travel to Syria. Foreign fighters with organisations such as ISIS, JaN or affiliated organisations have various duties. We can paint a general picture about this. After their interview and training, ISIS provided all foreigners with weapons – in many cases they were old Kalashnikovs or similar weapons. Fighters are free to get more weapons themselves, at their own expense. Fighters are placed in battalions (*katiba*). These battalions are composed on the basis of cultural similarities and language. That is why Dutch and Flemish fighters are often in the

same battalion, enabling them to speak Dutch with each other. Foreign fighters can be deployed in various ways. They may be instructed to guard border areas or checkpoints (*ribaata*) or to join the battle on the front lines after some time. Others guard prisons or are, directly or indirectly, involved in torture or executions. To what extent foreign fighters are involved in such activities is hard to assess. It depends on the location and time and also on the commands issued by the superior (*emir*).

It has been established that fighters alternate periods at the front with times behind the front lines. A period at the front can last as little as one day or as much as a number of weeks. Once back from the battlefield, they enjoy their time with their families, but they often also carry out other duties (such as administrative work, *da`wa* or patrolling the cities).

Foreign fighters enjoy a special position, at least, in the ranks of ISIS. An ISIS fighter has privileges compared to local civilians. In addition, a foreign ISIS fighter also has privileges compared to a local ISIS fighter. They include a higher salary and the allocation of accommodation. This has resulted in indications of trouble and internal conflicts. ISIS has indicated that it may start treating all fighters equally in future. Such a uniform line has not been realised yet.

We have seen that most Dutch men who have left for Syria come to fulfil a role as fighter in the conflict. Yet, there are other roles in which individuals are (initially) not directly involved in the armed conflict on the front lines, but contribute to the organisation in a more indirect way. The type and extent of violence involved then depends on the specific role in question and the erratic course of the civil war in Syria.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁵ In this publication, the paragraph about the formal research assignment is not included.

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Appendix A: List of interviews

Table 3: List of respondents

No.	Explanation
1	Researcher
2	Journalist
3	Propaganda researcher
4	Researcher
5	Researcher
6	Researcher
7	Aid organisation focused on Syria
8	Co-founder local activist group in Syria
9	Activist/former teacher in Syria
10	School manager in Syria
11	Inhabitant ISIS territory
12	Inhabitant ISIS territory
13	ISIS fighter
14	ISIS fighter
15	Employee Syrian human rights organisation
16	Employee international aid organisation
17	Former employee organisation for social support
18	Employee Ministry of Security and Justice
19	Head of press agency focusing on Syria, with local journalists
20	Syrian refugee
21	Head organisation for social support
22	Researcher
23	Dutch Syrian, visited Syria recently
24	Family member of Dutch Syria travellers
25	Researcher
26	Journalist

Appendix B: List of topics

1. Introduction		
▪ An explanation about the study and why this interview is held; ▪ An explanation about how the information from the interview will be used (particularly anonymity/source reference); ▪ An explanation about the process of the interview.		
2. Daily life in general		
<u>Overarching questions</u>	<u>Topics/sub-questions</u>	<u>Clarifying questions</u>
What are the daily lives like of people living in the conflict area? What are the daily lives like of people living in areas, conquered by rebels, where fighting no longer takes place? How do they support themselves on a day-to-day basis?	▪ Work (Yes/no? What kind of job? Enough income to support themselves on a day-to-day basis? If no job: where do they get an income from and how do they support themselves? ...) ▪ Shopping/shops (Baker? Butcher? Department stores? Fashion store? Accessible? Affordable? Enough food and clothing for themselves/family? ...) ▪ Housing (Where? What kind of housing? Gas? Water? Electricity? ...) ▪ Transport (Own transport? Public transport? Affordable? ...) ▪ Safety (Safe to go into the street? ...) ▪ Integration (Language barriers? Funny looks? Treated differently? ...) ▪ Medical assistance (Hospital? Family doctor? Availability medication? ...) ▪ Education (Primary/secondary/university? Childcare? ...) ▪ Recreation (Things to do? What is allowed and what not? ...) ▪ ICT infrastructure (Internet? Telephone? Computer? Radio? Reliability? ...) ▪ Family (Differences when someone arrives on his own or with his entire family? ...) ▪ Is there a difference in availability of facilities for members of a combating group and 'ordinary' residents? Development: ▪ How did this develop in 2014/did any changes occur in that respect? Region: ▪ Answer the questions above for A) life on the front line and B) life in conquered rebel area.	<i>Can you give an explanation?</i> <i>Could you give a couple of examples of that?</i>

