

## “I Just Said It. The State”: Examining the Motivations for Danish Foreign Fighting in Syria

by Jakob Sheikh

### Abstract

*While several studies of radicalization processes and recruitment to jihadi organizations have been undertaken in European countries, very few are based on interviews with foreign fighters that have been fighting in Syria and/or Iraq. Hence, actual knowledge about the foreign fighters' inner narratives and motivations remain scarce. This article aims to shed light on how foreign fighters from jihadi organizations in Syria and/or Iraq understand their own actions and behaviour, and what we might overlook when designing counter radicalization measures. Drawing upon 16 in-depth interviews with returned and current foreign fighters from Denmark, the study suggests that while many previous studies emphasize the role of structural socio-economic factors in pushing foreign fighters to travel, several pull factors—some rather counter-intuitive—are also at play. Thus, the very idea of an Islamic State seems to have a significant pull effect on Danish jihadi-travellers, being a driving force in the radicalization process, in the recruitment to jihadist organizations, and on the battlefield.*

**Keywords:** Denmark; foreign fighters; motivation; counter-measures

### Introduction

**W**hat drives Danish Muslims to leave their country behind and travel to conflicts in the Middle East, potentially ending up as international militant jihadis?

The outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011 proved to be a new arena for foreign fighters, sparking an intense focus in European media on radicalization and jihadism. While structural and socio-economic factors have been discussed in numerous media and academic articles,[1] we still know too little about the motivations of foreign fighters, much less what really “triggers” those involved. As primary data is often very hard to obtain, most studies that seek to address this question draw on open source material such as court documents, media articles, online autobiographies, or official government statistics.[2]

This article examines the motivations as seen through the lens of the foreign fighters themselves. Based on interviews with militant Islamists who left Denmark to take up arms in Syria and Iraq, it argues that some of the motives are quite counter-intuitive and may differ from common assumptions regarding push- and pull-factors in relation to foreign fighter participation.

In recent years, Denmark, along with the rest of Europe, has experienced an increasing threat from terrorism. Assessments made by Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) and the Agency's Centre for Terror Analysis (CTA) suggest that Denmark “continues to face a serious threat of terrorism from networks, groups and individuals who adhere to a militant Islamist ideology.”[3]

Throughout the last decade, Denmark has been the scene of several notable terror plots such as the Glostrup Case (2007), the Glasvej Case (2008), the Jyllands-Posten Case (2012), and the Copenhagen Shootings (2015). Although the reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet in February 2008 made Denmark and Danish interests a high-priority target among militant Islamists, the terrorist threat against Denmark is now primarily linked to the efflux and influx of militant Islamist foreign fighters. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, individuals travelling to Syria and Northern Iraq have therefore been of key concern in Denmark. Even though Danish citizens/residents have previously fought as foreign fighters in various conflicts—most notably in the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s and the Finish uprising against the Soviet

invasion in the Winter War from 1939–1940—the recent flow of foreign fighters from Denmark to Syria and Iraq is unprecedented.

By April 2016, at least 135 individuals—primarily young Sunni-Muslim men—had travelled from Denmark to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, according to the PET. Around half of the individuals had returned to Denmark, while around 35 had been killed.[4]

Though the agency assesses that an attack in Denmark is most likely to be carried out by “small groups or individuals who have not been abroad”, groups that attract foreign fighters—such as the Islamic State group (IS)—remain a major concern. CTA writes in its latest assessment that:[5]

*“There are individuals with intent and capacity to commit terrorist attacks in Denmark [...] The terror threat is primarily posed by militant Islamism. The key factors affecting the threat picture are the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the group that refers to itself as the Islamic State (IS). IS propaganda has an influential effect on persons in Denmark to commit terrorism or to travel to Syria/Iraq to join IS. Moreover, IS can direct attacks against Denmark...”*

Thus, radicalization and counter extremist ideological programmes remain core components in policy-making on state, regional, and local levels in Denmark. The country is among those in Europe with the most extensive counter-radicalization initiatives, many of them specifically aiming at reducing the potential threat, both foreign and domestic, posed by the militant Islamist milieu in Denmark.

