The Essential Dynamics of Countering Violent Extremism

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Countering Violent Extremism

- 1. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) represents an evolving response to the problem of extremist violence that is more holistic that prior approaches,

- 2. Working both upstream and downstream of problems

- 3. Working collaboratively across community groups. It involves diverse government and community stakeholders identifying, developing, and implementing

CVE

- 4. Progressive, non-coercive measures to work with vulnerable individuals and groups to deflect and dissuade them from using violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.

- 5. At the same time it seeks to reintegrate into mainstream society individuals and groups that have become radicalized and involved in violent extremism by facilitating their disengagement from social networks and patterns of behavior that draw them into extremist violence.

Radicalization
radicalization is a social process

Understanding what goes wrong

- In order to develop effective interventions it is essential that we first understand what goes wrong

- Individuals radicalize and become engaged in violent extremism for a variety of reasons but three broad elements are generally involved:
  - Identity reorientation through joining radical social networks
  - Cognitive radicalization and the embracing of radical narratives
  - Transgressive behavior and the crossing of thresholds of criminal activity

Interventions

- Interventions need to address each of these three elements

- Not every program needs to address all three elements but for an overall CVE strategy to be effective all three need to be addressed

- Ideally, agencies, families and community groups need to each address every element but it is natural that emphases will vary according to opportunity

The importance of social networks

- Social networks are generally more influential in radicalization than ideology

- Ideology is usually a second-order mechanism used to legitimate violence motivated by the issues of concern to the social network

Al-Muhajiroun

Implications for CVE

- CVE efforts are strategically best focused on:
  - Restoring broken networks with society

  - Using new networks to wean potential perpetrators away from those networks promoting violence

  - Reestablishing networks to reestablish a sense of belonging in society

  - Paying attention to virtual networks explored and experienced online

Radicalization and CVE

- There has been much confusion about what it means to be 'radical' and the process of becoming 'radical'

- The concern of CVE is primarily those individuals and groups that:
    - Espouse radical ideologies and
    - Believe in using violence

'Radicalization' vs (dis)engagement

- 'Radicalization' suggests a steady process of rational conviction and embracing a new identity
  - it is seldom so simple
- Some argue that it is better to talk of engagement with violent extremism rather than radicalization
  - and disengagement with violent extremism rather than de-radicalization
- This is a very useful corrective, up to a point
  - but radicalization remains vitally important

Emotion and passion

- Far from being 'rational actors' we are all - the 'normal' as well as the 'extreme' - inclined to make choices based more on emotion than on cool, rational assessment
- But we also feel compelled to explain and justify our choices in rational terms
- So it is with those engaged with violent extremism

- **Identity** – both identities given to us by circumstance and identities that we choose – lies at the core of this emotional attachment

Identity and social context

- Our emotional responses are substantially shaped by our social relationships and our sense of self and of belonging to a community

- Our sense of self - our identity - is very much a product of our social context / networks

  - Both actual and imagined

Social Networks (1.)