3. Daily lives of Syria travellers		
Overarching questions	Topics/sub-questions	Clarifying questions
<i>What are the daily lives like of fighters of a rebel group and of members of a combat group which do not form part of the armed conflict themselves?</i> <i>How do they support themselves on a day-to-day basis?</i>	▪ Group (ISIS? JaN? FSA? Other group? Switched from one to the other? ...) ▪ Armament/training (Armed? With what? Trained? For what? ...) ▪ Duties (Duties in the group? Fighting? Border post? Cooking? ...) ▪ Reward (Money? Resources? How much? Enough to support yourself? ...) ▪ Shopping/shops (Baker? Butcher? Department stores? Fashion store? Accessible? Affordable? Enough food and clothing for themselves/family? ...) ▪ Housing (Where? What kind of housing? Gas? Water? Electricity? ...) ▪ Transport (Own transport? Public transport? Affordable? ...) ▪ Safety (Safe to go into the street? ...) ▪ Integration (Language barriers? Funny looks? Treated differently? ...) ▪ Medical assistance (Hospital? Family doctor? Availability medication? ...) ▪ Education (Primary/secondary/university? Childcare? ...) ▪ Recreation (Things to do? What is allowed and what not? ...) ▪ ICT infrastructure (Internet? Telephone? Computer? Radio? Reliability? ...) ▪ Family (Differences when someone arrives on his own or with his entire family? ...) ▪ Is there a difference in availability of facilities for members of a combating group and 'ordinary' residents? Development: ▪ How did this develop in 2014/did any changes occur in that respect? Region: ▪ Answer the questions above for A) life on the front line and B) life in conquered rebel area.	<i>Can you give an explanation?</i> <i>Could you give a couple of examples of that?</i>
4. Any additions (on the initiative of the respondent)		
Any themes, not yet discussed, of interest within the framework of daily life in Syria?		

5. Assessing the likeliness of certain scenarios (based on what has been discussed)	
<u>Question (research questions)</u>	<u>Clarifying questions</u>
▪ How likely do you think it is for someone who travelled to Syria or Iraq in 2014 or who intended to do so, did so or intended to do so for reasons other than to fight? ▪ How likely do you think it is for someone who travelled to Syria or Iraq in 2014 and ended up with a combat group, not to be personally involved in the armed conflict. ▪ How likely do you think it is for someone who travelled to Syria or Iraq in 2014 to end up with a group other than ISIS?	<i>Can you give an explanation?</i> <i>Could you give a couple of examples of that?</i>
6. Rounding off the interview	
▪ Final additions made by respondent; ▪ Thanking the respondent.	

