

THE UNITED NATIONS WARN ABOUT UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF JIHADI RECRUITMENT

On Friday October 31, the British daily newspaper “The Guardian” revealed passages of an un-published report from the UN Security Council’s committee in charge of monitoring the activities of Al-Qaeda. The document’s authors raise concerns about the “unprecedented scale” of the flux of foreign fighters who have joined Jihadist organizations in Syria and Iraq, most of them to fight alongside the “Islamic State” and “similar extremist groups”.

Confirming figures disclosed in September by U.S. intelligence officials, the authors noted that an estimated 15,000 people ailing from 80 countries made the journey since 2010. According to the report, these figures are already more important than the cumulative numbers of foreign terrorist fighters during the previous 20 years. Moreover, the flow continues despite the bombing campaign against Syria and Iraq by the United States and its allies.

Although the report fails to provide a comprehensive list of nations affected by this phenomenon, the authors insist on the fact that many fighters are coming from countries which have never before been faced with the threat of terrorism and had never provided combatants to the global Jihad.

According to the UN committee, the effectiveness of the IS’ “cosmopolitan” recruitment efforts is achieved due to social media expertise and excellent communication skills. The authors of the report note that the terrorist organization was able to develop propaganda messages without the ideological dogmatism of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Apart from obvious security issues in the countries of origin of the Jihad fighters, the trends underlined in the UN report illustrate the consequences of the relative weakening of the “core Al-Qaeda”. In the near future, the propaganda war between the leading Jihadist organizations should therefore intensify, especially as Ayman al-Zawahiri is not ready to relinquish his position as Osama Bin Laden’s successor.

Although it has been excluded from the ranks of Al-Qaeda, the IS achieved its emergence due to the “explosion of enthusiasm” for a new kind of organization, one that is not putting the global Jihad at the top of its priorities. In contrast with Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State terrorist group has developed an original tactic by becoming a full-fledged “local player”.

Therefore, it is quite unlikely that the IS will plan itself full-scale attacks against high-profile international targets as long as the war continues in the Middle East. As has been proven by the Jewish Museum killing in Brussels on May 2014 and by the Ottawa shooting in October, the present situation has however increased the risks of isolated attacks in more countries than ever, with experienced fighters returning home or with radicalized individuals who didn't succeed in joining the Jihad in Syria and Iraq.

In the long-term, the Islamic State could change its tactics, especially if it succeeds in securing a safe stronghold in Syria and Iraq. While the next step of its expansion might well be transnational attacks against the Lebanese and Jordanian territories, coordinated terrorist campaigns in western countries cannot be ruled out in the years to come.

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