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Jihadist online communication and Finland

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Description sheet

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Abstract

This study investigates jihadist online communication related to Finland in 2014–2018. In particular, it examines the visibility of Finland and persons connected to Finland in jihadist communication and investigates what kinds of content persons living in Finland have produced and disseminated online.

During the investigated period, jihadist online communication related to Finland was more prevalent than ever before. Finns were mentioned in ISIS materials, and persons living in Finland produced and disseminated jihadist content in the Finnish language. This reflects the broader development of the jihadist activities connected to Finland. The amount of content must not be exaggerated, however, as the amount of content and online activities connected to Finland were still relatively minimal when compared internationally.

Over the past three years, jihadist online communication has migrated to closed platforms, as technology companies actively removed public content inciting people to violence. This means that openly jihadist activity online has largely slowed down for the time being, and this is also the case with content related to Finland. Jihadist online communication, however, has not ceased entirely. The study found signs that jihadist online communication is still occurring via closed, encrypted channels.

The study was carried out together with the *Jihadism in Finland* study.

Kuvailulehti

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimus käsittelee Suomeen liittyvää jihadistista verkkoviestintää vuosina 2014–2018. Siinä kartoitetaan erityisesti Suomen ja Suomeen liittyvien henkilöiden esiintymistä jihadistisessa viestinnässä sekä sitä, millaista aineistoa Suomessa asuneet henkilöt ovat tuottaneet ja levittäneet verkossa.

Ajanjakson alkupuolella Suomeen liittyvää jihadistista verkkoviestintää oli enemmän kuin koskaan aiemmin. Suomalaisia esiintyi Isisin aineistoissa, ja Suomessa asuneet henkilöt tuottivat ja levittivät jihadistista aineistoa myös suomeksi. Tämä heijastaa Suomeen liittyvän jihadistisen liikehdinnän yleistä kehittymistä. Aineiston määrää ei tule kuitenkaan liioitella, sillä Suomeen liittyvän viestinnän määrä oli edelleen kansainvälisesti katsoen verrattain vähäinen.

Viimeisen kolmen vuoden aikana jihadistinen verkkoviestintä on siirtynyt suljetuille alustoille, kun teknologiayritykset ovat aktiivisesti poistaneet avointa väkivaltaan yllyttävää aineistoa. Tämä tarkoittaa, että avoimen jihadistisen verkkoviestinnän aika on tällä erää myös Suomeen liittyvän aineiston osalta pitkälti ohi. Suomeen kytkeytyvä jihadistinen verkkoviestintä ei ole kuitenkaan todennäköisesti täysin tyrehtynyt. Tutkimuksen yhteydessä havaittiin merkkejä siitä, että sitä saattaa edelleen olla suljetuilla ja salatuilla kanavilla.

Tutkimus on tehty samanaikaisesti *Jihadistinen liikehdintä Suomessa* -tutkimuksen kanssa.

Presentationsblad

Referat

Undersökningen behandlar jihadistisk webbkommunikation som gäller Finland 2014–2018. Den kartlägger i synnerhet hur Finland och personer med anknytning till Finland förekommer i den jihadistiska kommunikationen samt hurdant material personer som bott i Finland har producerat och spridit på webben.

I början av tidsperioden förekom det mer jihadistisk webbkommunikation som gällde Finland än någonsin tidigare. Det fanns belägg på finländare i ISIS material, och personer som bott i Finland producerade och spred jihadistiskt material också på finska. Detta reflekterar den allmänna utvecklingen av jihadistiska rörelser med anknytning till Finland. Man ska dock inte överdriva mängden material eftersom mängden kommunikation som gäller Finland fortfarande var rätt så liten internationellt sett.

Under de tre senaste åren har den jihadistiska webbkommunikationen övergått till slutna plattformar i och med att teknologiföretag aktivt har raderat material som öppet uppviglar till våld. Detta innebär att tiden för öppen jihadistisk webbkommunikation för den här gången till stor del är över också i fråga om material som gäller Finland. Den jihadistiska webbkommunikation som är förknippad med Finland har dock antagligen inte helt tystnat. I samband med undersökningen upptäcktes tecken på att den kan finnas kvar i stängda och krypterade kanaler.

Undersökningen har gjorts samtidigt med undersökningen *Jihadistiska rörelser i Finland*.

Contents

TO THE READER

The development of jihadism in Finland has sparked a heated debate in recent years, especially in the context of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Efforts to prevent violent extremism have expanded considerably in the 2010s. Consequently, the demand for evidence-based information on jihadist activity specifically related to Finland has increased strongly.

This report commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior was produced to meet this knowledge need, in particular regarding jihadist online communication. While its specific purpose is to support the efforts to prevent violent extremism in Finland, the authors hope that it will also be of more general interest to readers among the wider public.

This report was produced concurrently and by the same research group as the report titled *Jihadism in Finland*, which analyses the general development of jihadist activity in Finland in the 2010s.

The authors would like to extend their warmest thanks to all those who were interviewed for the report and who assisted in its writing in different ways. Our thanks go to the steering group led by Tarja Mankkinen (Ministry of the Interior). The group's comments were a great help in different stages of the study. The members of the steering group were Marko Juntunen (University of Helsinki), Timo Kilpeläinen (National Police Board), Marja Tiilikainen (Migration Institute of Finland) and Oussama Yousfi (Radinet).

We would also like to thank our research assistants Fairuz Muthana, Taru Tervahauta and Lauri von Pfaler as well as our colleagues who commented on the draft reports at different stages.

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March 2019

Executive summary

This study focuses on jihadist online communication in 2014–2018 from the perspective of Finland. In particular, it examines and analyses the visibility of Finland and persons connected to Finland in jihadist online communication and investigates the types of content persons who are or were living in Finland have produced and disseminated content on different online platforms and channels. The report focuses on jihadist material that was openly available online during this period. It also contains a section describing the development of jihadist online communication more generally, thus helping to put observations in a broader international context.

Up till the early 2010s, Finland was conspicuous by its almost total absence from jihadist content. This situation changed in the early stages of the conflict in Syria, at which time jihadist online communication became more prolific in Western countries. Around the same time, Finland also became visible in international jihadist discussions for the first time. During the early years of the conflict, the volume of jihadist online communication related to Finland was higher than ever before. This volume should not be exaggerated, however, as the quantity of online communication linked to Finland remained relatively small by international comparison.

Finland has been mentioned and persons coming from Finland have appeared a number of times in ISIS publications and videos. Persons originating from Finland have mainly featured in stories and videos intended for the Western public in a wider sense. In ISIS publications, Finland is also cited as one on the long list of the organisation's enemies and a heathen country where orthodox Muslims are not understood.

References to Finland in jihadist groups' publications have been few and far between, and they do not add up to a clear picture of Finland as an important target. It is likely that ISIS has used persons from Finland in jihadist publications and videos mainly to target its communication at broader Western audiences. Numerous persons originating from other Western countries also appear in similar stories and videos. These stories and videos offer a new point of comparison, however, which may make identification with jihadist activity seem more natural also in Finland. At this stage, the actual impact this has ultimately had on the development of jihadism in Finland should be considered as an open question.

In addition to established jihadist groups, jihadist online content has also been produced independently by their supporters. Many of those who have travelled to Syria and Iraq from Finland have been active on the social media. In addition to everyday messages typical of social media discussions, this activity has included

reporting on local conditions, responding to questions, and also encouraging others to go to Syria or Iraq. The communication has also contained some threats against Finland and, for example, against Shia Muslims. While the preferred channels for these activities appear to have been Facebook and Twitter, such content was also found on other discussion platforms.

Persons who are and were living in Finland have disseminated and, in some cases, also produced jihadist content in the Finnish language. The majority of the content available and distributed outside the social media, including on websites and in blogs or online discussion forums, has been translated from other languages. The volume of Finnish content has been quite modest, and as far as we can conclude, it is unlikely to have attracted a large number of readers.

The volume of open jihadist online communication has dropped significantly in the last three years, as technology companies have started actively deleting content inciting or advocating violence. Apart from a few exceptions, the content discussed in this study is no longer available online. The golden days of open jihadist online communication are now mostly over, and this also applies to content related to Finland or provided in Finnish. While online content related to Finland has almost completely disappeared from public platforms, this does not mean that it no longer exists elsewhere. As disseminating such content publicly has become more difficult, jihadist online communication has moved to closed and encrypted channels. The study found signs indicating that jihadist content related to Finland has been shared and interaction associated with it has also occurred, and may occur still, on these closed and encrypted channels.

The impact of jihadist online communication on Finland is not limited to content directly linked to Finland, and content in which "Finland is mentioned" in some way is not always automatically the most significant for Finland. Online communication is produced in countless other languages, and it is frequently also consumed in languages other than the audience's native language. Rather than living in the same country, the producers and consumers of jihadist online communication typically are part of the complex online milieu of international movements.

Interpersonal relationships, even highly significant ones, may be established through online communication. This possibility may facilitate attachment to jihadist activity, especially for people for whom it is difficult to find persons with a similar ideological predisposition close by. At the same time it should be noted that, according to research findings, face-to-face interaction still almost always plays a significant role in recruitment to jihadist activism.

1   Introduction

In his book titled *The Management of Savagery* (2004), Abu Bakr Naji [1], a key strategist of modern jihadism, declared that the global jihadist movement should exploit the new opportunities provided by new media to wage psychological warfare against Western countries. This book has provided extensive inspiration for the current wave of violent terrorism.[2] Around the same time Abu Musab al Suri, one of al-Qaeda's strategic thinkers, also proposed in his book *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* a new type of information warfare, in which communication technology would be used to spread the message of the movement and drum up support for it.[3] It is likely that the general public is more familiar, however, with the new generation of jihadist communication as violent videos and online recruitment by ISIS encouraging young people to Syria and Iraq have gained wider publicity.[4]

The new opportunities offered by the social media have had a crucial impact on the development of jihadist activity in Europe. Content inciting violence that can be easily accessed on the Internet and the possibilities for interaction offered by the social media are considered one of the reasons for thousands of young people travelling to the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq. The new communication channels have also been used in numerous terrorist attacks in an attempt to amplify the psychological shock effect of violent attacks by such means as social media campaigns and live streaming on Facebook.[5]

While the countermeasures of the authorities and technology companies have succeeded in reducing the volume of jihadist content publicly available online and on the social media in recent years, terrorist organisations have also shown an ability to

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[1] In this report, Arabic names and terms have been written with the established spellings used in the news. For terms that do not as yet have established spellings in Finnish public discussion, the spellings used in English research literature have been selected. For names that organisations, media or persons use of themselves (such as foreign fighters' noms de guerre), the spelling preferred by the relevant party is used.

[2] See Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass* (Cambridge, Mass.: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, 2006), https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf.

[3] See e.g. M.W. Zackie Masoud, "An Analysis of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's "Call to Global Islamic Resistance", *Journal of Strategic Security 6*, no 1 (2013), 1–18. A good general review of relevant academic literature can also be found in Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Nick Khaderbhai, *Research perspectives on online radicalisation: A Literature Review 2006–2016* (VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2017).

[4] Charlie Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy* (London: Quilliam, 2015).

[5] Maura Conway and Joseph Dillon, *Case study: future trends: live-streaming terrorist attacks* (VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2017), http://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/Live-streaming_FINAL.pdf.

adapt their operating methods to the rapidly changing digital media environment. Encrypted messaging services, including Telegram, have grown in popularity as means of distributing content and recruiting supporters.[6] Researchers have also warned of the increasing use of the "darknet" in planning violent attacks and disseminating online communication supporting them.[7]

Historically, Finland's role in international jihadism has been marginal. This has also been true of jihadist communication, whether we mean references to Finland, the volume of content produced in Finnish, or the role of persons living in Finland who have produced or disseminated content. In recent years, however, there have been indications of a change in this situation. While Finland's role remains clearly marginal, persons who have lived in Finland have been seen in ISIS videos and publications, for example, and jihadist content has been available in Finnish on the Internet.

The purpose of this research project was to examine the links between jihadist online communication and Finland. This is the first study on the subject conducted in Finland. The report also aims to serve as a more extensive introduction to the development of jihadist online communication for those who are not yet familiar with the discussion and literature on this topic in the Finnish context.[8]

The study was commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior with the purpose of supporting efforts to prevent violent extremism. It was produced simultaneously with the study on jihadist activism and Finland presented in the report *Jihadism in Finland* and carried out by the same research group.

1.1   Research topic and objectives

In this report, we use the term jihadist online communication to refer to the object of the study. The study focuses on (Salafi) jihadist communication which accepts the use of violence and the actors and networks producing and disseminating it. In short,

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[6] Ahmat Shehabat and Teodor Mitew, "Black-boxing the Black Flag: Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution Tactics", *Perspectives of Terrorism* 12, no 1 (2018), 81–99.
[7] Gabriel Weinmann, "Terrorist Migration to the Dark Web", *Perspectives of Terrorism* 10, no 3 (2016), 40–44.
[8] Useful works on the topic in more general terms include Christina Archetti, *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media: A Communication Approach* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Akil Awan, Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *Radicalisation and Media: Connectivity and Terrorism in the New Media Ecology* (London: Routledge, 2011); Anne Aly, Stuart Mcdonald, Lee Jarvis and Tomas Chen, *Violent Extremism Online: New Perspectives on Terrorism and the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2016).

jihadism in this report refers to the activity and ideology of such movements as al-Qaeda and ISIS. For a more extensive discussion of the history, objectives and worldview of jihadist movements and their relationship with a number of other phenomena, see the report *Jihadism in Finland*.

