



THE ISLAMIC STATE AND ITS HUMAN TRAFFICKING PRACTICE

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Simultaneously with the growing concern over the European terrorist networks that are linked to Middle-Eastern radical groups, in spite of the recent actions and measures taken by NATO and other supranational organizations, Islamic State still longs to maintain its influence in the occupied territories with diverse methods. Among these is human trafficking, that represents a major threat from both humanitarian and international security perspective. In this article, I aim to present a series of aspects related to human trafficking, while highlighting the most important motivators for the practice. Although a prior motivation is personnel supply to the Syrian front, trafficking in persons serves several other purposes for the terrorist organization, such as extensive business, out of which come huge amounts of income (transport-specialized units, money-laundering and smuggling businesses); enslavement of women for sex, recruitment of children to infiltrate members of the terrorist organization to create forward bases in Europe.

Keywords: *Islamic State, ISIS, human trafficking, smuggling, enslavement, kidnapping, sex trafficking, migration.*

Introduction

In the recent years, accompanying the ongoing negotiations about possible responses, NATO addressed the problems generated by the reigning power of the terrorist organization and

launched multidimensional counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism raids. Besides, partner states responded by military and soft-power support both at national and international levels. Although many aspects of the threat (for example territorial gains, worldwide propaganda, etc.) should be countered by the traditional and modern diplomatic, economical or military response methods, there are still segments that are waiting to be discussed and responded – still in the queue for comprehensive solution.

Additionally, the Islamic State terrorist organization became notorious for its fundamentalist ideology, brutality, worldwide-spread propaganda, recruitment success and its capabilities for activating moderate or unstable Muslims of the European continent in order to plan and commit attacks in their country, as well as persuading thousands of people to join the Syrian terrorist groups as foreign fighters. As we had to experience in the last months terror attacks, the radical organization managed to prove its presence among current and settled migrants, thereby highlighted the threat of the hardly detectable human trafficking operations and the widespread and hugely connected networks of Middle-Eastern and European terrorist cells.¹

¹ Besenyő János; Prantner Zoltán; Speidl Bianka; Vogel Dávid, *Az Iszlám Állam - Terrorizmus 2.0: Történet, ideológia, propaganda, [The "Islamic State": Terrorism 2.0 – History. Ideology. Propaganda.]*, Kossuth kiadó, Budapest, 2016, pp. 16-20.

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Even if migration is powered by various factors, we may (and can) not forget the fact that its link with organized crime can contribute to the destabilization of the European continent in the long run.

The radical organization's primary area of operation is located in Syria and Iraq, but as the recent terrorist attacks on Paris, Brussels and Nice showed, they also prepare and execute terrorist acts in Western territories. On the basis of their radical interpretation of the Quran, they call every Muslim to continue jihad actively and participate in their war against the *kafirs* (non-believers). Besides the active participation in the Syrian and Iraqi clashes, they also execute diversified stabilizing, social and institutional services for citizens. For instance, we should mention payment of soldiers and their families as well as the establishment of a functioning governing and public administration system.

Financing this multi-tasked terrorist organization requires huge amount of money, which is only partly covered by financial assistance of individual donors². The rest of the required budget is to be self-financed. Throughout the evolution of the organization, ISIS developed a well-functioning basis for these transactions. It earns income from several operations (selling seized artifacts or looting banks) and also has sovereignty on some industrial facilities (for example oil and wheat industries) whose products are being sold to partners. According to some estimates, the organization's revenues were dropped from \$80 million in mid-2015 to \$56 million in March 2016³. Human trafficking not only supplements these financial sources, but also produces other benefits for the terrorist organization. In the followings, I shall highlight and detail the three most important motivators for trafficking in persons.

² Brooke Satti Charles, "Funding Terrorists: The Rise of ISIS" in *Security Intelligence*, 2014, available at: <https://securityintelligence.com/funding-terrorists-the-rise-of-isis/>, accessed on 25.07.2016.

³ IHS, "Islamic State Monthly Revenue Drops to \$56 million", in *IHS Says*, 2016, available at: <http://press.ihs.com/press-release/aerospace-defense-security/islamic-state-monthly-revenue-drops-56-million-ihs-says>, accessed on 30.05.2016.

1. Financial benefits

Maintaining a moderate standard of living in territories under the authority of the Islamic State, providing basic social services and simultaneously planning and executing the active war and operation of the terrorist organization requires huge amount of income. Besides, jihadists are assured to earn monthly payment between \$200 - \$600 per operative, according to the operative's nationality and family size and up to \$2,000 for administration personnel in senior management positions⁴. The terrorist organization is, thereby, forced to take part in various, billion-dollar financial transactions in order to maintain its authority and strength.

