

The personnel files of Fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)
What They Reveal

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These files consist of the in-processing forms of 4,018 fighters of ISIL. The earliest entry on these forms was in 2011 with an increase in entries recorded from July 2013 but by September 2014 the volume of entries significantly decreases with the last entry being in December 2014. The ISIL was declared in April 2013 and the Khilafah in June 2014 which means that these files are predominantly those of fighters who were recruited into ISIL and not Islamic State (IS).

The content and structure of the in-processing form of ISIL reveals the strategic worldview of ISIL and the place of fighters who undertook hijrah in it. Item 1 on the form calls for the fighter's name with Item 2 calling for the fighters Kunya which is to have stated by those who live in the West their non-Islamic name and the Islamic name they adopted if it applies or any other name/s they are known by and answer to. Item 5 calls for the country where the fighter is a citizen of whilst Item 7 calls for the address and place of residence of the fighter. This will unearth fighters who are in fact migrants or those living in a country where they are not citizens of as in the case of Europe. Item 8 calls for the education level of the fighter whilst Item 9 calls for the level of Sharia experience defined as advanced, student, intermediate and basic and Item 10 wants their occupation before their entry to ISIL. These three items are crucial to determining the quality of fighters that are arriving to enter ISIL as suitable talent must be found to be placed throughout the military structure. The level of expertise of the fighters with Sharia law is very important as it impacts their ability to implement the order of the military structure and most of all the social order created by ISIL over spaces where they exercise hegemony. An experienced fighter with a basic knowledge of the Sharia is then problematic as a commander and most of all as the military ruler of a province of ISIL. A compromise has then to be attained between prowess on the battlefield and the ability to maintain order in keeping with the Sharia both within the military command and in the social order. Item 17 of the form illustrates the worldview of ISIL when it calls for the entrant to indicate if they are specialised in one of the following areas: fighter, sharia, security and administrative. To have multi-skilled entrants is the ideal especially an entrant who specialises in the sharia with battlefield experience. Clearly ISIL is seeking to establish a social order where power is wielded by an elite with a tension between the warriors and the Islamic scholars warranting the rise to power of the warrior/scholar who is the maximum leader.

The items on the form dealing specifically with uncovering the fighting skills and experience of entrants and the strategic vision of ISIL are of special relevance. Item 15 calls for experience if any in jihad of the entrant and the location/s of the jihad. Item 16 lists the three types of fighters ISIL is seeking and entrants must choose one which are: fighter, istishaddi and inghimasi. The generic term fighter is divided into three categories as follows: fighters who are suicide bombers/ Shahids (istishaddi), fighters who are part of a unit of suicide fighters (inghimasi) and fighters who are not Shahids. The istishaddi and the inghimasi are then separate and apart a blessed category of fighters. The inghimasi units on the battlefield attack the enemy in waves of suicide bombers or units that refuse to retreat and surrender when engaged in battle they simply fight without regard for their personal safety and survival. In battles of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) Shia militia units of Iran attacked the army of Saddam Hussein with broomsticks in their hands. Those with experience of jihad will be the fighters most sought after to be battlefield leaders as seen in the Chechen commanders of IS.

The items that seek out information on the entrant that enables security checks by ISIL is noteworthy and indicate the security concerns of ISIL with those seeking to penetrate their organisation and territory who pose a threat to its security. Item 11 calls for a listing of the countries visited and the length of time spent in each which is searching for a trail to follow to verify the identity of the entrant

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and to unearth individuals with international travel and residential experience. Item 12 calls for the entrant to state the point of entry into the territory of ISIL and the identity of the facilitator of this entry. An item that goes to the need to verify the identity of the entrant. Item 13 asks if the entrant has a

recommendation to ISIL and the identity of the recommender. Items 12 and 13 indicate that ISIL has a listing of its recognised facilitators and recommenders those entrants reporting that they crossed at points into ISIL not used by ISIL's recognised facilitators and those entrants bearing no recommendation or a recommendation from a recommender not recognised by ISIL sets off the alarm bells. These items point to the existence of organisation in the source nations whose task is to recruit, facilitate the hijrah and verify the identity of those seeking entrance to ISIL. These agents of ISIL are all part of the Muslim population of the sending nations and were involved in the movement to militarily engage with the West before the declaration of the creation of ISIL. Embracing ISIL was then a stage in the progression of the strategy of engaging the West militarily from within the West by those living in the West. Item 20 is the first opportunity on the form for officials of ISIL to write their assessment of the entrant by stating the level of understanding and obedience of the entrant. The entrant is assessed on the level of knowledge and understanding of the discourse and order of ISIL, whether the entrant has embraced and acts upon the discourse of ISIL which is seen in the obedience of the entrant to ISIL. Obedience is the result of knowledge, understanding, the embrace and acting upon the discourse of ISIL. ISIL demands nothing less than subservience. Item 23 also enables the ISIL official to write further observations on the entrant.