In this context, online communication refers to communication intended to promote jihadist ideology and/or to support actors and networks disseminating it. The study focuses on content of this type, particularly on the Internet and social media. In academic research, the term *violent online political extremism* is often used to describe such content.[9] This includes the communication of violent movements themselves as well as content sympathetic to such movements produced independently by their supporters.

Jihadist movements engage in many types of activities online, including fundraising. However, this study only focuses on that part of communication which is targeted at a wider public or supporters and which thus presumably strives to attract more extensive attention to the movement's activities, or to recruit more people to violent activity or otherwise support it. In other words, rather than analysing the internal communication of jihadist groups (related to planning attacks or coordinating their activities, for example), the study focuses on communication that has been publicly available online. The analysed content includes communication between supporters which is easily visible to outsiders (e.g. threads under open social media accounts).

In keeping with the commission, the objective of the study is to map the online communication of jihadist movements and networks with particular reference to Finland, as well as to explore the way in which this communication has changed in recent years. As this is a highly international phenomenon, the report also contains an extensive background section, which describes the international development and main features of jihadist communication in more general terms.

The focus on Finland means that particular subjects of the study are a) content produced in or translated into Finnish, b) participation of persons who live/have lived in Finland in producing and disseminating content, and c) content that discusses Finland, Finnish society and politics, and persons who live or have lived in Finland. The study also contains analyses of the type of jihadist content relevant to Finland that has been discussed in Finnish-language media.

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[9] See e.g. the VOX-Pol network's description of the term "violent online political extremism: www.voxpol.eu/about.

The key questions of the study are:

- How have Finland and Finnish people been discussed in jihadist online communication?

- What type of content has been produced and disseminated by persons who live, or have lived, in Finland? Which channels have been used for this?

- What were the key messages of the produced and disseminated content? What type of images were used in the communication? How does the communication discuss issues and events that relate to Finland in more general terms?

- In keeping with the commission, the main focus of the study is on the period 2014–2018. It also looks at a few preceding years, during which the publicly available content was more prolific and/or easier to find. The study mainly concentrates on Finnish and English content, which has the potential to reach the widest target audience in Finland. The study also contains a more limited discussion of content published in other languages.

- Persons living/having lived in Finland refer to all inhabitants of Finland, including the so-called native Finns. Numerous people of Finnish birth and with Finnish roots have participated in jihadist activism in Finland in general as well as in jihadist online communication.

- The study does not take a stand on what should be done about jihadist online communication. Neither does it deal with the detailed content of the communication and, for example, the way in which persons who travelled to Syria and Iraq themselves justified the reasons for their decisions and their religious and political views. An earlier study already exists on the latter theme.[10] The objective of this study was to provide an overview of jihadist online communication linked to Finland.

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[10] Marko Juntunen, Karin Creutz-Sundblom & Juha Saarinen, *Suomesta Syyrian ja Irakin konfliktikentälle suuntautuva liikkuvuus*. Publication series of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities no 43/2016.

1.2   Previous research

While jihadist communication emerged more extensively as a topic of public discussion in Finland along with the media visibility attracted by ISIS, the roots of this phenomenon go back to the time before Internet and social media use became widespread. Examples include tapes used to spread the sermons of spiritual leader Khomeini during the Iranian revolution, which contributed to the formation of the ideological foundation of the Islamist revolution in the country.[11] Al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri also became known in the 1990s and 2000s for distributing videos and tapes among their supporters and, through them, also to international news channels.[12]

When talking about jihadist communication today, however, we usually refer to the more widespread use of the Internet and social media for jihadist movements' communicative purposes. Research in this topic has been exceptionally active in the last five years. Studies have looked at the media use of different jihadist movements (especially al-Qaeda and ISIS) and its role in their activities, including spreading religious doctrines, dissemination of educational and teaching materials, information acquisition, fundraising, planning of attacks, recruitment of fighters and attracting new supporters.[13]

Research in jihadist communication has drawn from the theories and methods of a number of different disciplines, including political research, criminology, history, sociology and media research. Research in this subject has been particularly active in the United States, the Great Britain and France, where jihadist activity has had a more prominent role in both public discussion and policy-making than in countries such as Finland.

No research that maps this phenomenon from the Finnish perspective has so far been conducted. Research in jihadism and Finland has in general been virtually non-existent. References to jihadist communication in Finnish publications have so far been almost exclusively limited to some comments issued by the Finnish Security Intelligence Service and news items published when Finland has been cited or persons who had lived in Finland have appeared in jihadist communication.

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[11] Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution* (St. Paul: Minnesota University Press, 1994).
[12] Flagg Miller, *The Audacious Ascetic: What the Bin Laden Tapes Reveal About al-Qaʾida* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015). See also Martin Rudner, "Electronic Jihad: The Internet as Al Qaeda's Catalyst for Global Terror", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no 1 (2010), 10–23.
[13] See e.g. Aly et al., *Violent Extremism Online.*

It has also been typical of research in jihadism in Europe in a broader context that it either focuses on such activity at the international level or looks at developments mainly in those countries that have traditionally had the strongest jihadist networks (especially France and the Great Britain). Research in countries on the periphery of this activity (such as Finland), on the other hand, has been far less active. Studies in which jihadist communication is examined from the specific perspective of a certain country have also been few and far between. For these reasons, this study is rather exceptional in the field of academic research.

1.3   Data and methods

Researching jihadist movements is rarely easy because violent groups are unwilling to reveal details about their activities to outsiders. Researching jihadist communication intended for the general public is slightly easier, as it focuses on the very part of the movements' activity to which they wish to draw attention. When we move from the content of the communication to its producers and its methods of dissemination, however, we soon encounter the data challenges typical of research in jihadism.

Jihadist online communication had its short golden era around the period extending from 2013 to 2015. In the early years of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, jihadist communication on the social media proliferated rapidly, and especially pro-ISIS content was widely and quite openly available on such channels as Twitter and Facebook. This offered researchers unique possibilities for studying the content and social networks, as the authorities paid much less attention to this content in the early days than they did only a few years later. During this period, researchers were able to collect unique primary data on the activities and communication strategies of different jihadist movements on a much larger scale than ever before.

The situation has since changed significantly, as much more stringent monitoring of social media content has been introduced, and authorities and technology companies have become very quick in removing content inciting violence. This is why content from the years of prolific jihadist social media communication is no longer publicly available, and new content is equally difficult to access. New content continues to be published and disseminated on the social media with new profiles, but this content is removed as soon as it goes up, and consequently it is not only difficult to find for research purposes but also relatively insignificant, given its short life span.

Rather than ending completely, however, jihadist communication in the online environment has increasingly moved to closed, encrypted channels. Forming a

comprehensive overview of the content and users of these channels is extremely difficult. In order to follow the types of content and uses found on these encrypted channels, profiles covering the researcher's identity and profession and often also active participation in the discussions are required. This raises difficult questions in terms of research ethics and requires high amounts of time and resources.[14] Monitoring social medial discussions has thus been a full-time job for researchers in this field for many years. Such understanding and experience acquired over the years has been quite essential for an ability to follow the discussions in the current, rapidly changing jihadist media environment. The restricted access to the content has been a particularly acute challenge when studying jihadist online communication related to countries like Finland, as in these cases the volume of content is low to begin with.

Not only is the content more difficult to access but its use is also hampered by the fact that technology companies have imposed more stringent practices on sharing open data with researchers. Previously, social media content was much easier to access as it could be downloaded directly through the application programming interfaces (APIs) of different social media companies (including Twitter or Facebook). This method allowed for the collection of large-scale social media data for research purposes. In practice, it meant that public social media content could be downloaded automatically, for example from Twitter or Facebook, using different search words without having to first save the content manually as screen captures or in other ways and going through it post by post. This has now become considerably more difficult, hampering especially the acquisition of the large data sets important for research purposes and the use of research methods requiring larger data sets.[15]

The following data were used in this study:

- Social media profiles – this includes Facebook profiles and Twitter activity of fighters who left Finland for Syria and Iraq. Whereas a small part of this content is still available online, most of it came from the researchers' personal archives. The researchers also had access to social media content collected by Sara Rigatelli, an Yle reporter, who has actively followed the accounts of foreign fighters.

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[14] See e.g. Nico Prucha, "IS and the Jihadist Information Highway – Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram", *Perspectives of Terrorism* 10, no 6, (2010), 48–58.
[15] Joe Whittaker, *Methodological Problems in Online Radicalisation* (VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2017), https://www.voxpol.eu/methodological-problems-online-radicalisation/.

- International Twitter archives – The researchers had access to international Twitter archives. The most extensive one of these is TRAC's Shadows of ISIS data set containing 9.3 million tweets related to ISIS.

- Finnish online forums – This part of the data consists of Finnish online forums and websites on which jihadist content was published in 2014–2018 (including *An-Nida*). Most of this content has also since been taken down, and content stored in the researchers' personal archives was thus used. The data has been complemented by using archive.org.

- Jihadist movements' own media production – For the purposes of this study, some of the best-known key jihadist online magazines, videos etc. were examined, with a particular focus on ISIS media production directed at Western audiences (e.g. *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*, *Al-Amaq*, *Al-Naba* and *Inspire*).

- Videos – the content studied also includes videos. Most of these videos have been or are still available on YouTube or similar video services and in researchers' archives. The videos were mainly identified on the basis of social media profiles, news coverage and interviews.

To support the analysis of the data, the following sources were used in addition to research literature:

- Interviews – Interviews with Muslim community members and public authorities, among others, conducted together with the *Jihadism in Finland* study. Additionally, leading international researchers of jihadist online communication were consulted to find out what aspects linked to Finland have emerged in their data.

- Legal documents – The study also examined documents related to court proceedings and criminal investigations to the extent they addressed the suspects' Internet and social media use.

- News content in mainstream media – Features on content and links related to Finland in jihadist online communication found in key Finnish news media were collected for the study. The studies *Jihadist online communication and Finland* and *Jihadism in Finland* worked together to acquire this content. The study also included an analysis of how Finland has been represented in the main-stream Arabic-language media in the Middle East.

1.4   Limitations of the study

The study aimed to produce as comprehensive and careful an analysis as was possible within the limits of the available resources. At the same time, it is obvious that many gaps in our knowledge remain to be filled by future research projects.

The most important limitations affecting the study originate from the difficulties of obtaining data described above. While the researchers had access to a high volume of social media content that is no longer available online, it is unlikely to cover all the content related to Finland that was posted online. In practice, this limitation is relevant to all historical research in which jihadist social media data is used and where it was not possible to collect the data for the needs of the project before the more stringent practices were introduced. The use of archived material creates additional challenges in terms of research methodology, as it only provides a limited sample of social media threads, which often are dynamic and change rapidly. Additionally, analysing social media posts and 'likes' based on archived material is much more difficult and restrictive.

Another limitation of the study was its focus on openly available content. This means that online communication on closed channels, which today have an important role, was excluded from the study. While research on communication on closed channels is undeniably important, we should at the same time be aware of the fact that the closed channels are a different form of communication also from the perspective of the jihadist movements themselves. The difficulties associated with tracing and following the content described above also apply to the potential audiences of jihadist online communication. Discussions on Telegram, for example, often cannot be followed unless you receive a link or an invitation to the right channels and groups.[16] Moreover, these numerous channels and groups are in constant flux. Consequently, the visibility and accessibility of content produced through Telegram, for instance, are essentially more restricted and disseminating such content is more difficult than it was on Facebook and especially Twitter. This has also been noted by supporters of jihadism on Telegram. In practice, stricter monitoring of the social media has driven actors with

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[16] The channels of the Telegram messaging app are intended for receiving messages, and they can only be used by the administrators of these channels when communicating with their followers. Group chats, on the other hand, are discussions in which all members can participate. Groups further include normal groups (up to 200 members) and supergroups (up to 100,000 members). Additionally, both of these group types may be either public (they can be found by search engines) or closed (channels or groups that cannot be found without a precise address). Telegram also has a chat feature through which the members can engage in encrypted communication. For a useful review of the realities of research related to Telegram, see Mia Bloom, Hicham Tiflati and John Horgan, "Navigating ISIS's Preferred Platform", *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2017).

ISIS and al-Qaeda sympathies back to closed discussion forums, or their own 'echo chambers', which many of them experience as unfortunate.

In other words, the use of closed channels has made online communication more fragmented and probably less effective in reaching wider audiences. Furthermore, the communication mostly comprises interaction between those who already are involved in the activities. On Telegram, assessing the number and identities of those following the chats is also made more difficult by the fact that a significant number of subscribers to jihadist channels are likely to be researchers, journalists and intelligence service representatives.[17]

1.5   Research ethics

In research conducted in keeping with academic principles, questions of research ethics must always also be addressed. Careful consideration of research ethics is particularly essential when the research concerns societally sensitive topics. This project follows the research ethics principles of human sciences, as does its sister project on jihadism in Finland. A preliminary evaluation of both projects was requested from the University of Helsinki Ethical Review Board in the Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences.

In terms of its methods and data, the study involves rather commonplace social science research in many ways. In the use and storage of interview material, principles discussed in greater detail in the report *Jihadism in Finland* were followed. In addition, the way Internet and social media content should be handled in this report needed to be considered carefully. While the social media and Internet content used in it originally was public and thus openly accessible, in this report all content collected from such sources is discussed anonymously and without revealing information that would violate the privacy of individuals. An exception to this rule is made for persons whose participation in jihadist activism already is public knowledge and confirmed, and persons who have appeared with their real name in openly

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[17] See e.g. Bart Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism, 2007–2016: A Review of Data, Methods, and Authorship", T*errorism and Political Violence* (2018)*;* also Deven Parekh, Amarnath Amarasingam, Lorne Dawson, Derek Ruths, "Studying Jihadists on Social Media: A Critique of Data Collection Methodologies", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no 3 (2018), 5–23.

available online content produced by them. In this respect, the study follows the established practices of Internet research.[18]

This report also uses some images to illustrate themes and features associated with jihadist online communication. All images contained in the report have already been distributed widely, and some have also been published by mainstream media. However, we have consciously avoided using the most shocking images (including the brutal communication and execution videos of ISIS). We have also avoided long quotations where including them in the report would not bring added value to the study.