However, even though the focus on these issues is without doubt intense, knowledge on why individuals are radicalized, motivated and recruited to jihadist organizations remains scarce and inadequate at best.[6] Interviews with radicalized individuals or foreign fighters are rare as the environment surrounding them is generally hostile towards authorities and media outlets alike.

This paper draws on 16 interviews with individuals that have fought or are currently fighting for militant Islamist groups in Syria and/or Iraq between 2011 and 2016. These qualitative interviews seek to identify individual narratives and motivations in order to improve our understanding as to why and how do some young European Muslims become attracted to and recruited by jihadi organizations. What drives and motivates them? Why are they drawn to a group as murderous and extreme as IS?

The interviews are supplemented with a quantitative dataset covering background information on gender, age, and other socio-economic measures related to Danish foreign fighters. The sample of qualitative interviews is not to be considered fully representative or unbiased (e.g. the sample does not include female interviewees). The author did, however, manage to include interviewees with various group affiliations, of different age levels, different hometowns, and different socio-economic backgrounds in order to reduce the bias.

### ***The Rise and Impact of IS in Denmark***

Denmark has seen the presence of militant Islamist networks within its borders since the early 1990s, mainly due to a small influx of North African and Middle Eastern (especially Egyptian) militants who received asylum. By the late 1990s, a limited number of Danish-born or Danish-raised Muslims began to embrace a jihadist ideology. In May 2014, PET estimated that “some hundred individuals actively support a militant Islamist ideology in Denmark.”[7] Several individuals from this militant Islamist milieu have been linked to Danish terrorism cases, while others have fought, or are currently fighting for jihadist organizations in Syria or Northern Iraq.

PET now considers returned foreign fighters as one of the most potent threats to national security in Denmark. As is the case with most European countries, the vast majority of the Danish foreign fighter

contingent have joined IS. The Islamic State has already inspired individuals who sympathize with the group, to carry out attacks on its behalf in Denmark. In February 2015, Denmark was struck by the first ever attack defined as terrorism in which victims were killed. The perpetrator, a young Dane of Palestinian descent, who had a violent criminal past and had recently been released from prison, shot and killed two civilians—one at a debate event focusing on freedom of speech, and another in front of the Jewish synagogue in Copenhagen.

During his imprisonment, Omar el-Hussein had expressed sympathy for IS, which led prison staff to warn the Prison and Probation Service, and to the latter warning PET.[8] Just a few minutes before his first attack, el-Hussein posted a statement on his *Facebook* wall, pledging *bay'ah* (oath of loyalty) to the self-declared caliph of IS known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

In June 2016, a 24-year old returned foreign fighter from Denmark was sentenced to seven years in prison for joining IS in Syria.[9] At the time of this writing, this was the first Danish court case against a returned foreign fighter.

Although the war in Syria and the rise of IS has encouraged militant Islamism in Denmark, this development has also been exacerbated by other political and social factors such as the rise of far right extremism (since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, and the refugee streams that followed, Denmark has seen a number of attacks on refugee camps and mosques, some of them carried out by far right extremists).[10]

According to PET, “there are political extremist circles in Denmark that are prepared to use violence to promote their political agenda,” and “the violence may be directed at political opponents, minority groups, including refugees and migrants, and organisations and companies considered to have a symbolic value.”[11] PET also assesses that “increasing focus on refugees and migrants among persons affiliated with political extremist circles or extremist sympathisers may increase the threat to asylum centres, refugees and migrants as well as relevant authorities,” and that “such a threat may be in nature of violence, arson, or other types of attacks. Attacks or threats against refugees and migrants by right-wing extremists may lead to reactions from Islamists or left-wing extremists.”