In Dodwell, Milton and Rassler (2016) analysis of the contents of the forms reveals that the in-processing files for 4,173 entrants comprised the cache of ISIL files with 935 entrants failing to disclose their country of origin which means the statistics for the countries of origin of entrants are not reflective of the reality of the data. Then there is a difference in the ranking of source countries between entrants classified according to country of origin and residence. The top 10 source countries according to citizenship/country of origin is as follows: 1. Saudi Arabia 579 entrants, 2. Tunisia 559, 3. Morocco 260, 4. Turkey 212, 5. Egypt 151, 6. Russia 141, 7. China 138, 8. Syria 120, 9. Azerbaijan 107, 10. Libya 87. The top 10 source countries by residence is as follows: 1. Saudi Arabia 797, 2. Tunisia 640, 3. Morocco 260, 4. Turkey 244, 5. Russia 210, 6. Egypt 194, 7. Unknown 173, 8. China 168, 9. France 128, 10. Syria 126. Both tables reveal the presence of nations in the top 10 of source nations which are now targets of IS such as France, Turkey, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Egypt which raises the possibility of the resource of entrants from these countries in the ranks of ISIL and IS facilitating the military engagement with specific states both in the West and the Middle East as a result. A position supported by the attacks on France and Belgium. The next reality of the files is entrants using nations as transition points to hijrah to IS which are not their country of origin raising the issue of migration into source nations and the threats posed to the internal security of these states. What is clearly apparent from the files is the contribution of migrants undertaking hijrah to the IS to the total number of entrants from source countries especially in the case of Saudi Arabia. The volume of entrants from Saudi Arabia indicates the dividend yielded by the house of Saud's embrace and support of Salafi Jihadi discourse and the need for the strategy to remove from power the house of Saud articulated by Al Qaeda and now IS to seize control of this Salafi Jihadi state. The other reality of note is the volume of entrants from Tunisia a supposedly "moderate Muslim state" which illustrates the peril of flawed racist Western discourse in its attempt to manufacture a Muslim reality that fits in with their Enlightenment worldview with disastrous consequences. Another reality that must be noted for the future is the number of entrants from the Muslim minorities of Russia and China. The files contain two entrants from Trinidad and Tobago with the possible number of entrants from Trinidad and Tobago amongst those who failed to declare their country of origin not being stated in the analysis as with other source countries. There are no other entrants from the Caribbean island chain and none from Guyana amongst those who

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declared their country of origin/residence in the files.

Analysis of the files reveal the dominant border crossing points into Sham/Syria to enter ISIL and five out of the six most active crossing points are located on the Syrian border with Turkey which

means that ISIL/IS has an extensive network in Turkey with the majority of ISIL facilitators located there. This extensive network in Turkey is today enabling IS attacks on the Turkish state and its citizens. The top crossing point in Syria is Tal Abyad located in Ar Raqqa province which borders Turkey the IS centre of operations is placed in Ar Raqqa province. The second crossing is Jarabulus in Halab province, the third is Atimah in Idlib province, the fourth is Azaz in Halab province and the sixth is Ar Rai in Halab province all bordering Turkey. Without the complicity of the Turkish state ISIL/IS would have been placed under grave pressure to move entrants into Syria this is but another instance of the “Game” that is fed to the powerless as reality.

In the analysis the name of the top ISIL facilitator for entrants to make the border crossing is given as Abu-Muhammad al-Shimali but one expects that this is an operational name mutually agreed upon between both parties. The most important information contained in the files is not revealed in the analysis especially for the intelligence agencies of source countries this is the name of recommenders entered on the in-processing forms by entrants as these names are the key to unlock the operational resources of ISIL/IS in the source countries. It is the key necessary to the task of identifying and penetrating the sleeper cells of IS in the source countries as this task is especially attainable in source countries with comparatively small Muslim populations but this hinges on the vision, the talent and the resources of the intelligence agencies and herein lies the problem that contributes longevity to the IS project.

Reference

Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, Don Ressler (April 2016): “The Caliphate's Global Workforce”
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