These principles are in keeping with the objectives of the study. The purpose of the study is to provide an overview of the relationship between jihadist online communication and Finland, rather than to investigate individuals' participation in these activities or to engage in detailed textual or image analysis.

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[18] Annette Markham and Elisabeth Buchanan, "Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)", *Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR)* (2012), https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf.

2 Jihadist online communication as an international phenomenon

In this Chapter, we look at research evidence related to jihadist online communication in a broader context. We begin by providing a short review of historical background and describe how various jihadist groups have previously used different media forms and channels to promote their goals and ideology. We then discuss the online communication of three jihadist groups that have attracted attention in Finland -- al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and ISIS --and their special features. Finally, we summarise research findings regarding the role of online communication in radicalisation of persons who become involved in jihadism and provide an overview of the current developments in jihadist online communication and potential future trends.

2.1 Jihadist online communication and the changing media environment

The development of jihadist online communication has followed the opportunities offered by a changing media environment. While the digital media environment has undergone dramatic changes in the last few decades, so have the communicative practices of jihadist movements. The development of jihadist online communication can be roughly divided into four phases based on the platforms and types of communication which have been prevalent.[19] Rather than being mutually exclusive, however, these phases have often overlapped. Many platforms created earlier have continued to operate, including websites or online forums, while the social media or encrypted messaging services have emerged as key forms of communication.

The earliest phase in jihadist online communication comprised so-called static websites, which were the most common form of online communication for jihadist movements in the early 2000s. These sites offered movement leaders a means to disseminate their message wider than what would have been possible before the proliferation of online communication and the social media. The sites were often hierarchic, however, and they mainly served as a platform for distributing textual content (e.g. ideological pamphlets, religious sermons and reports from war zones) and a channel through which the leaders could disseminate their message to those outside the inner circle. The early websites did not offer similar extensive

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[19] Meleagrou-Hitchens and Khaderbhai, Research perspectives on Online Radicalisation, 38–49.

opportunities for acting anonymously or participating in personal discussions as online forums and especially the social media did later on. The websites were also relatively easy to supervise, and they were vulnerable to the countermeasures of authorities and service providers.[20]

The next phase saw the introduction of online forums. They enabled two-way interaction between activists in jihadists movements and those interested in the movements. Online forums also allowed supporters to talk to likeminded people around the world and thus create more extensive global networks around ideological aspirations. In particular, the possibility for anonymous communication provided by online forums facilitated group activities in online environments. Online forums created completely new opportunities for building a feeling of togetherness among the 'virtual' community. Anonymous communication, on the other hand, made it possible to safely discuss topics that could otherwise lead to countermeasures, especially in cases where the identity of the participants involved in the discussions would be revealed to authorities.[21] Unlike the early static websites, many of the discussion forums had content not only in Arabic but also increasingly in English and other Western languages. This allowed the movements to spread their communication and activities more widely in the international context and especially among Muslims living in Western countries.

The use of online forums and chatrooms associated with them reached its peak in the mid-2000s. For example, many themes and strategies that later took on a key role in jihadist online communication, including "open source jihad", (providing supporters with encouragement and guidance in carrying out attacks on their own devices without direct links to the movements' leaders) originate from discussions on such forums. While the earlier static websites served rather as the official communication channels of movement leaders, these online forums contributed to removing the prior elitism and hierarchies of jihadist communication by making it available for ordinary supporters and discussions between them.[22]

Blogs were another version of these online platforms supporting discussions, which were used to disseminate jihadist content especially by individual persons. Since the mid-2000s, in particular, blogs and content management systems that facilitated their

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[20] Meleagrou-Hitchens and Khaderbhai, Research perspectives on Online Radicalisation, 39–40.
[21] See also Thomas Hegghammer, "Interpersonal Trust on Jihadi Internet Forums", in Diego Gambetta (ed.) *Fight, Flight, Mimic: Identity Signalling in Armed Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[22] Aaron Zelin, *The State of Global Jihad Online* (Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation 2013); see also Akil Awan, "Radicalization on the Internet? The Virtual Propagation of Jihadist Media and its Effects", *The RUSI Journal* 152, no 3 (2007), 76–81; Meleagrou-Hitchens ja Khaderbhai, *Research perspectives on Online Radicalisation*, 40–42.

creation, including Wordpress, offered for many supporters an easy and often anonymous way of setting up websites and sharing content through them.

The third phase, or more widespread social media use in the activities of different groups, brought along significant changes. Especially the rapid spread of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube use since the 2010s offered unprecedented opportunities for reaching larger audiences anonymously, with smaller resources and faster than what was possible a few years earlier. Facebook and the new possibilities for chatting and sharing content facilitated the creation of new types of connections between those interested in the ideology and supporters who were already active, which in its turn enabled the dissemination of information to new audiences and target groups. Twitter offered a similar possibility of spreading a message rapidly to a large audience while also providing for the interested readers links to other content providers on the web where material was still available. YouTube also enabled the effortless dissemination of visual content, including videos, as well as an opportunity to discuss the videos in the comments.[23]

As ISIS supporters travelled to Syria and Iraq, this opened up more new possibilities for online interaction. Supporters from around the world were able to share the movement's content more widely across the globe and personally recruit new supporters on social media platforms. ISIS media production (videos, memes and newsletters), in particular, became known for its diverse ways of producing different types of content and targeting it at a variety of countries and audiences.[24] Social media use reached its peak in 2013–2015. While social media continues to be used quite commonly for this purpose, extensive countermeasures have made it much more difficult to share jihadist content, especially in English.

Today, jihadist communication has been fragmented across a number of channels, which in many cases are encrypted and not publicly available. Telegram messaging service have become a particularly popular platform for communicating with supporters and disseminating content, whereas supporters of jihadist movements have also used other similar encrypted messaging services, such as SureSpot, Kik, Wire, Signal and WhatsApp. Two new trends have also emerged in this phase, which differ from the ways in which jihadist groups have previously operated online. The first one is the so-called virtual plotter activity, in which fighters of a movement based in Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan have been able to coordinate attacks in Western countries

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[23] See Gabriele Weimann, *New Terrorism and New Media*, Research Series 2 (Washington, D.C.: Commons Lab of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2014).
[24] See e.g. Charlie Winter and Dounia Mahlouly, *A Tale of Two Caliphates: Comparing the Islamic State's Internal and External Messaging Priorities* (VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2018), https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/A-Tale-of-Two-Caliphates-Mahlouly-and-Winter.pdf.

via Telegram.[25] Good examples of these are high-profile terrorist attacks in Europe in recent years, including the attack at the Christmas fair in Berlin and live streaming of murders of priests in Normandy in 2016. As far as is currently known, ISIS was at least partly involved in the virtual plotting of both attacks.[26]

Another current trend is the increased use of content sharing platforms (such as justpaste.it, sendvid.com, dump.to) and the so-called grey web for disseminating content in order to evade countermeasures taken by authorities and companies. Rather than spreading content, social media channels including Twitter and Facebook (and increasingly also the messaging services Telegram and WhatsApp) now primarily serve as portals through which those who are interested can be guided to actual jihadist content. This content, in turn, is increasingly dispersed over different platforms which are more difficult to access and which usually cannot be found without a precise address.[27] Jihadist content can thus be hosted on these platforms without attracting wider attention. The storage of jihadist content is thus fragmented over numerous different platforms, and the content is difficult to delete permanently, as it can be rapidly re-posted at a different address.[28]

So far, we have discussed jihadist online communication as one homogeneous entity in this Chapter. In fact, there are significant differences between the online communication of jihadist groups depending on their goals, regional aspirations and resources. The history, politics, culture and media environment of their operational areas have to some extent influenced the means and objectives of their online communication. This makes it difficult to present more precise generalisations regarding a large-scale phenomenon which is linked to different movements operating in diverse conditions, such as Boko Haram in West Africa, al-Shabaab in Somalia, ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and Abu Sayyaf in the southern Philippines. We should also emphasise at this point that, when discussing the development of jihadist online

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[25] See e.g. Rukmini Callimachi, "Not 'Lone Wolves' After All: How ISIS Guides World's Terror Plots From Afar", *The New York Times*, 4.2.2017; Amarnath Amarasingam, "*An Interview with Rachid Kassem, Jihadist Orchestrating attacks in France*", Jihadology, 18.11.2016, https://jihadology.net/2016/11/18/guest-post-an-interview-with-rachid-kassim-jihadist-orchestrating-attacks-in-france/.

[26] See e.g. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Madeleine Blackman, "Virtual Planners: a Critical Terrorist Innovation", War on the Rocks (2017), https://warontherocks.com/2017/01/isils-virtual-planners-a-critical-terrorist-innovation/.

[27] See e.g. Shehabat and Mitew, "Black-boxing the Black Flag", 81–99; also Maura Conway at al., "*Disrupting Daesh: Measuring the Take-down of Online Extremist Material*" (VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2017), http://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/DCUJ5528-Disrupting-DAESH-1706-WEB-v2.pdf.

[28] The site justpaste.it, for example, is in practice run by a single person, which makes it more difficult to monitor its content on a large scale, unlike on such channels as Twitter or Facebook. Carmen Fishwick, "How a Polish student's website became an ISIS propaganda tool", *The Guardian* 15.8.2014.

communication, the focus in this Chapter is on developments and movements which have played a key role from the perspective of Western countries.

In the following section, open communication and publicly available content in the network of jihadist movements is illustrated in greater detail by discussing the media production of three such movements -- al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and ISIS.

In case of Al-Qaeda, perhaps the best-known example is the online magazine *Inspire* produced by the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), through which the organisation has sought to spread its ideology in Western countries and respond to large-scale military operations against the movement's leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan. Al-Shabaab, on the other hand, has developed its video and radio production in Somali to support the movement's activities in Somalia, and its media production in Swahili particularly for Kenya. Content produced by this group has also been spread online in other languages outside Somalia, among other things to recruit more followers.[29]

The media production of ISIS, however, has been the best known and largest in scale. While the international attention attracted by ISIS is undoubtedly to a great extent based on its military success in the areas of Syria and Iraq, it is equally due to the shocking videos produced by the organisation and the new and versatile way of using the social media for sharing content and attracting foreign fighters to the area. ISIS's media production and especially its innovative use of digital media are considered the prototype of the new forms of communication by armed groups, which many other groups have striven to copy.

2.2   Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda has traditionally played an important role in the development of jihadist communication. Whereas ISIS has in recent years been a forerunner in the tactical use of violent videos and social media, al-Qaeda was a pioneer of Internet use, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Many of the contemporary practices of jihadist online communication were inspired by al-Qaida's strategic thinkers who discussed the role of the new media and the Internet as part of the global jihadist movement's activities. The group's twenty-year strategic plan (2001–2020), "Military

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[29] See e.g. Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Shiraz Maher and James Sheehan, *Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy* (London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence ICSR, 2012). See also Christopher Anzalone, "The Resilience of al-Shabaab", *CTC Sentinel* 9, no 4 (2017), 13–20.

Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants", describes the group's aspirations to increase its global influence. A key element of the strategy was so-called electronic jihad, which meant the strategic use of the Internet in raising jihadist awareness, recruiting new supporters, training, fundraising and the groups' activities. For example, Yemen-based Anwar al-Awlaki, who was born in America and who inspired a number of attacks in Western countries, spoke about the need to create a new generation of 'Internet jihadists', who could spread the message and content of al-Qaeda, mobilise supporters and incite them to carrying out terrorist attacks through the Internet.[30]

Al-Qaeda's online communication around the mid-2000s was regarded as having three objectives. The first objective was creating online libraries and archives used for collecting and sharing the movement's key religious, ideological and military material. The second one was creating a platform through which the message of militant ideologists, such as Anwar al-Awlaki, could be disseminated widely. The third objective was developing jihadist websites and online forums, through which jihadist ideological discussions would be possible, activities could be planned and a spirit of togetherness could be built.[31]

Content sympathetic to Al-Qaeda has been spread online through a number of channels. One of these is As-Sahab Foundation for Islamic Media Publication established in 2001, which has operated as the official media production organisation of al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda has also often been linked to the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), which has produced large amounts of jihadist material and also translated it into Western languages, including German, English and French. It has also published such online video series as the one titled Voice of the Caliphate used in attempts to spread the organisation's message outside mainstream media channels since 2005. Both of these were particularly active in 2001–2007, although they have remained operative until recent years.[32]

The best-known form of al-Qaeda communication directed at the Western public probably is the aforementioned *Inspire* magazine, which first came out in 2010 and which was primarily disseminated as an electronic version online. Among other things, the magazine contained Osama bin Laden's speeches and detailed instructions on how, for example, the movement's supporters could participate in carrying out attacks

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[30] See e.g. Carl J. Ciovacco, "The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no 10 (2009), 853–875; or Haroro Ingram, "An Analysis of Inspire and Dabiq: Lessons from AQAP and Islamic State's Propaganda War", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no 5 (2016), 357–375.
[31] See e.g. Rudner, "Electronic Jihad", 10–23.
[32] Steven Stalinsky, *The Rise And Fall Of Al-Qaeda's 'Al-Sahab' Media Wing And Its American Architect* (Memri & Cyber-Jihad, 2017),   http://cjlab.memri.org/analysis-and-special-reports/the-rise-and-fall-of-al-qaedas-al-sahab-media-wing-and-its-american-architect/.

in Western countries without major military resources or coordination by the movement's leaders. Incitement to such activities, known as "open source jihad", was one of the magazine's key themes. Encouraging this type of violent activities was part of al-Qaeda's adjustment to the military defeats it experienced after 2001 (including in Iraq and Afghanistan) and the restrictions they created. This operating method has later been developed further by other jihadist movements, including ISIS, especially following losses of areas held by the organisation in recent years. The screen capture below from issue 13 of *Inspire* in 2014 is a good illustration of how such open source jihad operates.