However, while both the historical evolution of Danish jihadism and the consequences of the Syrian war have surely influenced those Danish Muslims who decided to become foreign fighters, the question is what IS fighters’ themselves say about their own motivations. Are there other, less intuitive, factors at play that push or pull them? To explore this question, I have spent months and years tracking the activities of current and returned foreign fighters and militant Islamists in Denmark. This provided me with a rather unique chance to study their intentions, narratives, motivations, and thoughts.

### **Methodology**

This article is based mainly on qualitative interviews, supplemented by a quantitative dataset consisting of background data on 82 foreign fighters from Denmark, with variables such as gender, age, socio-economic status, education level, residence in Denmark and group affiliation. The interviews took place between March 2013 and October 2015. Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, while nine were conducted by phone or through encrypted messaging programs, such as Telegram, Surespot, Kik, or Signal.

A number of individuals have left Denmark to join jihadist organizations in Syria and/or Northern Iraq, narrowing the pool of possible interviewees considerably. Hence, as access to respondents was hard to obtain, the aim was to recruit as many interviewees as possible, using snowball sampling, acknowledging the risk for bias.[12][13]

The 16 respondents had been, or were currently fighting for militant Islamist groups at the time of the interview. 8 of them had fought for IS, while another 8 had not. Thus, the respondents should not be regarded

as one homogenous group. They offer very different approaches to fundamental issues of inquiry, e.g. how a future (Islamic) state should look like. Some respondents even fought for jihadist groups on opposing sides. This was the case with two individuals who fought for Jabhat al-Nusra (now Jabhat Fath al-Sham) during the first years of the conflict and later ended up fighting for IS. Hence one should be cautious with drawing firm conclusions based on individual statements.

The interviews focused on the respondents' motivations, their network of contacts, and in broader terms their creed and grievances. Because speaking openly about jihadist activity can lead to legal prosecution in Denmark, respondents were guaranteed full anonymity in the face-to-face interviews, and approached through encrypted channels. This enabled the respondents to speak more freely about issues that are often considered sensitive, even within jihadi milieus.

The 16 respondents were all male, and the vast majority were under 30 years of age. They were all from the cities of Aarhus and Copenhagen, or suburbs of the two cities.

While some respondents were approached through a snowball-sampling method—one respondent vouching for the interviewer toward another possible respondent—others had for years been sources to the author, providing information of journalistic relevance. The long term-relationship with some of the respondents may have led to a discrepancy in the respondents' level of trust.

Several respondents were in Syria or Iraq at the time of the interview, and the sometimes chaotic and unpredictable situation in a conflict zone limited their time and availability. These conditions made it challenging to conduct in-depth interviews with a pre-planned interview questionnaire. However, the interviews were semi-structured in the sense that the respondents were asked similar questions about fixed topics such as ideological sympathies, group affiliation, inspirations, grievances, and personal backgrounds. Other questions were improvised according to how the conversations developed, allowing time and space to discuss points and narratives that came up spontaneously.

### ***Analysis: The Attraction of 'The State'***

The interviews made for this study revealed that many of the things the interviewees portrayed as motives ran counter to common assumptions. Activist foreign policy seemed to be a significant driver, as highlighted in several other studies.[14] This aligns with the official assessment of the terror threat to Denmark by PET that considers the participation of Danish military troops in the invasions and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq to have been an important factor.[15]

When respondents were asked by whom and from where they got their religious inspiration (apart from religious texts, audio sources, and visual sources), none pointed to the mosques. In fact, the interviews conducted imply that militant Islamists are quite sceptical towards the mosques, especially mosque that are considered to be "moderate" by mainstream society. Several respondents even accused these mosques of being right-hand men for PET. Most respondents claimed they entered the militant Islamist milieu along with a group of friends. It was not clear from the interviews whether a friend introduced the respondents to the milieu, whether the respondents themselves introduced their friends, or whether they and their friends entered extremist circles at the same time as a group. Instead of trusting what was preached in the mosques, the respondents seemed to rely almost exclusively on their close friends. Discussions among friends were mentioned as an influential inspiration. Most respondents stated that they travelled to Syria with a group of friends, adding that the mosque had no say or influence on their decision to leave Denmark.[16]