- Social networks
  - Lone actors are very rare
  - Most home grown terrorists have significant intimate social networks - often within their families - shaping and motivating them
  - Virtual communities are very important – even for genuine lone actors – to a sense of self
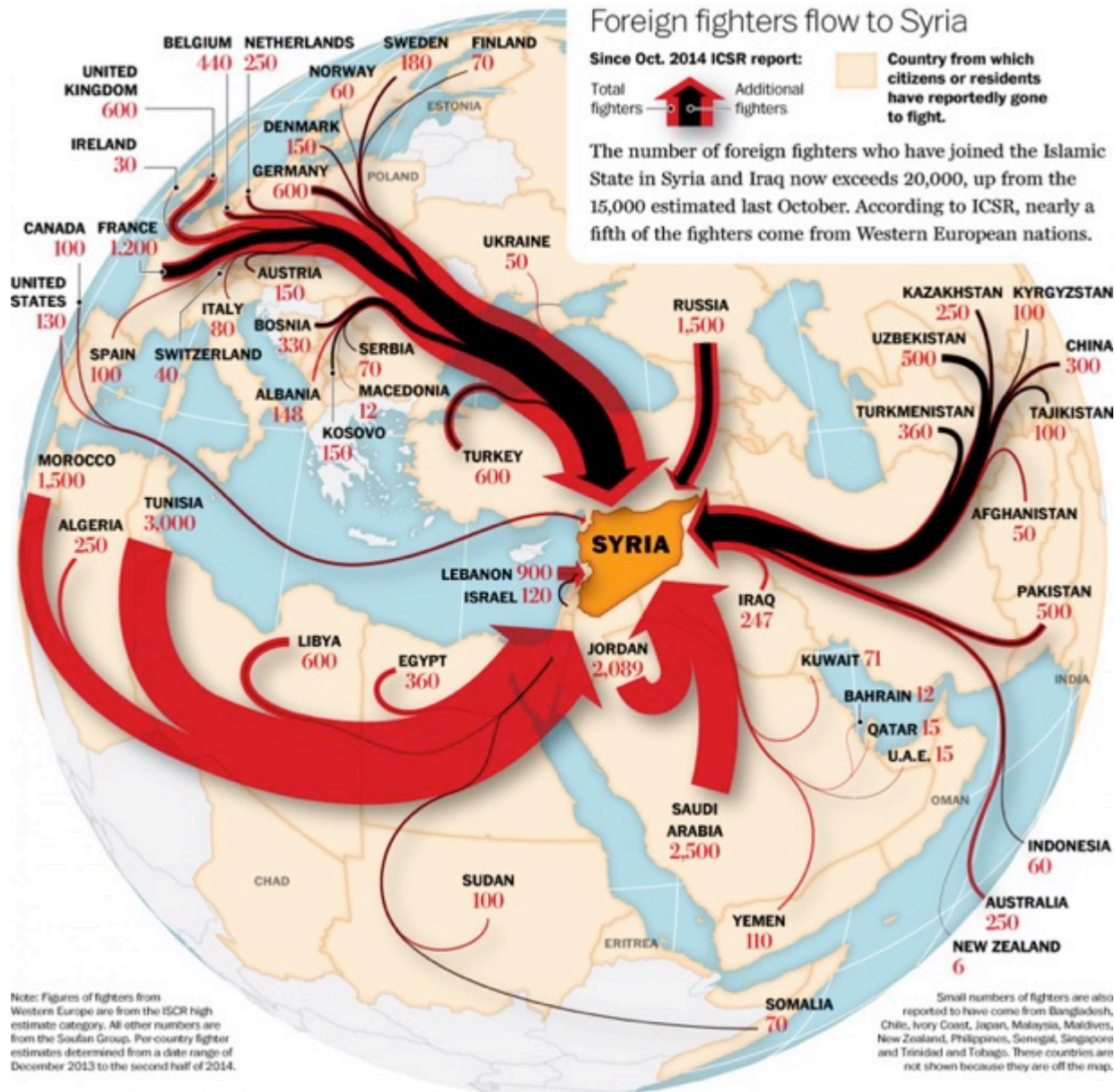
Al-Muhajiroun network
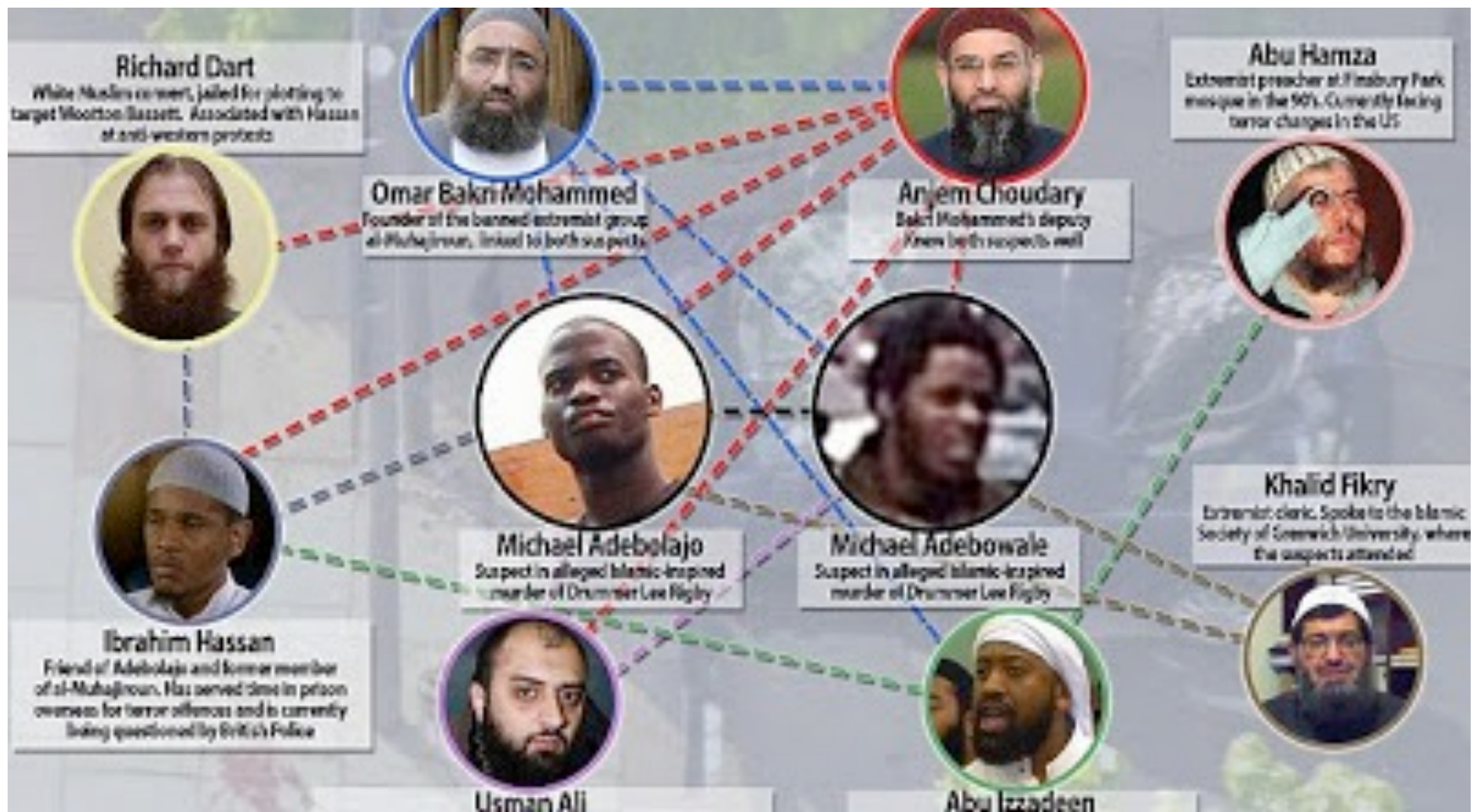
Foreign fighters flow to Syria