Figure 1. Screen capture from al-Qaeda's Inspire magazine which, among other things, contains instructions for making bombs and avoiding airport security checks

2.3 Al-Shabaab

When al-Shabaab was established in the mid-2000s, its main purpose initially was to engage in regional fighting in Somalia. The group's early-stage communication mainly consisted of official bulletins and military reports, which were disseminated on different websites and news channels. This early-stage material was mainly produced in Arabic, and it contained descriptions of military operations and acts of violence. Al-Shabaab also started producing content in Somali as early as late 2006.

From the start, al-Shabaab also used websites in its communication, especially when targeting Somalis living outside the country. This purpose was served by such discussion forums as Ansar al-Mujahideen. The group soon started consciously using

media production as part of its aspirations to centralise power to itself. As the war continued and became more demanding, videos were also produced in an attempt to recruit foreigners and particularly expatriate Somali fighters to support its regional war efforts. Content production was coordinated by such groups as Echo of Jihad Center for Media (Markaz Sada al-Jihad li-I-l'lam), which has also been linked to al-Qaeda and the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), an organisation which supports the jihadist cause in more general terms.[33]

By 2009, the media production of this group had advanced considerably. It comprised audiovisual content and radio broadcasts produced in many different languages. In addition to French and English content, the group produced a magazine called *Gaidi Mtaani*, which mainly came out in Swahili but also contained English articles and through which the group attempted to recruit fighters, especially among the Muslim minority in East Africa. Many of the videos and other content produced by al-Shabaab contained themes typical of the global jihadist movement's communication, including reports on military victories, criticism of Western countries' actions (for example, in connection with the controversy related to the Mohammed cartoons published in Jyllands-Posten), descriptions of idyllic life in areas ruled by al-Shabaab, and recruitment and training of new supporters. The screen capture from the *Gaidi Mtaani* magazine (issue 4) illustrates al-Shabaab's communication strategy. In the article shown in the image, the magazine offers its own version of the attack at Westgate shopping mall, which took place in Kenya in 2013.

Other channels linked to al-Shabaab include or have included Al-Kataib Media Foundation which, among other things, produces various videos and bulletins about attacks, and Al-Katain News Channel, which broadcasts news about Somalia from the group's perspective, especially for audiences outside Somalia. Radio al-Andalus serves as the group's official radio channel within Somalia, and other media channels linked to the movement include al-Furgan Radio and Media. Shahada News Agency concentrates on disseminating information about the group's military actions and attacks. Such news networks as Somali MeMo and Calamada, which also continue to operate online, support the group. Al-Shabaab additionally has its own Twitter accounts which, particularly in 2009–2013, disseminated content sympathetic to the group. These accounts also became famous for being used for live tweets during the attack at Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi in 2013.[34]

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[33] See e.g. Christopher Anzalone, *Continuity and Change: the Evolution and Resilience of Al-Shabab's Media Insurgency, 2006–2016* (Hate Speech International: Investigating Extremism, 2016), https://www.hate-speech.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/email_722762_Readers.pdf.
[34] See e.g. David Mair, "#Westgate: A Case Study: How al-Shabaab used Twitter during an Ongoing Attack", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no 1 (2017), 24–43. See also Anzalone, *Continuity and Change*, 11.

Figure 2. A screen capture from al-Shabaab's Gaidi Mtaani online magazine reporting on the attack at Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi

Al-Shabaab's media production started to wind down after 2010, however, at which time the group also experienced large-scale military setbacks. Since it joined al-Qaeda, multilingualism and communication targeted at international audiences have been increasingly stressed in al-Shabaab's communication strategy. Its main purpose appears to be to recruit fighters and support from abroad as the movement has lost control of areas in Somalia and its activities have again taken on the characteristics of guerrilla warfare. Regardless of its losses, however, al-Shabaab remains active. Among other things, the group carried out another attack in Nairobi in January 2019 and continues to produce online content in order to boost its status.

2.4 ISIS

In recent years, ISIS has become known for its diverse media strategy drawing on new types of digital media techniques, through which the group has tailored its message to the needs of different audiences and maximised the recognisability of its

"brand"'.[35] The production and use of shockingly violent videos has been part of ISIS's communication strategy for some time. ISIS's predecessor, Muntada al-Ansar, published a video showing the execution of Nick Berg, an American businessman, already in 2004 as revenge for the Americans' actions in Iraq.[36] Since 2012, ISIS's media production has comprised films, videos, social media activity, newsletters and a monthly magazine that has been available both online and through smartphone apps. Unlike earlier jihadist communication, which often consisted of long speeches and religious sermons, ISIS videos have been more visually ambitious, of higher quality, and clearly intended to appeal to younger audiences. Many cinematographic and graphic techniques, images and filming styles adopted from games, and dramatic means of expression aiming to make the message easy to adopt and appealing to different target audiences are used in the group's media production. The screen captures below and on the following page from a film titled 'Flames of War', which appeared in English in 2014, are a good illustration of this 'Hollywood-style' visual look often intended for Western and young audiences.[37]

Figure 3. A screen capture from an ISIS video reflecting the high-quality visual look of the group's videos

[35] See e.g. Haroro Ingram, "Three Traits of the Islamic State's Information Warfare", *The RUSI Journal* 159, no 6 (2014), 4–11; Haroro Ingram, "The strategic logic of Islamic State information operations", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 69, no 6 (2015), 729–752.
[36] See e.g. "Zarqawi' beheaded US man in Iraq", *BBC News* 3 May 2004.
[37] See e.g. Meira Svirsky, "ISIS Releases 'Flames of War' Feature Film to Intimidate West", *Clarion Project* 21.9.2014. https://clarionproject.org/isis-releases-flames-war-feature-film-intimidate-west/.

Figure 4. A screen capture from an ISIS video in which the group's military might is highlighted visually with special effects and using several different camera angles

The longest-standing ISIS media organisation is Furqan Foundation for Media Production, which continues to operate and produce many types of material (CDs, DVDs, posters, official statements). This media machine has been expanded several times, for example through Al-I'tisam Media Foundation and Ajnad Foundation for Media Production. The latter mainly focus on audio communication and nasheed songs. In addition, Al Hayat Media Center tends to target its communication at Western audiences, and it produces content especially in English, German, Russian, and French. It has also published the magazine *Dabiq*, which has attracted a great deal of attention in Western countries, and its successor *Rumiyah*. These magazines mainly feature ISIS's content in which textual material predominates (e.g. stories of foreign fighters and interpretations of religious texts). ISIS also publishes the newspaper *Al-Naba* in Arabic. The news agency Amaq is ISIS's official news channel, which disseminates the organisation's news through different channels, including Telegram and mobile apps. The group also has an official radio channel, Al-Bayan, which broadcasts news of the group's activities in a number of languages.

Semi-official or unofficial media organisations, including Al-Batār Media Foundation, have also been linked to ISIS. While these organisations that support jihadismin a broader sense have produced plenty of pro-ISIS material, they have not been considered a part of ISIS's official communication machine.

ISIS's communication channels differ from each other regarding the type of content and target audiences. The Arabic communication of Al-Naba, for example, consists mainly of news stressing the practical aspects of building an Islamic state and daily war news. *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, on the other hand, are mainly intended for the international audience, and they contain articles emphasising the global dimension of the jihadist fight and in-depth discussions on ideological topics.[38] The diagram below describes the highly multidimensional media production linked to ISIS.[39]
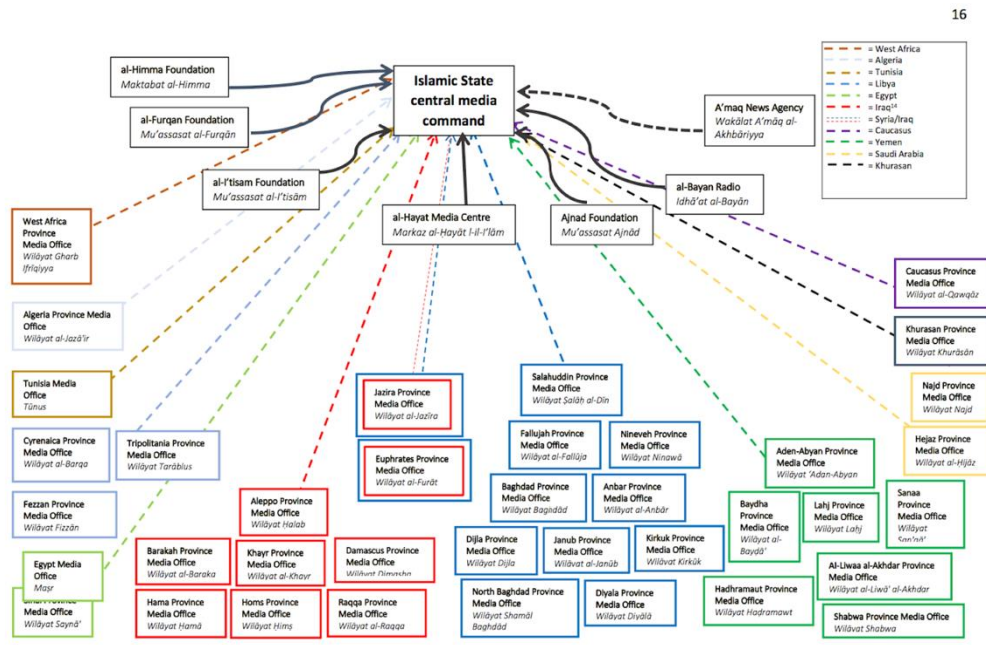
Figure 1

Figure 5. A diagram illustrating the structure of ISIS's media production[40]

Several different themes and narratives can be perceived in the content of ISIS's media production. The suffering of Sunni Muslims and especially children caused by Western countries' war efforts in the Middle East is a common theme. These stories strive to appeal to Muslims globally. Another frequent theme is highlighting the group's achievements and military power. This content often has pictures of dead soldiers, military patrols, training camps and battles. Their purpose is to raise a fighting spirit among sympathisers and attract new adventurous supporters to join the fight. It can also be thought to aim for a psychological effect by instilling fear in opponents.

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[38] Winter and Mahlouly, *A Tale of Two Caliphates*.
[39] Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate'*.
[40] Diagram from Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate'*, 16.

An aspect of ISIS's media production that has attracted a great deal of attention in Western countries is so-called brutal communication, through which the group has attempted to instil fear in its opponents, convince its supporters of its capabilities, and provoke its local enemies and the international media to pay attention to its activities. The best-known examples of these probably are the execution videos, in which a man nicknamed Jihadi John speaks in English directly to Western audiences, with the obvious intention of provoking media attention in the West and getting Western countries to react to the group's cruelty and violence. The use of English language and European fighters on the videos is further intended to emphasise the idea of ISIS as a dangerous enemy also within Europe, as its activities are not limited merely to the regional conflict in Iraq and Syria. This brutal communication often stresses the cruelty of ISIS and uses dramatic visual techniques, creating the image of a strong military might that does not hesitate to use any means against the infidels. The screen capture from an ISIS execution video below is an example of how ISIS creates an image of itself as a mighty opponent relentless towards its enemies.

Figure 6. A screen capture from an ISIS execution video as an example of the group's brutal communication[41]

As a counterbalance for communication focusing on violence and the suffering of Sunni Muslims, content depicting normal life in areas ruled by ISIS has also been produced. Harmonious life in a society organised according to the principles of Islam is specifically presented as a contrast to violence. The content repeatedly shows

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[41] A screen capture from Dashiell Bennett and Polly Mosendz, "New ISIS Video Reportedly Shows the Execution of British Hostage", *The Atlantic* 13 September 2014.

images of happy children, well-functioning infrastructure and agriculture. It also often contains encouraging descriptions of fighters who have moved to Syria and Iraq from around the world to serve ISIS.[42] The screen capture below is from a video titled 'Islamic State Caliphate Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah', which was published by ISIS in August 2014 and which shows images of daily life under ISIS in Syria.
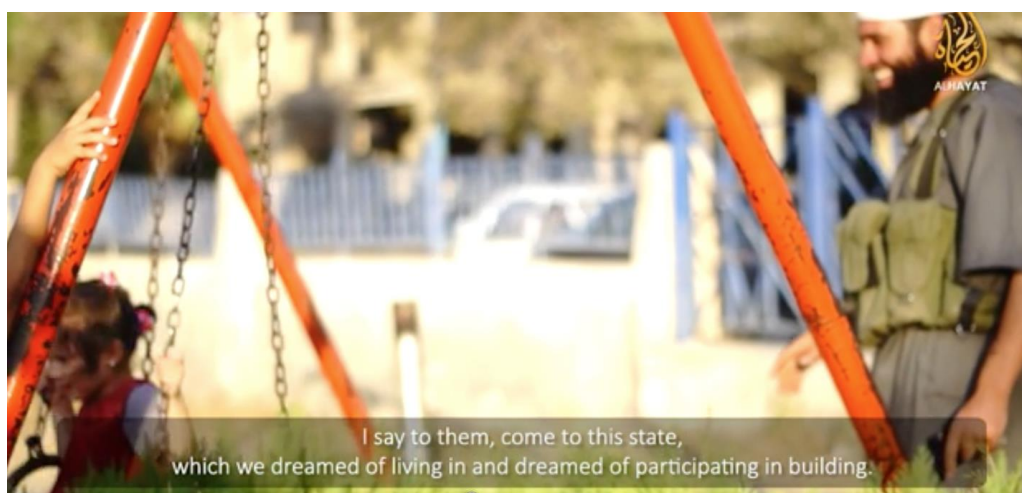

Figure 7. A screen capture from an ISIS video titled 'Islamic State Caliphate Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah' depicting daily life under ISIS

ISIS has also been active on the social media, where it has shared plenty of content in different forms and recruited supporters. These activities were particularly prolific in 2013–2015, a period in which researchers who charted the group's activities on Twitter found tens of thousands of pro-ISIS accounts around the globe.[43] Not all of them were directly linked to ISIS. Research indicates that in the pro-ISIS online milieu, many types of actors playing different roles can be identified, including militants and active producers and distributors of content (*disseminators*), supporters (*jihobbyists*) and passive consumers supporting the ideology (*fan boys*).[44] In practice, this has meant that content supporting ISIS was produced and shared not only by the organisation's own media activists and production machine but also a large unofficial

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[42] Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate'*.
[43] John M. Berger and Jonathan Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter* (Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings,The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, 2015).
[44] See e.g. Jarrett Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2008); Joseph Carter, Shiraz Maher and Peter R. Neumann, *#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation - ICSR, 2014).

network of supporters that emerged around it, which produced a great number of 'fan videos', memes and other content typical of social media inspired by ISIS but to a great extent outside its control.