The recent flow of migrants has laid the foundation for a hardly-checked possibility to expand the thriving international system for illegal trade and smuggling. Either people, money, black-market items or artifacts are considered, several links can be detected between illegal trafficking and various terrorist organizations. In my analysis, I concentrate mainly on the human trafficking contexts, but the other mentioned aspects should also be added to understand the economic situation and the relevant profits of the organization.

Although their propaganda rather highlights the ideological aspects of trafficking in persons, the Islamic State itself admittedly earns huge amount of income from human trafficking. Smuggler groups of migratory routes are said to be linked up with the leaders of the terrorist organization, which can be a highly profitable agreement for both sides. The approximate value of human smuggling in Libya had risen from \$8m to \$20m in 2010 to \$255m to \$323m in 2014⁵.

⁴ *ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization*, The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014, p. 155, available at http://www.crethiplethi.com/files/cp_0115.pdf, apud: Richard Barret, Senior Vice President, "The Islamic State", The Soufan Group, November 2014, p. 50, accessed on 26.05.2016.

⁵ Orlando Crowcroft, *ISIS: People trafficking, smuggling and punitive taxes boost Islamic State economy*, 2015, available at <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-people-trafficking-smuggling-punitive-taxes-boost-islamic-state-economy-1506473>, accessed on 27.05.2016.



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The route from Syria to Turkey could reach over \$8,000 for an individual, which indicate that the millions of trafficked persons generate a considerable amount of income for the ISIS and linked groups. According to the analysis of the *Sahan Foundation* and the *IGAD Security Sector Program* (ISSP), some smugglers may also charge \$400 to \$500 to “insure” migrants against abductions⁶. According to some analysis, the trafficked Syrian and African migrants generate over \$320m yearly income for the terrorist organization⁷. It should be also added that human trafficking is highly linked with the similarly serious problem, the oftentimes mentioned organ trafficking, which also contributes to the financial revenues of the terrorist organization⁸.

While the operative work of human trafficking is carried out by hardly-detectable individuals, the organization provides a safer background with its expanded equipment, information and other capabilities. However, among the persons involved in trafficking, we may also mention those who pledged allegiance to the Islamic State’s ideology from the beginning and thereby are ideologically driven for supporting the organization in every possible ways (in this case, trafficking persons).

The terrorist organization has provided guidance to its fighters regarding how many female slaves they are allowed to maintain and sets up regular auctions where mostly women and children are for sale⁹. According to a document issued by the ISIS, Christian and Yazidi girls,

⁶ *Human Trafficking and Smuggling on the Horn of Africa-Central Mediterranean Route*, Sahan Foundation, 2016, p. 16, available at http://igad.int/attachments/1284_ISSP%20Sahan%20HST%20Report%20%2018ii2016%20FINAL%20FINAL.pdf, accessed on 26.05.2016.

⁷ Orlando Crowcroft, *cit. art.*

⁸ János Besenyő, Zoltán Prantner, Bianka Speidl, Dávid Vogel, *Az Iszlám Állam - Terrorizmus 2.0: Történet, ideológia, propaganda [The “Islamic State”: Terrorism 2.0 – History. Ideology. Propaganda.]*, Kossuth kiadó, Budapest, 2016, p. 45.

⁹ *Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*, FATF, 2015, pp. 12-13, available at <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Financing-of-the-terrorist-organisation-ISIL.pdf>, accessed on 26.05.2016.

between 1 and 9 years old, are sold for \$172. Girls that are 10 to 20 years old might be bought for around \$129, while those 20 to 30 years old are on sale for about \$86. ISIS sex slave prices for women that are 30 to 40 is about \$75 and for those 40 to 50 is \$43¹⁰.

In parallel with its other financial and economic operations¹¹, human smuggling business is difficult to detect, as routes and methods are diverse and constantly adapting to the current political, environmental and financial situation. Thereby, this business should provide a secured way of income with minimal risks for the organization.

2. Societal reasons

Distracting and destabilizing the local communities are considered as a key element in the process of the possible future followers’ radicalization. In order to gain authority and press its fundamental ideology on the locals, the terrorist organization declared war on *kafirs* (non-believers) and on those who do not full heartedly obey the given strict rules of the extremist group. Thereby cleansing the gained and maintained territories adds a big amount of individuals (mainly Yazidi and Christian women¹²) for human trafficking operations.

As we see in Nigeria or Iraq today, trafficking highly intimidates population, generates fear and contributes to the push-factors of migration. Enslavement and rape of women were used as tools of war in the past (for example in Bosnia)

¹⁰ *Exclusive: ISIS document sets prices of Christian and Yazidi slaves*, Iraqinews, available at <http://www.iraqinews.com/features/exclusive-isis-document-sets-prices-christian-yazidi-slaves/>, accessed on 26.05.2016.