What intrigued me the most, however, was the impact resulting from the very idea of an Islamic State, and how this notion seemed to shape a specific jihadi narrative and serve as a direct and very present motivation for Danish foreign fighters. When the self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-

Baghdadi, officially declared the caliphate in the summer of 2014, he also gave his sympathizers and ‘soldiers’ an extra reason to come. Now, foot soldiers and fanboys alike were no longer just joining an insurgency; they were joining a Muslim state. While a battlefield primarily attracts fighters, a state also attracts immigrants, who want to settle down and build a future for themselves. The notion of “the state” occurred very often in the interviews conducted after the announcement of the caliphate in late June 2014. When the interviewees used the term “dawla” [“state” or “nation”] they were sometimes not referring to the jihadist group, but rather to the caliphate itself (although most often referred to as the “khilafah” by its supporters). They spoke of a place that no longer just represented a battlefield to its fighters but a home to its citizens. As one 28-year-old returned former IS fighter from Denmark said in a face-to-face interview:

*Interviewer:* You mentioned that you want to go back to Syria...

*Interviewee:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Why?

*Interviewee:* Why shouldn't I? It's like... It's more perfect there than here.

*Interviewer:* How?

*Interviewee:* What do you mean by “how”?

*Interviewer:* How is it more perfect in Syria compared to Denmark?

*Interviewee:* The state is better at taking care of its citizens.

*Interviewer:* Which state? The Islamic State?

*Interviewee:* Yes. But I am not speaking about the group now. I am speaking about the state.

*Interviewer:* Ok, I understand. Don't you... I mean... Don't you find it dangerous down there?

*Interviewee:* As a Muslim, I love death more than I love life. And trust me, it is not like how we hear it in Western media all the time. You also know that.

*Interviewer:* Yes, I know that Western media are influenced by Western politics. In your opinion, what is it that Western media overlook?

*Interviewee:* I just said it. The state. Western media don't understand our love to the state. To the land we have. They don't understand that this piece of earth means the whole world to us. We are ready to give up our lives to defend this piece of land, you know. It is like a fortress to us; we have conquered it with our hands and weapons, and we will defend it with our hands and weapons. I tell you this. We are a state. All Muslims wish to emigrate to the state, because it is their home, and they can live in this state without fearing that the enemy will make problems for them or disturb them from worshipping Allah, may piece be upon him.

To a certain extent, being able to join a perceived state and (at times) also being able to participate in governing the state seem to be pull-factors for the Danish jihadists in Syria. The respondents kept mentioning “the state” as a driving force.

Several times during the rest of the interview the respondent referred to propaganda videos released by IS about daily life in IS held areas. These videos seemed to appeal strongly to him. At times during the interview it seemed like the state was a particular reason to fight in itself. The respondent wanted to defend the state because it seemed to provide legitimacy to his cause.

The aspiration for state building is by no means a new tendency. Long before IS's self-declared caliphate, jihadists in Denmark were talking about the establishment of a state as a goal that would allow Muslims to emigrate and implement Islamic law. One of the most prominent advocates for the cause in Denmark has been Shiraz Tariq, a Danish born Salafi with Pakistani roots. A leading figure among militant Islamists in Denmark for almost a decade, Tariq was seen as an “emir” by his followers. During an interview in late 2012, he made it clear to this author that a state was a goal in itself:

*“Implementing an Islamic State takes sacrifices. It is our duty to fight the infidels and take back what it was they took away from us. It is our duty to implement the caliphate.”[17]*

Tariq was a good friend of the well-known British-Born Pakistani Salafi preacher Anjem Choudary. The latter had ties to several convicted terrorists, and was actively recruiting foreign fighters to the war in Syria from the outset. A few months after the above-mentioned interview, Tariq left himself, ending up joining the extremist group that would later be known as IS.