Extensive countermeasures against ISIS and the social media profiles supporting it have since greatly disrupted pro-ISIS online communication.[45] A situation not unlike the Whack-a-Mole arcade game has emerged between those setting up Twitter accounts and those closing down extremist accounts: accounts supporting ISIS are taken down as soon as they appear on the social media.[46] In 2015–2016, for example, Twitter closed down 125,000 accounts supporting ISIS. In recent years, only sporadic activities have been observed, especially in Arabic or key Western languages.[47] In 2018, Twitter declared itself the winner of this Whack-a-Mole game, as its innovations allowed 94% of accounts supporting terrorism to be closed down automatically, and 74% of these accounts had already been taken down before they had time to disseminate a single message.[48]

While Twitter undeniably was a key communication channel for ISIS earlier, this does not necessarily hold true any longer. Whereas Twitter continues to play a role as part of the more extensive media environment linked to ISIS, the organisation's activities have found refuge in messaging services, such as Telegram, in which hundreds of different channels and groups have existed since 2016. Their content is often in Arabic, but material has also been translated into many Western languages. ISIS's official media production also continues to be published on Telegram.

2.5 Jihadist online content and violent radicalisation

Communication and interaction online and on the social media have many purposes for jihadist movements, and the opportunities offered by a changing media

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[45] See e.g. John M. Berger, *Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter: a Comparative Analysis of White Nationalists and ISIS Online Social Media Networks* (Washington, D.C.: GW Programme on Extremism, 2016), https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2371/f/downloads/Nazis%20v.%20ISIS%20Final_0.pdf.
[46] See e.g. Joseph Karam, T*witter, ISIS and Social Media Whack-a-Mole* (Foreign Policy Association, 2016), https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2016/02/09/twitter-isis-social-media-whack-mole/;
also Conway et al., *Disrupting Daesh*.
[47] In 2016, Twitter announced it had taken down 125,000 accounts sympathetic to ISIS during the year. See e.g. Danny Yadron, "Twitter deletes 125,000 ISIS accounts and expands anti-terror teams", *The Guardian* 5.2. 2016.
[48] See Natasha Lomas, "Twitter claims more progress on squeezing terrorist content", *Techcrunch* 5.4.2018, https://techcrunch.com/2018/04/05/twitter-transparency-report-12.

environment have influenced the movement's development in many ways. Many of these goals and influences have already been touched upon above. To conclude this Chapter, however, it is apt to discuss one of them in a broader context: the assumed role of social media communication in radicalisation.

The potential for so-called online radicalisation has been discussed many times in recent years, also in Finland: the possibility that a person adopts a jihadist mentality through the Internet and, consequently, starts independently planning violent attacks. While this threat of a person sitting at a computer alone, without attracting anyone's attention, and being radicalised enough to carry out violent attacks is a cause for concern from security authorities' perspective, research findings indicate that such cases are rare.

Online communication has undeniably changed jihadist activity in many ways. A link between the number of violent attacks and the widespread use of the Internet is difficult to prove, however. A study that analysed terrorist activities in 1990–2011 showed that increased Internet use has not resulted in growing terrorist activity. Research has shown that few of those who have carried out violent attacks alone can be regarded as having been radicalised exclusively based on online content and discussions. Research findings also indicate that the likelihood of attacks carried out by those who only communicate online with persons with a similar ideological predisposition is smaller than for those who additionally have had social contacts with such persons in real life.[49]

A great deal of research has been conducted in violent radicalisation in recent years. In this context, the role of jihadist online communication in the process of radicalisation has also been analysed. There are strong indications that Internet and social media use should always be seen in relation to activities offline. The social media complements rather than replaces social relationships in the real world.[50] On the other hand, Internet use may reinforce ideas already held by a person and complement existing social networks.[51] According to a theory, online communication is like a virtual glue binding together ideologically likeminded jihadist actors, also

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[49] See e.g. Paul Gill, John Horgan and Paige Deckert, "Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviour of Lone-Actor Terrorists", *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 59, no 2 (2014), 425–435.
[50] See Paul Gill, Maura Conway, Emily Corner and Amy Thornton, *What are the Roles of the Internet in Terrorism? Measuring Online Behaviours of Convicted UK Terrorists* (VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2015).
[51] See e.g. Ines von Behr, Charlie Edwards, Luke Gribbon and Anais Reding, *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Brussels: Rand Europe, 2013), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR453.html.

those who do not have strong ties or links in the non-virtual world.[52] Internet and social media platforms have thus served as a 'jihadisphere', which has enabled jihadist communication inciting violence to spread across the globe faster and more extensively than what was possible before the Internet or the social media existed.

Supported by these observations, academic research has increasingly rejected the 'internet-centric' approach in favour of a more all-round analysis of the social networks and relationships online. The new approach sees Internet and social media use as part of complex interaction between online and real-world offline activities.

Radicalisation is the sum total of many factors, and social networks play a key role in it. While the Internet may lead people more easily and faster than before to movements and actors that incite violence, they do not replace personal contacts. In most cases, transition towards actual acts of violence or acceptance of such acts can happen more easily only when personal contacts with activists in violent movements have been established.

The Internet and social media thus serve, above all, as channels for establishing contacts that are significant in violent radicalisation and in forming personal relationships that play a key role in it. The initial contact between individuals interested in such ideas and active supporters may take place on social media channels, including Twitter or Facebook, or currently more often on Telegram or even online gaming platforms and the chatrooms associated with them.[53] In this initial phase, however, the participants usually merely share ideological and religious material. Only when the interested individuals move on to more restricted discussion channels and begin to communicate with active members of violent movements in person are they offered material directly inciting violence and urged to participate in the groups' violent activities. At the same time, interpersonal relationships may be established, which often play a key role in participation in violent acts.[54]

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[52] See e.g. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Marc Sageman, "The Next Generation of Terror", *Foreign Policy* 8 October 2009, http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/08/the-next-generation-of-terror/.
[53] Seamus Hughes, Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Bennet Clifford, "A New American Leader Rises in ISIS", *The Atlantic* 13 January 2018.
[54] John M. Berger, "Tailored Online Interventions: The Islamic State's Recruitment Strategy", *CTC Sentinel* 8, no 10 (2015), 19–23.

2.6   Future trends in jihadist online communication

What, then, does the future of jihadist online communication look like from a researcher's perspective? Attempts to disseminate jihadist content online will certainly also be made in the future, as jihadist activity is not expected to subside either in Western countries or globally over the next few years. The forms of online communication and the platforms used for it are likely to develop in pace with the potential offered by advancement in communication technology and the Internet also in the future. Various users find their way to evolving technologies and platforms and changing modes of using them without delay, and jihadist activity is no exception. In the last twenty years, jihadist online communication has moved from websites and forums to the social media and encrypted messaging services.

Similarly, the future trends of jihadist online communication will continue to reflect the more large-scale changes in the digital media environment. Perhaps the most important trend is related to the more widespread use of encrypted channels not only in society in general but also for disseminating jihadist content in particular and in the activities emerging around it. As a result of countermeasures taken by the authorities and technology companies, it has been obvious for some time now that jihadist communication cannot operate on public sites or on conventional social media as it did before. These activities will become even more difficult as technologies for the identification and extensive deletion of content based on new systems helped by artificial intelligence advance.[55] This means that jihadist content is likely to move increasingly to the so-called *deep web* or *darknet*, where it can still be hosted in large quantities and, if necessary, shared with those who show an interest.

In addition to the public Internet, a great volume of content and many websites exist which are either password protected or cannot be accessed by search engines. Studies show that this 'deep web' is much larger than the publicly available Internet, and it provides many services that are not in the search engines' registers, including several content sharing platforms. In addition, there is the 'darknet', which can only be accessed by means of software that automatically removes all identifying data of the user (including the computer's IP address). As this section of the web is very difficult to access and monitor, it is also used for unlawful commerce and dissemination of illegal content (e.g. child pornography). Researchers' initial findings

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[55] Facebook reports that it already removes approx. 99% of content related to terrorism, mainly by using algorithms. "Facebook's AI wipes terrorism-related posts", *BBC* 29 November 2017.

indicate that these encrypted sites are increasingly used to also spread jihadist content or to recruit supporters.[56]

This does not mean that jihadist actors would be expected to abandon the use of the public Internet. As we have already seen, the first contact between supporters and members of violent movements is still often established on the public Internet. It is highly probable that the publicly accessible communication channels will continue to serve as a meeting point of this type, from where interested persons are rapidly directed to the darknet and/or encrypted channels, however, on which more active communication and recruitment can take place. In addition, the darknet may serve as a new clearing house for jihadist content, always finding a new alternative place to be accessed from as content is taken down.

Researchers have recently speculated how such terrorist groups as ISIS will adapt to the extensive countermeasures of the authorities and technology companies. A transition to decentralised online platforms is predicted to be one of the potential trends. Researchers have warned that especially communication platforms based on new blockchain technology, such as Riot, will offer new ways of operating outside official monitoring, also for jihadist groups. It is still too early to say how common the use of such innovations will be in the future.[57]

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[56] Nikita Malik, *Terror in the Dark: How Terrorists Use Encryption, the Darknet, and Cryptocurrencies* (London: Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism at the Henry Jackson Society, 2018), http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Terror-in-the-Dark.pdf.
[57] See e.g. Lorand Bodo, *Decentralised Terrorism: the Next Big Step for the so-called Islamic State* (VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2018), https://www.voxpol.eu/decentralised-terrorism-the-next-big-step-for-the-so-called-islamic-state-is/.

3 Jihadist online communication and Finland

Historically, Finland has had a marginal role in the multidimensional jihadist online milieu described above. For example, a comprehensive study of ISIS's global Facebook networks published in 2018 only contained a few sporadic references to Finland.[58] International research in jihadist (online) communication in general makes few references to Finland.

This Chapter focuses on online content that is or was available between 2014 and 2018. Producing a corresponding analysis concerning the period before the conflict in Syria and Iraq would not have been very meaningful. References to Finland, in particular, in key jihadist publications and speeches have been few and far between. The first such reference known to this group of researchers dates back to 2008: Ayman al-Zawahiri, a leading al-Qaeda figure, announced that al-Qaeda will not "attack Brazilian tourists in Finland or the Vietnamese in Venezuela."[59] Al-Zawahiri used this example to stress that rather than being random, the group's attacks were part of its carefully considered strategy for the group's communication with its enemies. In other words, Finland was cited as an example of a country where it would not make strategic sense for al-Qaeda to carry out attacks.

Another reference that also attracted media attention in Finland at the time dates back to 2011; on a website supporting jihadism, a person called Abu Suleiman al-Nasser praised a recent attempt for an attack in Länsi-Pasila and a firebomb attack at a petrol station in Tapaninvainio (both in Helsinki). He also incited attacks against Finnish troops in Afghanistan. While this threat attracted attention in Finland, it was ultimately not particularly exceptional or significant. Similar threats against the troops of other Western countries have been rather commonplace. Soon afterwards, another (non-jihadist) actor claimed responsibility for the attacks in Pasila and Tapaninvainio, with a lot more credibility.[60]

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[58] Gregory Waters and Robert Postings, *Spiders of the Caliphate: Mapping the Islamic State's Global Support Network on Facebook* (Counter-terrorism Project, 2018), https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/Spiders%20of%20the%20Caliphate%20%28May%202018%29.pdf.

[59] Lawrence Wright, "The Rebellion Within: An Al Qaeda mastermind questions terrorism", *The New Yorker* 2 June 2008.

[60] See e.g. Sunnuntaistrategisti, "Abu Sulaiman al-Nasser, Suomen kauhu?" *The Ulkopolitist* 2 June 2011; Leena Malkki and Daniel Sallamaa, "To Call or Not to Call it Terrorism: Public Debate on Ideologically-Motivated Acts of Violence in Finland, 1991–2015", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, no 5 (2018).