Since Oct. 2014 ICSR report:
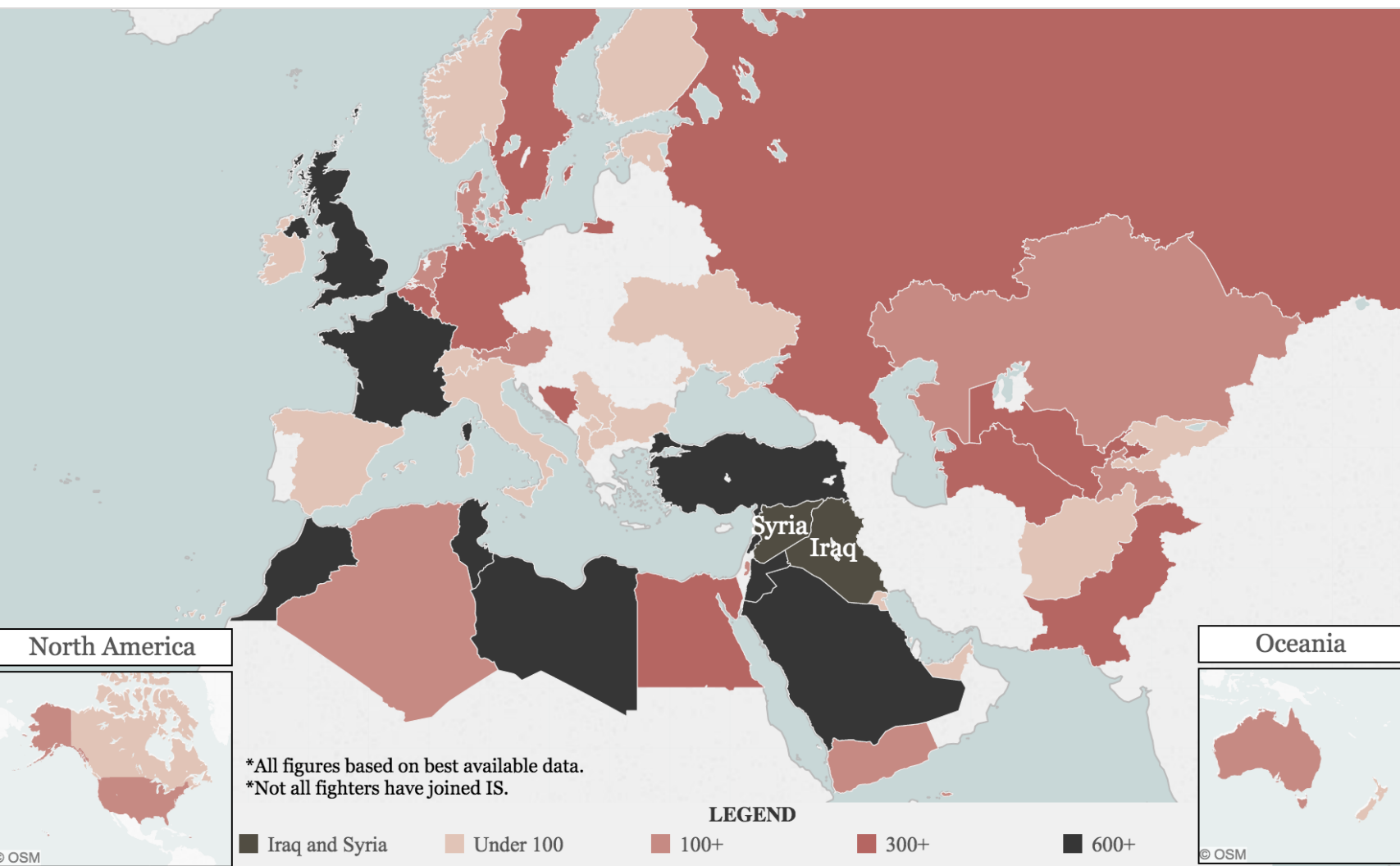
Total fighters ← → Additional fighters