From his hideout near Aleppo in Syria, Tariq wrote in an email to this author:

*“My goal is to fight the infidels until the state is implemented.”[18]*

Indeed, this seems to be a motivation that is commonly shared in the jihadist milieu in Denmark. After Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s caliphate announcement, the rhetoric shifted remarkably among IS fanboys in Denmark and among Danish IS fighters in Syria and Iraq. They consistently started referring to the group as “Dawla.” The state project seems to have an appeal at least in some parts of Danish jihadist milieu. Institutional aspects such as economical systems, schools, and legal systems were brought up several times during the interviews. Running the state seemed to be a major inspiration and motive for joining IS.

Other respondents talked about “protecting the state” rather than protecting Islam, or protecting the Muslims living in the caliphate. One respondent even went as far as calling the state “crucial”, claiming that the notion of defending an actual state was the determining driver in his decision to leave Denmark and take up arms in Syria. The interviews implied that most IS-affiliated respondents saw IS partly as a state-building project, aimed at restoring Islamic pride rather than waging war against the West.

The strong focus on state-building among my interviewees also implies IS no longer appeals merely to young men. Hundreds of women from European countries have travelled to the caliphate, where several are now working as school teachers near Hasakah, as day-care helpers in Mosul, and – as is the case for two female fighters from Denmark – sick children’s nurses at the hospital in Raqqa; important functions in IS’s endeavours to maintain a complete and valid state.[19]

Predictably, several respondents that did not fight for IS, or fought for groups that consider IS an enemy, were opposed to the idea of an IS-governed state.

Another recurrent, yet related, argument was that of the state being a sign of Islamic revanchism as well as a means to restore Islamic pride. In other words, cultivating the state-project was considered a means and an end at the same time. A remarkable number of the interviewees highlighted revenge as a driving force. As such, they echoed the message and reasoning of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi when the self-declared IS-caliph announced the caliphate in the summer of 2014. Under his direction and leadership, the Islamic world would be returned to “dignity, might, rights and leadership”, as al-Baghdadi had said.[20]

This narrative of revanchism has been prevalent among Danish jihadists for years. When the self-declared “emir” of a brigade of Danish foreign fighters in Syria, Tariq, wrote to this author in the summer of 2013, he said he was taking part in the revival of Islamic pride: “The goal of the Muslims is also to restore the power we had in the past (we are very close),” Tariq wrote from the battlefield near the city of Aleppo, Syria. He added: “Islam is superior and will never be beaten.”[21]

Shiraz Tariq and his fellow fighters appeared to be allured by the past; they felt they were as close as they had ever gotten to the vision of restoring the most holy and pure caliphate in history: the one that existed in the time of the prophet and has ever since been a guiding star for Salafist communities.

In public *YouTube* videos as well as in private messages it was highlighted that they were driven by the need to make good for the defeats of the past in the Muslim world. They wanted to see justice being done. One interviewee, a 28 year-old IS fighter, mentioned this exact phrase during the interview:

**Interviewer:** Do you remember the first time you went out to fight?

**Interviewee:** Haha. You mean fighting with weapons?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** You can't put it like that.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean?

**Interviewee:** Fighting is not just a question of actual fighting with guns. It is more like... Like Islam is a fight in itself. You are fighting every day to be a good Muslim and to follow the words of Allah, may peace be upon him. This is why the khilafah [caliphate] is important. It is like a proof to the kuffar [unbelievers] that we took back what belongs to us.