Some pieces written in Finnish whose content was close to the jihadist worldview are additionally known from the period preceding the conflict in Syria. The most noteworthy of these was an article translated into Finnish and uploaded to the web in 2009 titled "The duty of sisters in Jihad". It contained a detailed description of women's role in supporting violent jihadism. The article provided numerous instructions on how to bring up your children to be jihadists and contained pictures of children carrying bombs intended for suicide strikes. In mid-2000s, there was also a debate on the appropriate response to the move of Kavkaz Center (which was sympathetic to Chechen rebels), to a new server located in Finland.[61]

The discussion on online communication with links to Finland has been divided into two sections in this Chapter. The first section describes how and in which contexts Finland has been referred to in jihadist groups' key online content, including online magazines and videos. The second section examines the types of content that persons who live or lived in Finland disseminated or produced. Finally we return shortly to the question of Telegram content.

3.1 Finland in jihadist movements' key online content

According to the current knowledge, Finland has mostly been conspicuous by its absence from jihadist material before the conflict in Syria, whereas some references to Finland can be found in the content produced by ISIS. These references link Finland to jihadist discussions more closely than before. At the same time, however, it should be stressed that such references remain few and far between.

3.1.1 References to Finland in jihadist online magazines

Finland or persons linked to Finland appeared in jihadist online magazines a few times in 2014–2018. The following section discusses in detail the references to Finland in ISIS's English online magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* and the Arabic newspaper *Al-Naba*.

Dabiq. *Dabiq* was an ISIS online magazine intended for the international audience, 15 issues of which were published in 2014–2016. While the magazine was widely

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[61] This issue is mentioned in the annual report of the Finnish Security Intelligence Service for 2004, for example. Great many media features on this topic also came out over a period of several years.

available on the so-called darknet/grey web, it was also shared on the social media. It was published in many different languages, but its English version was perhaps the one to attract the greatest international attention. The articles of the magazine discussed especially topics intended for Muslims living in Western countries and included many stories on religious themes and descriptions of life under ISIS. In the same vein as in earlier jihadist online magazines (including al-Qaeda's *Inspire*), *Dabiq* also discussed the importance of religious warfare and violent attacks in the fight against the Western countries. [62]

Two articles with references to Finland were published in Dabiq. The first one appeared in issue 11, which came out in September 2015. This issue focused on describing the righteousness of ISIS's war and its relationship with historical battles against the Western countries. Finland is mentioned in an article titled "From the Battle of Al-Alzhab to the War of the Coalitions", which draws a parallel between historical battles and the fight against the modern Western 'crusader coalition' in Iraq and Syria. According to this article, the countries participating in this war include Albania, the Arab League, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, the European Union, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, South Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States and Finland. In terms of its contents, the article is a typical piece on the theme "Islam at war". This theme is highly visible in many other articles in Dabiq and also more extensively in ISIS material.[63] The article is rare in the sense that it lists Finland among the enemy countries. On the other hand, the list is clearly longer than what would usually be expected and also contains other small countries, such as Iceland, Luxembourg and Latvia.

Another reference to Finland can be found in issue 15 of *Dabiq* titled "Break the Cross", which came out in July 2016 and which focuses on religious themes. In an article related to this theme titled "How I came to Islam", a Finnish woman using the pseudonym Umm Khalid al-Finlandiyyah explains why she moved away from Finland

[62] See e.g. Hararo Ingram, "An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq magazine", *Australian Journal of Political Science* 51, no 3 (2016), 458–477; see also Robert J. Bunker and Pamela L. Bunker, "*Radical Islamist English-Language Online Magazines: Research Guide, Strategic Insights*" (Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2018), https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1381.pdf.

[63] Julian Droogan and Shane Pettie, "Mapping the thematic landscape of Dabiq magazine", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no 6 (2017), 591–620.

and how she found "true" religion with ISIS. In her article, she describes Finland as a "corrupt Christian country", where people do not follow the true religion. The article also relates how the woman finally decided to move to an Islamic country, in her case Syria. Additionally, she describes how the final impetus for this was when "infidel authorities" arrested her husband for terrorism and kept him in prison. As far as we know, she is the wife of the accused in Finland's first court case related to terrorism. The whole family moved away from Finland before the case was heard by the court of appeal.[64] The extent to which this article was written by the woman herself is not known. Based on the consistent style and similarities between the articles published in Dabiq, we may presume that they have been edited with a heavy hand.
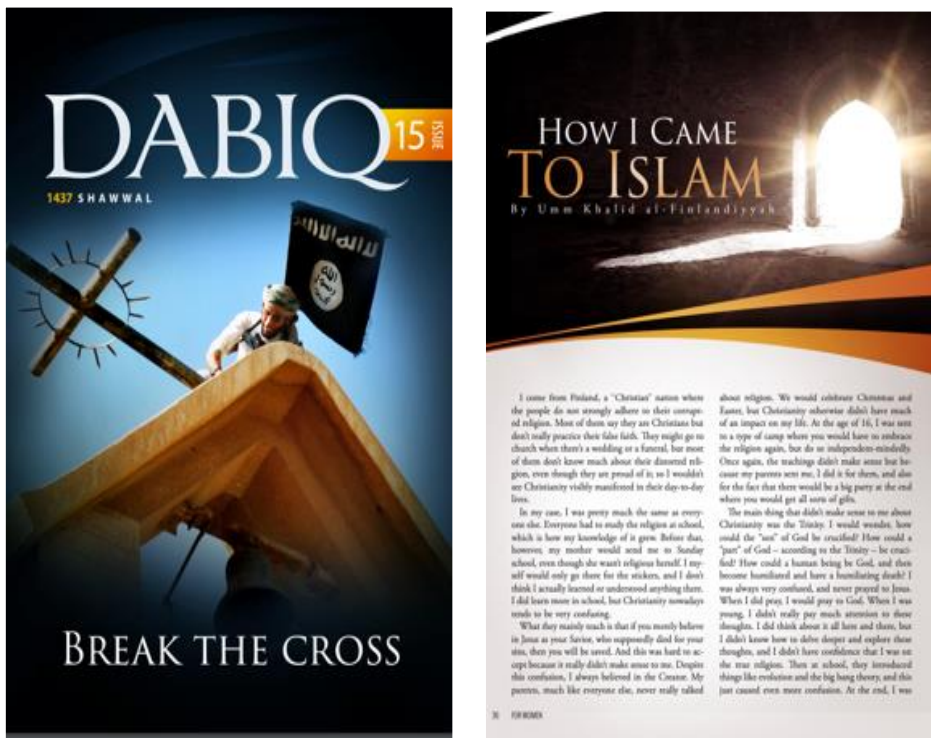
Figure 8. Screen captures from issue 15 of Dabiq containing a reference to Finland

The themes of this article, too, are highly typical of ISIS's English communication. In particular, it was related to the theme of moving to the caliphate, which came up in Dabiq frequently. These articles usually highlight personal reasons and motivation for moving to the ISIS-ruled territory.[65] Women, specifically, have had a high profile in

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[64] Sara Rigatelli, "Somalimiehen hätkähdyttävä tarina: Vapautui Suomessa terrorismituomiosta, oli jo ISISissä", *Yle* 4 March 2017.
[65] Droogan and Pettie, "Mapping the thematic landscape of Dabiq magazine", 591–620.

these 'softer' recruitment stories which, rather than military themes or justifications for violence, relate personal stories and positive experiences among ISIS.[66]

Rumiyah. Similarly to *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah* was an online magazine intended for international distribution. The first issue came out in September 2016 after *Dabiq* was discontinued. According to researchers' interpretation, the magazine's name was changed from *Dabiq* to *Rumiyah* when ISIS lost control of the town called Dabiq located in Iraq. This town had been a key symbol in ISIS's communication. According to a prediction in the Quran, a battle between Muslims and infidels at the end of times would take place in Dabiq, resulting in victory for the Muslims. Renaming the publication *Rumiyah* reflected ISIS's international strategy, which was modified in the aftermath of losses of territory. The name *Rumiyah* refers to Rome and, more specifically, a Quran prediction according to which the Muslims will conquer Rome.[67]

Rumiyah came out 13 times in 2016–2017. Its contents were to a great extent similar to those in *Dabiq*. In addition to religious themes, *Rumiyah* placed more emphasis on the importance of martyrdom and terrorist attacks for Muslims living in Western countries. Similarly to al-Qaeda's *Inspire* a few years earlier, *Rumiyah* attracted a great deal of attention in mainstream media as it published a series of instructions on how individuals can participate in ISIS's fight by carrying out independent attacks. Among other things, the magazine provided detailed instruction on how individuals can carry out attacks requiring little training or resources, for example by using knives or trucks as weapons.[68]

Finland is mentioned in one article in *Rumiyah*. This reference is found in the seventh issue of the magazine published in March 2017 under the title "Establishing the Islamic State: Between the Prophetic Methodology and the Path of the Deviants". This issue had a particular focus on the role of religion in defending ISIS. In an article titled "What they never told me", another young woman born in Finland related her personal experiences of religion and its role under ISIS using the pseudonym Umm Musa *al*-Finlandiyyah. According to information published in newspapers, she is

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[66] See *The Women in Daesh: Deconstructing Complex Gender Dynamics in Daesh Recruitment Propaganda* (The Carter Centre, *2017*), https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/women-in-daesh.pdf. Also Julia Musial, "My Muslim sister, indeed you are a mujahidah" - Narratives in the propaganda of the Islamic State to address and radicalize Western Women. An Exemplary analysis of the online magazine Dabiq", *Journal for deradicalization* no 9 (2016), 39–100.

[67] See e.g. Winter and Mahlouly, "A Tale of Two Caliphates", 13–14.

[68] See e.g. Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan, Kay L. O'Halloran & Rebecca Lange, "A Mixed Methods Empirical Examination of Changes in Emphasis and Style in the Extremist Magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no 2 (2017), 2–20.

married to a man with Bangladeshi background who had studied in Finland and used the fighter name of Abu Musa, who also had left Finland for this area.[69]

Unlike the earlier feature in *Dabiq*, this article was not directly dealing with Finland and only contained a few references to Finland (in addition to the writer's background and pseudonym). The first reference is associated with the writer's feeling that orthodox religion was prohibited in Finland, which is why it is important for orthodox Muslims to join the ranks of ISIS. According to the article, for example many key terms for infidel Muslims used by jihadism, including *kufr* (infidel) and *riddah* (a Muslim who abandons the true religion) are taboos among Muslims in Finland and cannot be uttered aloud. The article also contains a picture of the Pro Finlandia 1939–1944 memorial for Finnish Muslims who lost their lives in the war located in the Islamic graveyard in Helsinki. These soldiers are described in the piece as infidel Muslims (*murtaddin*) who have turned away from true Islam.

Figure 9. Screen captures from issue 7 of *Rumiyah* containing a reference to Finland

[69] Sara Rigatelli, "Suomi taas esillä ISISin propagandassa - Yhtenä syynä suomalaistaustaiset ISIS-johtajat", *Yle* 10 March 2017.

A memorial to the murtaddin who served in the Finnish army in World War II

Figure 10. A screen capture from an issue of ISIS's *Rumiyah* magazine showing a picture of the Pro Finlandia memorial in Helsinki

While references to Finland in ISIS's English magazines have not been particularly numerous nor necessarily had a very strong focus on Finland, bringing up Finland and persons who came from Finland symbolises the country's new role in the international jihadist milieu. These references for the first time made Finland openly a part of international jihadist communication. If Finland's role in such international jihadist content previously was neutral or invisible, the country had now been added to the list of ISIS's Western enemies, against which the organisation fights. A significant cause of this change undoubtedly was the fact that dozens of people travelled from Finland to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, considerably exceeding the numbers going to other similar zones before. The references to Finland can thus be seen as a reflection of Finland's better recognisability in jihadist networks, to which the Finnish Security Intelligence Service has also drawn attention.[70]

***Al-Naba*.** If *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* represent communication intended for the international audience, the Arabic newspaper *Al-Naba* is the internal communication channel of ISIS. *Al-Naba* is the official newspaper of ISIS, which it distributed as a printed version to fighters living in Iraq and Syria and to other residents of the 'caliphate'. It is also widely published online as part of ISIS's more extensive international communication. The paper has come out weekly since 2015, and it contains news articles of different lengths and reviews of ISIS's military and political

[70] Eero Mäntymaa, "Supo: Terrori-iskun uhka Suomessa kohonnut – Suomi mainitaan aiempaa useammin ISISin propagandassa", *Yle* 14 June 2017.

activities. Unlike the online magazines published in Western languages, *Al-Naba* gives a more accurate idea of ISIS's operative challenges, strategy and activities as well as life in territories ruled by ISIS.[71]

For the purposes of this study, we went through all issues of *Al-Naba*, looking for references to Finland. The results of the search indicate that Finland is only referred to once in issue 118. This news item was about the knife attack in Turku in August 2017. It reported that the perpetrator of the attack, Abderrahman Bouanane, considered himself an ISIS fighter and justified his act by the United States' air strikes in Syria. The short news article in Arabic described the reason for the attack and Finland as follows: "The police in Finland – a country located in the northern part of the globe – believe that the attack is connected to terrorism. The police have also added that Bouanane arrived in Finland in 2016 and lived at a reception centre in Turku, where his application was rejected." The article did not in any way comment on the potential relationship between the attack and ISIS or the fact that the perpetrator himself said he had acted in the name of ISIS.

The significance of *Al-Naba* in ISIS's communication outside the territories ruled by it is not very well known. The newspaper shows little interest in themes related to supporters living outside Syria and Iraq. Consequently, it is not particularly surprising that Finland is hardly mentioned.