Country from which citizens or residents have reportedly gone to fight.

The number of foreign fighters who have joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq now exceeds 20,000, up from the 15,000 estimated last October. According to ICSR, nearly a fifth of the fighters come from Western European nations.
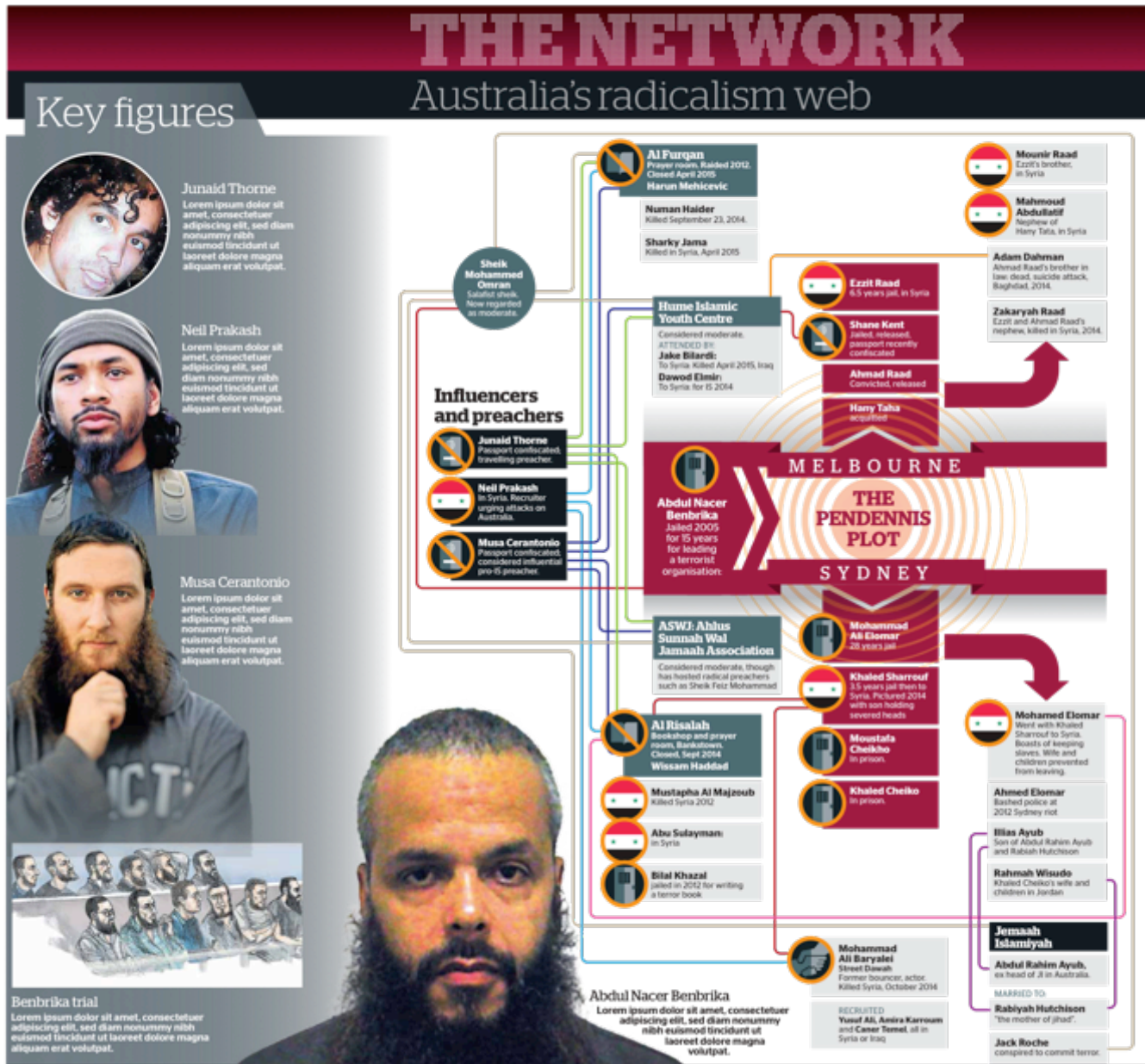
BELGIUM **440**
NETHERLANDS **250**
SWEDEN **180**
FINLAND **70**
NORWAY **60**
UNITED KINGDOM **600**
IRELAND **30**
DENMARK **150**
GERMANY **600**
ESTONIA
POLAND
UKRAINE **50**
CANADA **100**
FRANCE **1,200**
AUSTRIA **150**
UNITED STATES **130**
ITALY **80**
BOSNIA **330**
SERBIA **70**
SPAIN **100**
SWITZERLAND **40**
ALBANIA **148**
MACEDONIA **12**
KOSOVO **150**
TURKEY **600**
RUSSIA **1,500**
KAZAKHSTAN **250**
KYRGYZSTAN **100**
UZBEKISTAN **500**
CHINA **300**
TURKMENISTAN **360**
TAJIKISTAN **100**
MOROCCO **1,500**
TUNISIA **3,000**
ALGERIA **250**
AFGHANISTAN **50**
SYRIA
LEBANON **900**
ISRAEL **120**
IRAQ **247**
PAKISTAN **500**
LIBYA **600**
EGYPT **360**
JORDAN **2,089**
KUWAIT **71**
BAHRAIN **12**
QATAR **15**
U.A.E. **15**
INDIA
CHAD
SAUDI ARABIA **2,500**
OMAN
INDONESIA **60**
AUSTRALIA **250**
SUDAN **100**
NEW ZEALAND **6**
ERITREA
YEMEN **110**
SOMALIA **70**

Note: Figures of fighters from Western Europe are from the ISCR high estimate category. All other numbers are from the Soufan Group. Per-country fighter estimates determined from a date range of December 2013 to the second half of 2014.