About the Authors

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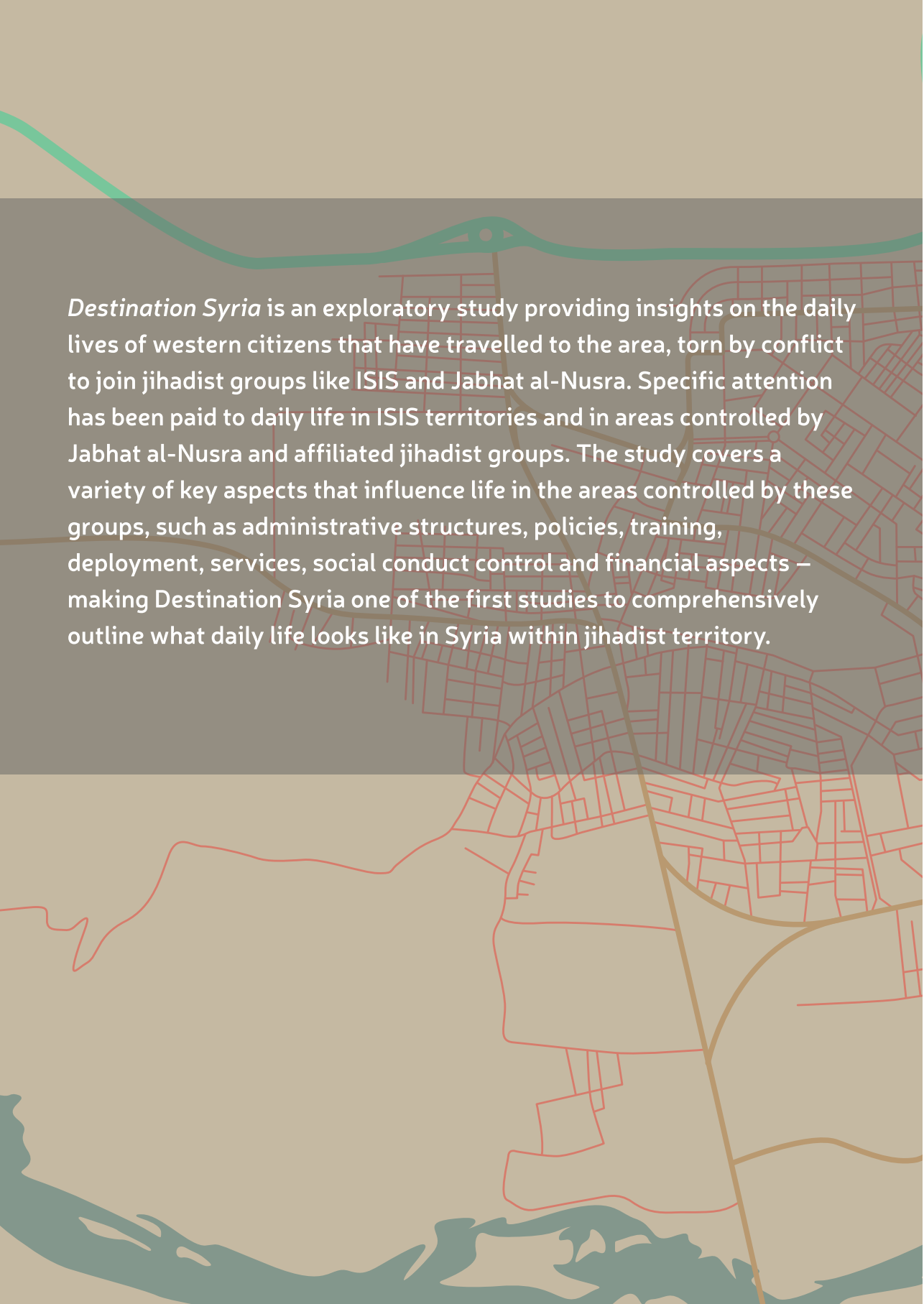
Ruud Peters is Professor emeritus of the University of Amsterdam, where he taught Islamic studies. He published books and articles on Islamic law and on the doctrine and practice of jihad and is often invited as an expert witness by courts in trials of Islamist extremists.

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About the Institute

The Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) is a scientific institute that specialises in security issues. The institute analyses and studies these issues in a coherent way from their local transnational and global impact. ISGA operates from The Hague, the third major city of the Netherlands, center of national governance and International City of Peace, Justice and Security

A stylized map of Syria is shown in the background. It features a grid of red lines representing urban areas and a network of brown lines representing roads. The map is set against a light beige background, with a dark grey horizontal band across the middle. A green line runs along the top edge, and a dark green, wavy line runs along the bottom edge.

Destination Syria is an exploratory study providing insights on the daily lives of western citizens that have travelled to the area, torn by conflict to join jihadist groups like ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Specific attention has been paid to daily life in ISIS territories and in areas controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra and affiliated jihadist groups. The study covers a variety of key aspects that influence life in the areas controlled by these groups, such as administrative structures, policies, training, deployment, services, social conduct control and financial aspects – making *Destination Syria* one of the first studies to comprehensively outline what daily life looks like in Syria within jihadist territory.