3.1.2   References to Finland in jihadist videos

Persons who have left Finland to travel to the conflict zone have appeared on some jihadist videos. In many cases it appears, however, that even if the person came from Finland, the fact that they were Finnish was not an essential part of the message or theme of the video. An example of this is a video on which fighters with a Somali background try to persuade al-Shabaab to join the ranks of ISIS. One of the fighters on the video is a person with a Somali background who left Finland for Syria. However, the video makes no reference to the fighter being Finnish, nor does it discuss Finland.[72] There are several similar examples of Finnish persons appearing on jihadist videos (probably more besides the ones identified and discovered within the limits of this study). Rather than necessarily being central, Finland's role on these videos may mainly be a device for highlighting that people have travelled to Syria and Iraq from all around the world, from countries as far away as Finland.

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[71] Winter and Mahlouly, A Tale of Two Caliphates.
[72] Robyn Kriel and Lillian Leposo, "In video, Somali ISIS members court Al-Shabaab", *CNN* 22 May 2015.

While ISIS is perhaps best known for its violent and shocking videos showing executions and fighting, many of its videos have also depicted normal life under its rule. In videos focusing on the themes of 'utopia' or 'belonging', Muslims who have moved from Western countries to Syria often relate their personal reasons for moving to the caliphate. They describe idyllic life under ISIS and extoll the togetherness of fighters under the caliphate's rule.[73]

A good example of these themes is a video titled 'Islamic State Caliphate Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah', on which an ISIS fighter who came from Finland persuades Western Muslims to come and join ISIS's fight. This video is rare in the sense that a man with a Somali background using the fighter name Abu Shu'ayb as-Somali talks directly to the audience in Finnish on it. The media has identified the person on the video as a young man from Helsinki region who later lost his life in Syria.[74] This video, which had a high number of views, sparked plenty of public discussion in Finland as it gave for the first time a face to foreign fighters who moved from Finland to Syria and Iraq and highlighted the threat of radicalisation among young Finns in public discussion.

**Figure 11. An ISIS fighter who left Finland for Syria talks to his audience in Finnish on a YouTube video titled 'Islamic State
Caliphate Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah'**

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[73] Charlie Winter refers to these themes as 'Utopia' and 'belonging'. Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate'*.
[74] "Miten kaksi miestä lähtee Leppävaarasta pyhään sotaan?", *Helsingin Sanomat* 7 August 2014.

Figure 12. An ISIS fighter who left Finland for Syria talks to his audience in Finnish on a YouTube video titled 'Islamic State
Caliphate Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah'

The video has English subtitles, and its target audience appears to be Muslims in Western countries in general. The man mentions on the video that he comes from Finland, and he invites all Western Muslims to join the 'land of the caliphate'. The video also refers to Finland by name in a few contexts, for example when the man says he believes that sharia will be imposed in all Western countries, including Finland, and how all Muslims in America and Europe, including Finland, should submit to the rule of the caliphate. Using Finnish on the video should thus be seen as ISIS's broader strategy of putting persons from a number of different countries in front of the camera. While the message naturally has an appeal in the speaker's country of origin, it can be generalised to attract all Western Muslims through the personal stories of those coming from different countries.

A person from Finland also appears on another video discussing people's reasons for moving to Syria and Iraq. In this Arabic recording, which was probably made somewhere in Syria in 2013, a person using the name of Abu Mansour who says he is from Finland stands in the street in front of an audience. He answers a question put to him by the host of the event and explains to the audience shortly that he has come to the area to help establish the caliphate.[75] The participants on the video also joke

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[75] Jukka Huusko, "Suomalaiseksi väitetty mies esiintyy äärijärjestö ISISin tv-ohjelmassa", *Helsingin Sanomat* 14 June 2014.

about how Abu Mansour can get visas for Finland to all those who wish for secularism in Syria and Iraq.[76]

Figure 13. A screen capture from an ISIS video on which a fighter from Finland answers questions asked by the audience and refers to Finland

Figure 14. A screen capture from an ISIS video on which a fighter from Finland answers questions asked by the audience and refers to Finland

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[76] "Daily: Man Claims to Be Finnish in ISIS Video", *Yle* 14 June 2014.

3.2   Jihadist online content produced in Finnish or by persons with a link to Finland

Especially in 2013–2014, activity in support of troops fighting against the Syrian government was relatively prolific in Finland, including showing an interest in and sympathy for jihadist movements. At that time, the conflict in Iraq and Syria was at its early stage and the activities of ISIS, for example, were only taking shape. The declaration of ISIS's caliphate in 2014 also attracted widespread attention among those following the conflict, and few restrictions were placed on the activities of persons supporting ISIS on the social media as yet.

In the early stage of the conflict, a number of persons living in Finland had social media profiles in which they openly expressed their support for movements fighting against Assad, and later for ISIS. These accounts also discussed religious themes openly and shared pro-ISIS content. Foreign fighters who travelled to Syria also kept in touch with their friends living in Finland and their networks on the social media, and thus contributed to getting across a picture of the situation in the conflict zone and shared content produced by the groups they supported. In addition to the small core group of fighters who went to Syria and Iraq, there were also others who disseminated jihadist content in general and provided passive support for the ideology.

This situation changed after 2014, however, as ISIS's violent videos and the terror attacks linked to the organisation in Europe resulted in more stringent countermeasures on the social media. The public profiles of foreign fighters and ISIS supporters have since been deleted, and jihadist communication, especially in Western languages, has been extensively blocked on the social media.

At the international level, a great deal is known about the social media activities of the supporters of different jihadist groups. Attempts have been made to structure the diversity of producers and consumers of online jihadist content by means of various typologies. As discussed in the previous Chapter, these typologies have addressed not only different types of actors and networks and their potential motivations for spreading jihadist content but also different content and themes that the produced and disseminated material has covered.

In this study, we use a division of the activities into two categories, which is compatible with the Finnish data: the first one contains *militant jihadists.* In the Finnish context, this mainly means foreign fighters from Finland and their families. The second category contains the *producers, disseminators and translators* of jihadist

content. It includes other persons with links to Finland who have been actively involved in producing and/or disseminating jihadist content on the social media or translated it, for example from Arabic into Finnish.

The latter category also includes so-called keyboard jihadists, who are sometimes seen as a separate category. This refers to persons who support the activities of jihadist movements by sharing content or commenting on threads related to it. In other words, their activities are in many ways similar to those of producers, disseminators and translators. However, keyboard jihadists do not participate in activities outside the web or social media, meaning that they are mainly passive supporters and consumers. In international research, they have been referred to by such terms as '*jihobbyists*'[77] or '*jihadi fan boys/girls'*.[78] While 'only being active online' may sound like 'larping' jihadist activism without an actual intention of doing anything in concrete terms, the online behaviour of these keyboard jihadists has significantly affected the visibility of jihadist content, for example on the social media.

While the classification described above helps to structure the phenomenon, the categories are not straightforward in practice, and their boundaries are blurred. For instance, the same person may support the movements by different means at different times.

The material analysed in this study is predominantly Finnish and English-language content. As persons interested in jihadism are a very fragmented group in Finland in terms of both their level of organisation and their backgrounds, this material is unlikely to cover all social media content with links to Finland, already for the reason that persons who were interested in jihadist activity and travelled to the conflict zone as foreign fighters are known to have also communicated in several other languages, including Kurdish, Bengali, Somali and Arabic. We will come back to this point in the following Chapter.

[77] See Maura Conway. "From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence and Development of an Online Radical Milieu", *CTX: Combating Terrorism Exchange* 2, no 4 (2012), 2.
[78] See Maura Conway. "Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no 1 (2016), 86.

3.2.1 Militant jihadists

The material produced and shared by those who travelled to Syria and Iraq is a key part of jihadist content related to Finland. Such usually pro-ISIS content could earlier be found on several platforms, the most important ones of which perhaps are Facebook and Twitter. Fighters also communicated on other channels, including various online forums or platforms such as Ask.fm, on which fighters living in Syria and Iraq answered questions about life under ISIS among other things.

3.2.1.1 Facebook

The Facebook activities of those who travelled to Syria and Iraq were particularly prolific and open in 2013–2014 before Facebook started actively deleting content and profiles and before public support for ISIS generally started to attract more extensive attention and disapproval both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe.

The archived profiles build a diverse picture of the themes, content and visual material circulating on the social media in the early days of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Often using their own names, fighters who left Finland for Syria described the war and their life under ISIS in their profiles. They could directly announce in their profiles that they had already relocated to Syria, and they often put up pictures of themselves with the black flag of ISIS and weapons. In the screen capture below, a foreign fighter who travelled to Syria gives Aleppo in Syria as his home and "Calling to Allah" as his job. In his profile picture he poses with an assault rifle, his face covered by a scarf.

The second screen capture depicts the profile of a woman who says she lives in Raqqah in Syria and who has the ISIS flag in her profile picture. In the third one, a person who has moved to Syria has replaced their profile picture with a pro-ISIS poster. In the fourth screen capture, the fighter's profile contains very strong pro-ISIS imagery, which was common in foreign fighters' profiles. Posts with jihadist content were mostly put up after the person had already left for the conflict zone, even if some profiles have shared jihadist content even before this.
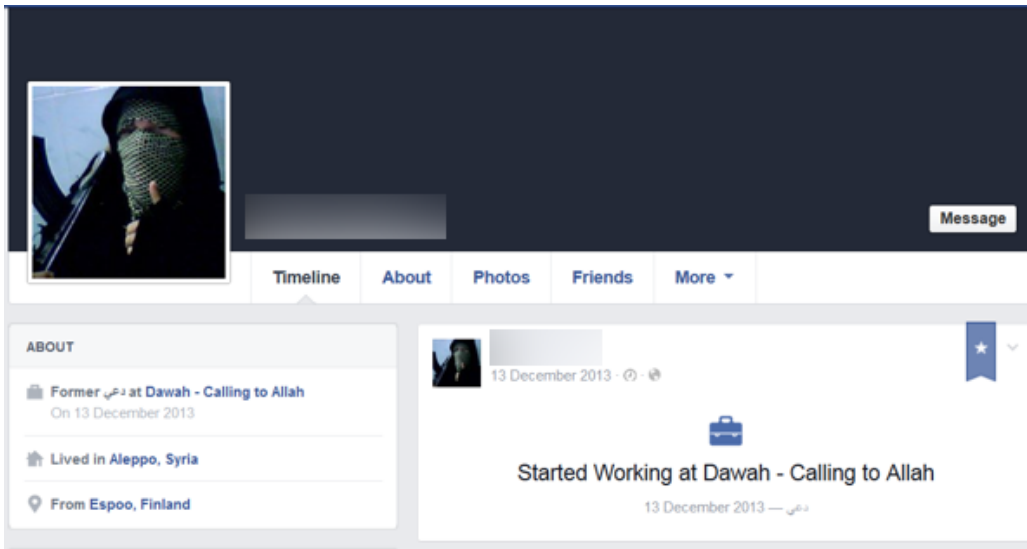
Figure 15. The profile of a foreign fighter with an assault rifle

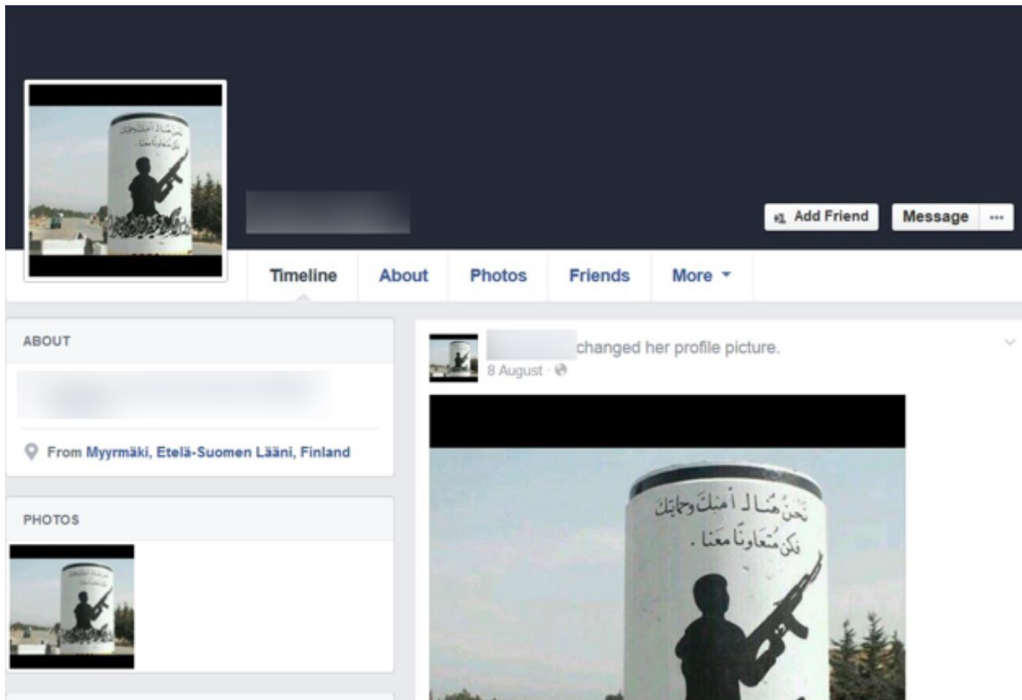**Figure 16. The profile of a woman with the ISIS flag**

Figure 17. The profile of another woman with pro-ISIS imagery

Figure 18. A man's profile with a typical visual look supporting ISIS

Some Facebook messages also contained violent threats and bluster against the Western countries typical of ISIS. The following screen capture shows a woman in a niqab carrying an AK-47 assault rifle and possibly a bomb intended for a suicide attack. In her post mixing Finnish and English, the woman issues threats against Shia Muslims.