¹¹ For example oil sales and bank robberies, smuggling artifacts or imposing taxes upon local residents. Source: Besenyő, János; Prantner, Zoltán; Speidl, Bianka; Vogel, Dávid, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

¹² Ashley Binetti, *A New Frontier: Human Trafficking and ISIS’s Recruitment of Women from the West*, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace & Security, 2015, available at: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/I2A%20-%20A%20New%20Frontier%20-%20Human%20Trafficking%20and%20ISIS’s%20Recruitment%20of%20Women%20from%20the%20West.pdf>, accessed on 27.05.2016.



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and also presents a humanitarian problem nowadays.

Women living under the authority of the Islamic State are sold as slaves (wives) for jihadists, thus fighters' needs and the demand for a solid family background are secured, while in the long-run, the next generation of jihadists is granted. In 2014, the terrorist organization operated an institutionalized process for abduction and sale of women slaves, according to the report of the OHCHR, ISIS had abducted up to 2,500 civilians, predominantly women and children, but also some men from Sinjar, Tal Afar, the Ninewa Plains and Shirkhan. Teenage children (both males and females) were being sexually assaulted¹³, while many of the young boys were taken on a daily basis to unknown locations¹⁴. Sale centers are operating in central hubs of the trafficking routes outside Syria and Iraq, such as in Antep, Turkey¹⁵.

Furthermore, ISIS seeks to recruit Western women online, creating a constant human trafficking route from the West into Syria for forced marriages¹⁶. Beside the questionable force of the call for a possibly exciting lifestyle, propaganda convinces women to feel themselves honored to be a mother of a future jihadist. According to Carolyn Hoyle, among the approximately 3,400 foreign fighters (data from 2015) in Syria,

approximately 550 are women¹⁷.

In his statement in 2015, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon condemned all the listed actions against women and the process of human trafficking in general, and claimed “trafficking in persons undermines the rule of law and contributes to other forms of transnational organized crime, which can exacerbate conflict and foster insecurity”¹⁸. Starting from his thoughts, we have to add that it is also a proven fact that human trafficking also represents an option for radical fighters to reach targeted destinations in Europe undetected¹⁹, which further stresses the international community to reach universal reaction against the unchecked inflow of migrants to European territories. Ideologically driven, these fighters may assimilate in the crowd and optionally convince others sympathize with the organization. Although, as the last months' terror attacks on European soil demonstrated, direct recruitment is not the most urgent problem, however, this should highlight one of the negative aspects of uncontrolled immigration, which – among others – is still in line for a universal and effective solution.

3. Trafficking as a weapon of war

Since 2011, the society of the fragile state of Syria suffers from both internally and externally detectable migrant waves. According to the data of the U.S. Department of State, in the given time period (from 2011 to 2015) over 7.6 million Syrians were displaced internally, while simultaneously over four million refugees fled the

¹³ Christopher H. Smith, *Fulfilling the Humanitarian Imperative: Assisting Victims of ISIS Violence*, The House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations, 2015, available at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-fulfilling-humanitarian-imperative-assisting-victims-isis-violence>, accessed on 25.05.2016.

¹⁴ *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July to 10 September 2014*, OCHCR, 2014, p. 27, available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf, accessed on 25.05.2016.

¹⁵ Bulut Uzay, *ISIS Selling Yazidi Women and Children in Turkey*, 2015, available at <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/7078/turkey-isis-slaves>, accessed on 25.05.2016.

¹⁶ Jenni Hankel, *ISIS: One of Many Contributors to Trafficking in Syria and Iraq*, Human Trafficking Center, 2014, available at <http://humantraffickingcenter.org/posts-by-htc-associates/isis-one-many-contributors-trafficking-syria-iraq/>, accessed on 25.05.2016.

¹⁷ Carolyn Hoyle, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015, p. 8, available at www.strategicdialogue.org/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.PDF, accessed on 26.05.2016.

¹⁸ Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2015/25, UN Security Council, 2015, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_prst_2015_25.pdf, accessed on 26.05.2016.

¹⁹ Further analysis on this topic can be found in: Kis, Álmós Péter (ed.), *Afrikai terrorista- és szakadárszervezetek*, Honvéd Vezérkar Tudományos Kutatóhely (HVK TKH), Budapest, ed. 2015.



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country²⁰. Although these processes involve the general and abovementioned human trafficking motivations (financial and social considerations), it must be also highlighted that human smuggling is used to be an asset for a better position in the war²¹.