**Interviewer:** Belong to you?

**Interviewee:** Yes. Kuffar [unbelievers] have always tried to take our faith away from us. They want to tell us that we should not be proud of being Muslims. This [having established a caliphate] is like telling them: "We are proud of who we are. No matter what you do, you cannot take away our pride." I am telling you the khilafah [caliphate] makes us proud.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** Look... Listen... This happened by the grace of Allah, may peace be upon him. He said to the Muslims: "You have to suffer, but in the end I will let justice be done." I tell you, now we have reached a phase where Allah has given us this opportunity to restore our pride.

**Interviewer:** What opportunity?

**Interviewee:** I just told you.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by "opportunity to restore our pride"?

**Interviewee:** If you look back in history, the Muslims have been defeated militarily lots of times, but no one has ever defeated our deen [religion]. Nobody has defeated the faith of the Muslims. And the khilafah [caliphate] is the proof that at the end of the day we will always win.

A majority of the interviewees also mentioned pride as a primary motivation for joining a jihadist organization. The respondents saw these organizations as actors that could restore the pride of the Muslims through military success and by seizing territory that is believed to be "Muslim land" and have been "taken away from the Muslims."

Several respondents spoke of the jihadist organizations' fight against (often Western) military powers as a fight to regain pride after crusades, colonialism, and other historical defeats. Numerous times, it was mentioned by both IS members and Nusra members that the respective jihadist groups sought to get even for what happened in the past.

### **Conclusion: What Danish Counter-Measures Are Missing**

This study has sought to make sense of what motivates Danish foreign fighters in the processes of radicalization, recruitment, mobilization and fighting for militant Islamist organizations in the Middle East.

The denouncing of the mosques by Danish militant Islamists might also suggest that even well-known Salafi mosques may only have limited contact with, and sway over, young militants, minimizing their possible influence on militant Islamist groups that are joining or fighting with groups such as IS. Instead, as indicated in this study, the attraction of the state-building narrative remains the most powerful driver in foreign fighter recruitment.

In the Danish discourse on foreign fighting, it is commonly assumed that the decision to leave Denmark and take up arms in conflict zone such as Syria can be explained largely by push factors. And while this assumption has found some support in previous studies on foreign fighting motivations, Danish authorities base their counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization measures almost entirely on this theory.

However, when talking to the foreign fighters, one finds that some of the things that motivate them are counter-intuitive; they pursue different aims than we think they do.

What, then, is the implication? The findings in this study raise a fundamental question: Are Danish authorities using too much resources on counter-measures that will probably have little or no effect on these guys, who seem driven to a large extent by a utopian ideological project far beyond Denmark?

This study suggests that the mobilization of foreign fighters may often have been fuelled not primarily by push factors such as political stigmatization, social marginalization, or other factors usually suffered by disadvantaged individuals—factors that are the main focus of counter-measures in Denmark.

This should not be understood as a denial of the correlation between individual socio-economic deprivation and risk of radicalization, as proved by many scholars. Rather, it appears that many counter-radicalization measures may be missing an important point: The prevalent pull factors (such as the narrative of state building) are apparently attracting foreign fighters for other—and perhaps more constructive—reasons than we might think. Hence, based on the interviews, it appears that the concepts of statehood, pride, and revanchism can be significant motivations for foreign fighters. These narratives are often overlooked in counter radicalization initiatives, issued by the authorities, perhaps limiting the chances of success.

*About the author: Jakob Sheikh is a multi-award-winning investigative reporter with the Danish daily Politiken, one of Scandinavia's leading newspapers. Since 2012, he has focused on radicalization and foreign fighters. In 2015, he released his book on Danish Islamic State fighters based on numerous interviews with returned and current jihadists as well as key figures in the militant Islamist environment in Scandinavia.*