Small numbers of fighters are also reported to have come from Bangladesh, Chile, Ivory Coast, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Philippines, Senegal, Singapore and Trinidad and Tobago. These countries are not shown because they are off the map.

Sources: International Center for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ISCR), The Soufan Group, CIA

GENE THORP AND SWATI SHARMA/THE WASHINGTON POST

Foreign Fighters In Iraq and Syria
Updated on January 29th, 2015 by L.L.

Syria

Iraq

North America

Oceania

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*All figures based on best available data.
*Not all fighters have joined IS.

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LEGEND

| Iraq and Syria | Under 100 | 100+ | 300+ | 600+ |

Australian extremist networks

Michael Bachelard The Age 9 May 2015

Australian recruits to Syria-Iraq
Mark Schliebs, The Australian 6 June 2015

Social Networks (2.)

- Migration – leaving and cleaving
  - Radicalization generally involves breaking (some) old relationships and forming new ones
  - This process is often witnessed by the broader community and generally raises concerns

- Travel
  - Radicalization often involves physical travel to a conflict zone (it always involves a virtual journey)

The imagined warrior
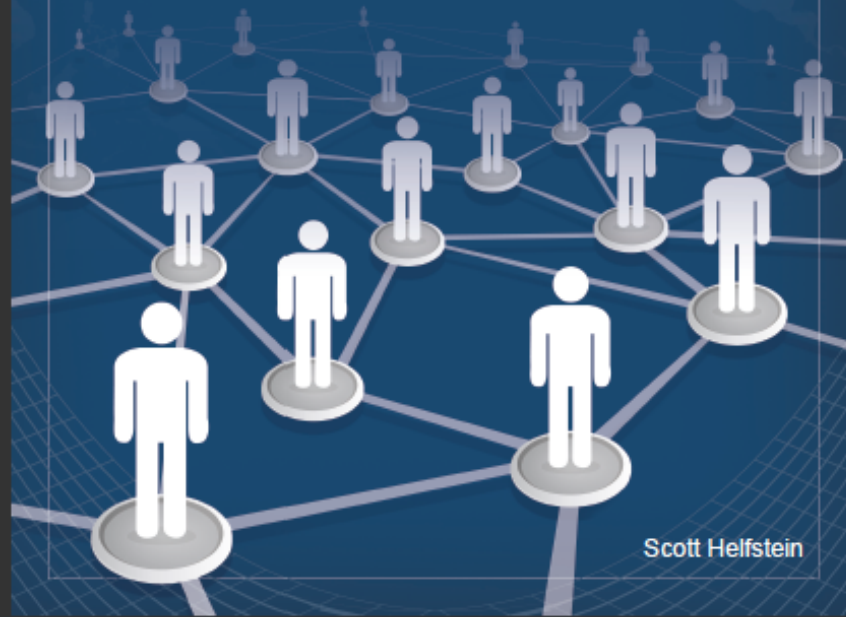
Radicalization (1.)