The Islamic State regularly claimed that thousands of its followers are blended among the unchecked crowd of the trafficked and fled migrants. After the recent months' and years' organized or self-planned terrorist acts and the known expansion of insurgencies, the international community may not afford excluding the possible threat, there is a need for an adequate level of reaction. Law enforcement agencies, border authorities, bodies in charge for security of the European region and the affected bordering states are operating with increased attention and capabilities, as many examples present that their work against the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations' infiltration is not unnecessary.

In order to legitimate its kidnappings and human trafficking methods, ISIS has regularly advertised its involvement in human trafficking in its own publications such as *Al Dabiq*²². Thereby it enhances determination and increases the morale of its own troops. Moreover, ISIS uses abductions and human trafficking as an option for eliminating the opponents' human capabilities. For example on 9 July 2014, the organization kidnapped at least 60 former Iraqi Army officers from southern and eastern Mosul to pre-empt the potential rebel strike²³.

²⁰ *Syria - 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report, Office To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State, 2015, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2015/243543.htm>, accessed on 27.05.2016.*

²¹ David M. Luna, "Convergence: Human Trafficking and Criminal Exploitation by Da'esh of Women and Vulnerable Youth", in NATO ARW Responses to Female Migration to ISIS, 2016, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/rm/2016/256682.htm>, accessed on 25.07.2016.

²² For example in *Dabiq* No 5. p. 17 or *Dabiq* No. 11. p. 31.

²³ *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July to 10 September 2014*, OCHCR, 2014, p. 8, available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10

In addition to the foregoing motivations, the Islamic State have used trafficking to collect and recruit children, who then are being sent to training camps and to the front lines²⁴. Besides the abductions of young children by ISIS, the Syrian army, pro-government militias, opposition forces and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) are also involved in similar processes. The later mentioned organizations consider children mainly "only" as an asset for human intelligence, providing information on local environment and conditions. Based on the current situation, we can say that, in spite of the increased efforts, the growing amount of child soldiers in the Middle-East and Africa remained an unsolved problem of the international community²⁵.

Conclusions

Considering the seriousness of the human trafficking business of the terrorist networks, international community continuously expresses its views and initiatives for countering trafficking in persons. The long-standing procedure in the recent years evolved to a multidimensional support for radical organizations, whose profits can be measured in material (e.g. human capital), financial (million dollar revenues) and ideological aspects.

It also must be added that human trafficking is not only connected with the Islamic State itself, but became a diverse and extensive network of the terrorist organization and other specialized groups, for example organ traffickers, drug smugglers or black market dealers. Thereby countering the terrorist group's operations alone is a significant, but not satisfactory response.

As it was mentioned before, it is proven that the ISIS linked up with traffickers and organized

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²⁴ *Modern slavery as a tactic in armed conflicts*, U.S. Department of State, available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/250876.pdf>, accessed on 27.05.2016.

²⁵ *Syria - 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report, Office To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State, 2015, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2015/243543.htm>, accessed on 27.05.2016.*



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smuggling groups inter alia in Libya and Turkey, in order to facilitate the human trafficking transactions of their militants through the smuggling routes of the Mediterranean Sea and the Eastern-Mediterranean territories. ISIS runs a well-organized illegal immigration network and according to their propaganda and several experts' research, trafficking routes are also used as militant supply routes (both for sending supporters to Europe and collecting jihadists from the western states). Its militants' aim is to persuade migrants fighting for them in Libya and Northern Africa in spite of 'risking their life' through the travel. Although these routes mainly correspond with the basic migrant and transport routes, the channels are dynamically adapting for the current changes, thereby their tracking and elimination requires a complex counter-trafficking procedure.

ISIS practices kidnapping and enslaves (mostly Yazidi and Christian) women and a number of girls from the West in order to meet the needs of its fighters. Sex trafficking, forced marriages and sexual assault became a well-known and often used practice in the occupied territories.

Collecting the future's jihadists, ISIS regularly abducts children and transport them to one of its training camps for further ideological lectures. Considering the support of their war on kafirs, besides the training of the new generation of jihadists, Islamic State often use the enemy's kidnapping as a propaganda method and a way for preempting local countermeasures.

Summarizing the foregoing, the Islamic State's trafficking in human procedures can be addressed as a tripartite threat:

- It generates income for both the linked organized crime groups and, indirectly, for the Islamic State.
- It improves morale among jihadists, ideologically legitimates actions against its enemies, thereby human trafficking improves the propaganda.
- By human trafficking, the terrorist organization's military actions should be

intensified and capabilities should be further increased.

Although, in the recent years, NATO, the responsible UN bodies and several specialized organizations discovered and addressed the threat, more intense and effective responses are still to be seen. While the European Union and African officials are striving to find ways to prevent the escalation of the problem, enhanced cooperation and international understanding is needed to handle the serious and urgent issue of the Islamic State's human trafficking practice.

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