## Notes

- [1] See for instance: Edwin Bakker and Roel de Bont, "Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015): Characteristics, Motivations, and Roles in the War in Syria and Iraq," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 27, 2016; Daan Weggemans, Edwin Bakker, and Peter Grol, "Who are They and Why do They Go? The Radicalisation and Preparatory Processes of Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 8, 2014; Rik Coolsaet, "Facing the Fourth Foreign Fighter Wave: What Drives Europeans to Syria, and to Islamic State? Insights from the Belgian Case," The Royal Institute for International Relations, 2006; Edwin Bakker and Peter Grol, "Motives and Considerations of Potential Foreign Fighters from the Netherlands," International Centre for Counter Terrorism, ICCT, 2015; Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, 2010.
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- [3] Danish Security and Intelligence Service, "Vurdering af terrortruslen mod Danmark"; URL: <http://www.pet.dk>, April 28, 2016.
- [4] Danish Security and Intelligence Service, "Vurdering af terrortruslen mod Danmark"; URL: <http://www.pet.dk>, April 28, 2016.
- [5] Danish Security and Intelligence Service, "Danske islamistiske miljøer med betydning for terrortruslen mod Danmark"; URL: <http://www.pet.dk>, May 28, 2014.
- [6] A few Danish studies, however, have dealt with identity related issues in extremist Islamist communities from a qualitative approach. See for instance: Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "Salafi Jihadism: Relying on fieldwork to study unorganized and clandestine phenomena," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2011; Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "Whose courtroom? Observations from terrorism trials," *Lived Space. Reconsidering Transnationalism among Muslim Minorities*, 2011; Jon Olsen, "Roads to Militant Radicalization—interviews with five former perpetrators of politically motivated organized violence," Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009; Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "The attractions of Jihadism. An identity approach to three Danish terrorism cases and the gallery of characters around them," University of Copenhagen, 2010; Tina Gudrun Jensen & Kate Østergaard, "Ekstremistiske miljøer med Salafigrupperinger i fokus," University of Copenhagen, 2011; Lene Kühle & Lasse Lindekilde, "Radicalisation and the Limits of Tolerance: A Danish Case-Study," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2012.
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- [9] "Første syrienskriger er dømt for terror," *Politiken*; URL: <http://politiken.dk/indland/ECE3263014/foerste-danske-syrienskriger-er-doemt-for-terror/>, June 22, 2016.

- [10] See for instance: "26-årig varetaegtsfaengslet for brandstiftelse ved asylcenter kendt fra højreradikalt miljø," Danmarks Radio. URL: <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/26-aarig-varetaegtsfaengslet-brandstiftelse-ved-asylcenter-kendt-fra-hoejreradikalt>, August 28, 2105
- [11] Danish Security and Intelligence Service, "Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark," English version,; URL: <http://www.pet.dk>, April 28, 2016.
- [12] See for instance: Patrick Biernacki and Dan Waldorf, "Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling," *Sociological Methods & Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1981.
- [13] The aim in this study was to get in touch with as many foreign fighters from Denmark as possible, regardless of their gender, age, jihadist group affiliation, time spent in Syria and/or Iraq.
- [14] See for instance: Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History*. London: Hurst Publishers, 2015.
- [15] Chief of PET, Mr. Finn Borch Andersen, testified before the Danish Parliament's Legal Committee at a public hearing on October 5, 2016.
- [16] The role of mosques in the radicalization process will be discussed further in a later study.
- [17] Jakob Sheikh, "Meeting the foreign fighters: how does Islamic State recruit thousands of Westerners?," *New Statesman*, December 1, 2015.
- [18] Jakob Sheikh and Morten Skjoldager, "Shiraz Tariq: Islam vil aldrig blive overgået :D," *Politiken*, August 30, 2013.
- [19] Angela Sharda, "Islamic State is a one-way ticket for jihadi brides," *International Business Times*; URL: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/islamic-state-one-way-ticket-jihadi-brides-1503746>, May 31, 2015.
- [20] SITE Intelligence Group, "Islamic State Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Encourages Emigration, Worldwide Action", July 1, 2014.
- [21] Jakob Sheikh and Morten Skjoldager, "Shiraz Tariq: Islam vil aldrig blive overgået :D," *Politiken*, August 30, 2013.