- Radicalization
  - Normally years in the making
  - Seldom occurs in isolation
    - It always involves a virtual community and usually a physical community

- Cognitive radicalization (the embracing of extremist ideology) is only one part of radicalization
  - And by itself does not usually lead to violent activism
  - But violent activism usually involves a degree of cognitive radicalization

Figure 1: Radicalization Process
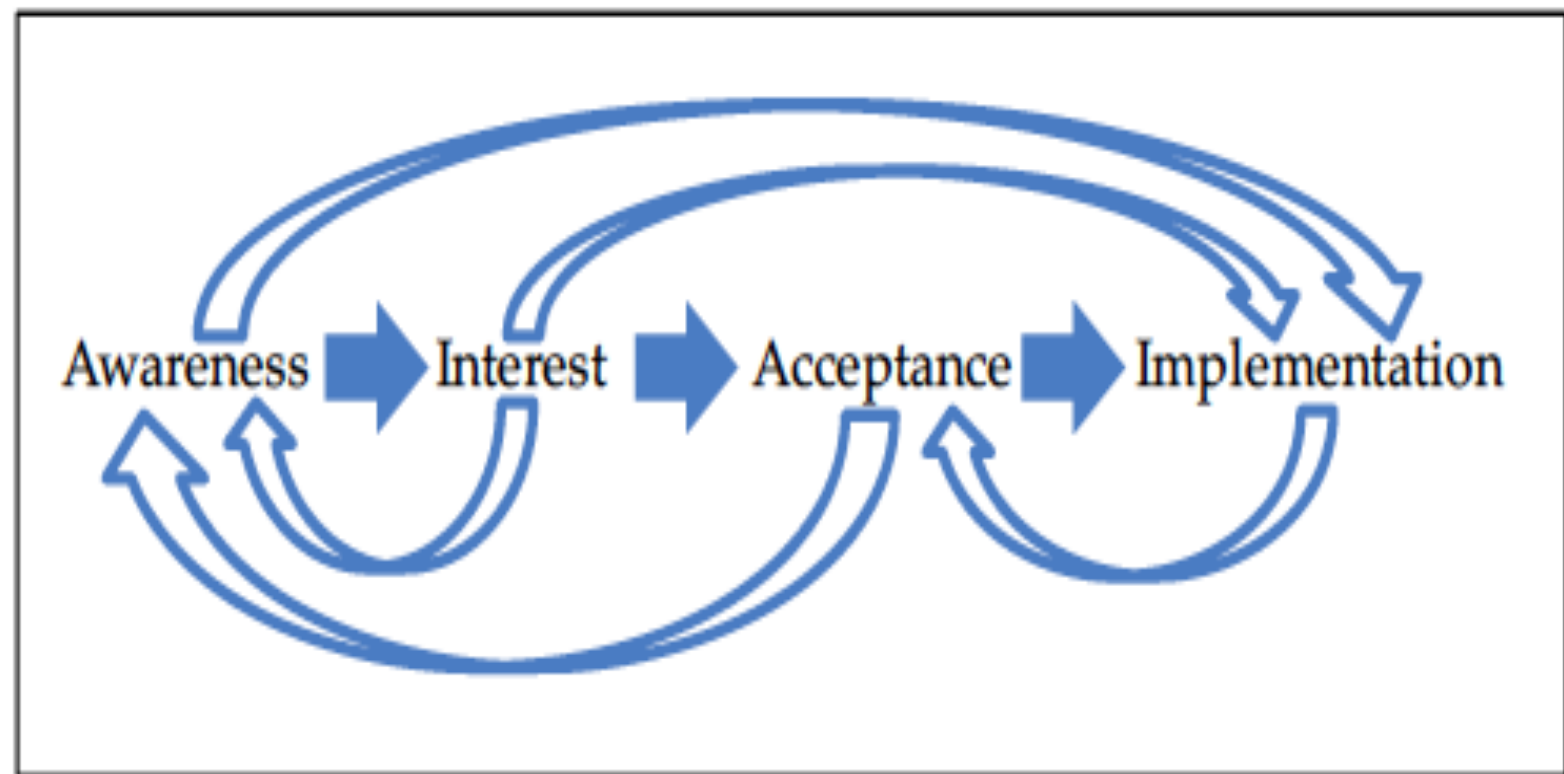
Radicalization (2.)

- Personal failure
  - Those most drawn to violent extremism are young men
  - Most struggle with a sense of personal failure

- Redemptive narrative
  - Terrorists (unlike, say, school shooters) embrace a justifying political narrative
  - This redemptive narrative holds the appeal of transforming personal failure into socially-recognized success