Figure 19. A woman dressed in a niqab with an assault rifle on Facebook

This Facebook post attracted the interest of the Finnish media and the attention of the authorities.[79] Yle, for instance, published an article on the woman's social media activities. This Yle article was shared further on the social media, where the woman's Facebook friends commented on it. The screen capture on the following page shows how a Facebook friend of the woman commented on Yle's article with the words "My friend" and love hearts.

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[79] "Suomalainen mahdollinen naisjihadisti uhkailee shiiamuslimeja Facebookissa", *Yle* 19 June 2014.

Figure 20. Yle article on a 'potential female jihadist' is shared on Facebook with comments

Figure 21. Facebook posts which describe everyday problems under ISIS rule[80]

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[80] In this context, hisbah refers to ISIS's religious police.

Active efforts to delete the profiles of fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq and their families from Facebook started after 2014. Since then, the number of publicly accessible profiles and posts has been much lower.

3.2.1.2   Twitter

Twitter has been at least equally essential as a social media platform for ISIS's online communication and the networking of those interested in the movement's activities as Facebook. However, the Twitter material available for this study was not as inclusive as the Facebook content, and making conclusions on its basis is thus more difficult. While Twitter was an important communication channel, especially for fighters who went to Syria and Iraq, its nature as a medium is different, and perhaps for this reason it has had fewer Finland-specific features and content . Most Twitter communication by Finns that we know about took place in English and was not specifically about Finland. As studies on the activities of European ISIS fighters on Twitter have found, Twitter was often used as an alternative channel for finding out what was happening among the fighters in Syria and Iraq. International research has also shown that Twitter was used widely for the purpose of recruiting new fighters.[81] While it is of course possible that this also happened in Finland, we have not found clear examples in the data in which a Finnish foreign fighter in Syria or Iraq would have targeted open recruitment attempts particularly at a Finnish audience on Twitter.

The following section discusses some examples of Finnish foreign fighters' activities on Twitter, especially in 2014–2015, when Twitter was the communication platform of choice for ISIS fighters. All these accounts have since been deleted, which makes it difficult to have a clear overall idea of the scope of the activity at a later date. All indications point to references and links to Finland being fairly marginal in this content, too, even if some foreign fighters from Finland attracted international attention with their Twitter activities. A review of 9.3 million tweets in the Shadows of ISIS material collected by the international organisation TRAC did not find relevant new references to Finland.

A good example of Finnish fighters' communication on Twitter is the activities of a man who used the fighter name Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi. Yle also wrote a few articles about the social media activities of this man, who was a Finnish convert, and nicknamed him 'ISIS-Joni'.[82] According to his own account, Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi

[81] Carter et al., *#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks.*
[82] Sara Rigatelli, "ISIS-soturi Jonin taustat: Yksinäinen nettieläjä, joka vihasi armeijaa ja haki yliopistoon." *Yle* 25 February 2015; Sara Rigatelli, "ISIS-soturi Joni kertoo Ylelle: En ole vielä päässyt tappamaan", *Yle* 25 February 2015. This case is also discussed in the report *Jihadism in Finland.*

came from a small locality and discovered ISIS's ideology mainly through online communication and interaction. He later travelled to Syria to fight and was highly active mainly on Twitter, where he described his life under ISIS, but he also used such other channels as Ask.fm.

The screen capture below shows one of Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi's several Twitter profiles which he kept creating as they were taken down by Twitter. Typically for ISIS fighters, his profile picture shows an AK-47 assault rifle and a flag. In his tweet, Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi describes how he shows pictures of Finnish people to other fighters on Google and how they laugh at them together.

Figure 22. One of Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi's many Twitter accounts

In the following screen capture, he writes about how he has left the diabolical/infidel (*taghuut*) Finland and how *Dawlat Islam* (the Islamic state) is now his home. He also relates in Finnish how he has left Finland's "false gods including the flag with a blue cross and the house of parliament" behind for ever.

Figure 23. Screen captures from Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi's Twitter chats

A good example of the Twitter activities of people living in Syria and Iraq was Umm Irhab's Twitter account, which also attracted international attention. The screen capture below shows one of Umm Irhab's accounts; the profile picture highlights religious themes, including the mosque and the niqab. In her profile, she describes herself as "a sister just trying to get closer to Allah".

Figure 24. A screen capture from Umm Irhab's Twitter profile

In her Twitter communication, Umm Irhab often approached life and religious issues from a woman's perspective, but she also shows that she actively supports ISIS's extreme violence. In the screen capture below, she speaks approvingly of the public execution of the American James Foley.

Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1 · 20h

I was
happy to see the beheading of that kaafir, I
just rewinded to the
cutting part..Allahu akbar! I wonder what
was he thinking b4 the cut

Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1 · 20h

What is 1 James Foley compared to the
thousands of innocent muslims being
slaughetered daily by filthy US

Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1 · 20h

Allahu
akbar! I feel proud to be part of Doula. More
beheadings please!.... now
 whatcha gonn do Obama? We gonn catch
more and more inshAllah

Figure 25. Screen captures from Umm Irhab's Twitter discussions in which she supports ISIS's acts of violence

Umm Irhab's Twitter account is interesting in that it was also noted in international discussions as an example of how women actively participate in supporting ISIS and its ideology.[83]

3.2.1.3   Ask.fm and other online forums

Finnish fighters and their spouses who travelled to Syria and Iraq also contributed to Askbook and Ask.Fm from their destination. Askbook and Ask.fm, which are available both in Finnish and English, are social networking platforms based on questions and answers. The threads of persons who left Finland for Syria and Iraq are typically about life under the rule of ISIS and different practical and religious matters associated with it. A good example of this type of communication is the activities of the aforementioned Abu Ibrahim Finlandi. He was active on both platforms and answered questions about living under ISIS in Finnish and English. In the screen

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[83] See e.g. Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford & Ross Frenet, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS* (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016), https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf.

capture below, he answers questions he was asked about such topics as his attitude to the executions of innocent people and soldiers by ISIS or whether he ever intends to go back to Finland.

Figure 26. Screen captures from Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi's discussions on Ask.fm

Other foreign fighters from Finland have also had Ask.fm accounts. It is impossible to know how inclusive the archive of threads on this platform accessible to the researchers was, and the accounts have since been deleted. The accounts archived for research use in 2014–2015 create the impression that interaction between fighters and those interested in their lives was relatively active on these platforms. The screen captures below show that *Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi* answered at least 325 questions, and his profile and answers had at least 68 likes.
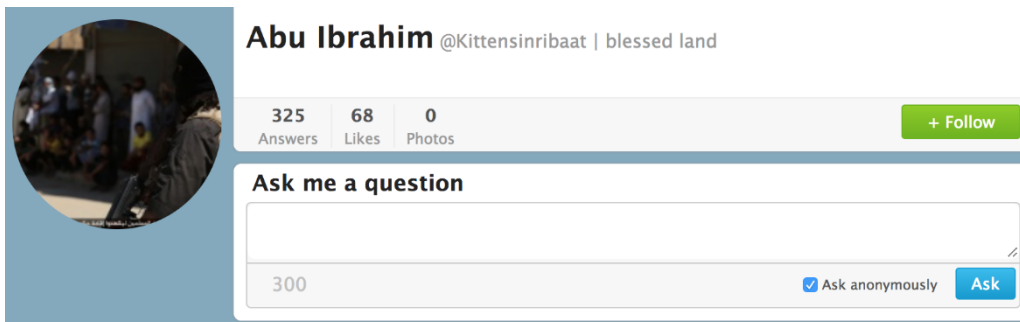
Figure 27. Screen captures from Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi's Ask.fm profile

Similar interaction between fighters and those interested in their lives and ideas also took place in Finnish online forums, including the Islamic chatroom Tulevaisuus.org. In this context, we should note that the chatroom was not pro-ISIS in itself, even if the organisation was discussed in a positive tone in some of its threads. In the screen capture below from August 2014, a person using the name Greenbird comments on their life under ISIS's rule. Among other things, they relate how they moved out of Finland with a large back bag and a small rucksack and how, because of the war, they are forced to constantly move around.

Figure 28. A screen capture from threads discussing ISIS in tulevaisuus.org chatrooms

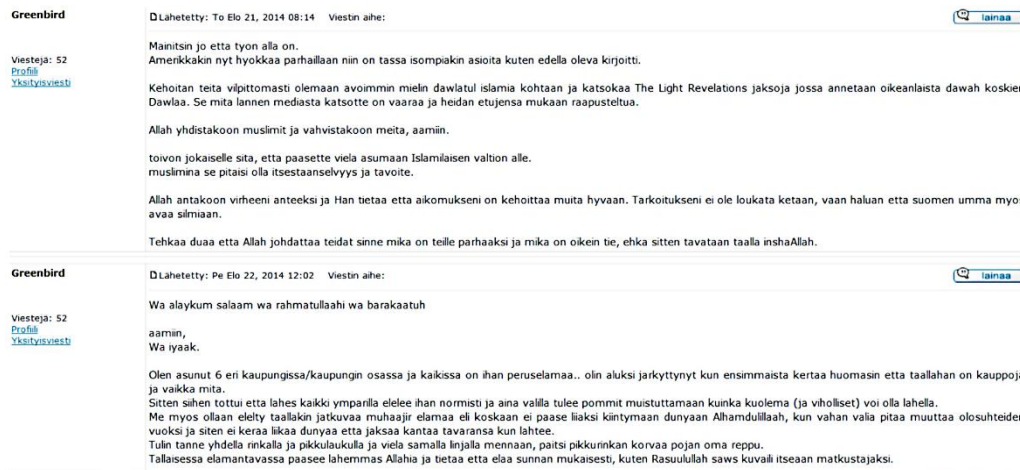While such discussions about life under ISIS cannot necessarily be regarded as examples of jihadist online communication, they reflect the many ways in which the new online platforms enabled diverse communication between fighters who went to Syria and persons living in Finland who were interested in going, or supported those who left, especially around 2014. This was additionally not only interaction between those who asked and answered questions, as the threads could also be followed by others.

3.2.2   Producers, disseminators and translators

In addition to the personal posts of fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq, sharing jihadist content and threads discussing religious themes have been widespread on the social media. For example, several highly significant accounts disseminating such content were active on the social media, and the holders of these accounts to a great extent acted independently from jihadist organisations. While all these persons have not been identified with certainty, those who have been are not known to include persons who live or lived in Finland, apart from the Twitter account @mujahid4life, which even attracted international attention. We are also not aware of any other indications of significant production or dissemination of content related to ISIS, for example, from Finland.

Some pro-jihadism content has also been produced in Finnish, and it has been publicly available on websites and in online forums. As a significant part of the publicly available content has already been taken down, it is now difficult to form a comprehensive idea of its scale and importance in earlier years. It is unlikely that the volume of this content has been high, and a significant share of it has been saved for research purposes. On the other hand, it is difficult to say much about the readers of this content.

Apart from social media profiles, the production and dissemination of jihadist online content in Finnish appears to have concentrated on a handful of sites, and the number of persons who actively produced it has been extremely small. To a great extent, the low volume of Finnish content can probably be explained by the small number of Finnish speakers, together with the fact that level of jihadism among those speaking Finnish as their native language has been low and that it is in many ways a relatively new phenomenon.

In terms of the subject of this study, the most important online content produced in Finnish was a website called An-Nida-media, which disseminated pro-ISIS content for a short period. Additionally, some individuals have contributed to threads in Finnish

online forums where they have published communication inciting violent jihadism or supportive of ISIS.

3.2.2.1 Activities of @Mujahid4life account on Twitter

The example which is best known to international researchers and which has attracted the most attention of jihadist online communication linked to Finland is the Twitter activities of Abdullah al-Finlandi, a Finnish convert. He became known for his Twitter account @mujahid4life which actively supported ISIS, especially in the early stage of the conflict Syria in 2013–2014.[84] The screen capture below shows Abdullah al-Finlandi's Twitter profile from the time when he still was an active ISIS supporter.

Figure 29. A screen capture from Abdullah al-Finlandi's Twitter account @mujahid4life[85]

At best, his @Mujahid4Life account had 11,000 followers, and it was the second most followed account of ISIS supporters in 2013–2014. Abdullah al-Finlandi was highly active on Twitter and shared jihadist content extensively, including religious texts and news of battles.

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[84] Lara Whyte, "How the World's Safest Country Produced So Many ISIS Fighters", *Vice* 22 August 2017,   https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/bjj7zz/how-the-worlds-safest-country-produced-so-many-isis-fighters.
[85] Screen capture from article by Whyte, "How the World's Safest Country".

What we know about Abdullah al-Finlandi is limited to information provided in articles based on interviews with him.[86] He became active on Twitter soon after the conflict in Syria began and originally supported al-Qaeda and its faction called Jabhat al-Nusra. However, he never travelled to Syria or Iraq. He has said that he was planning to travel to Syria and fight in the ranks of Jabhat al-Nusra in spring 2013, but he abandoned this plan after an intervention by the Finnish Security Intelligence Service. The Finnish Security Intelligence Service has not commented on this claim. As ISIS gained more influence, he started supporting it and actively shared different content associated with the organisation. He found this a much more effective way of operating and has later said that in his case, travelling to Syria would have been a waste of resources.

In August 2014, Abdullah al-Finlandi's Twitter account was deleted, apparently after he had shared images of journalist James Foley's execution. He said he had already started having reservations about his support for ISIS, and after this incident he withdrew from the social media. Today he is an active opponent of ISIS's activities. While he has described his earlier role as an ISIS supporter in media interviews, he has also made an obvious attempt to limit the information available on him. He currently has a new Twitter account, which he does not appear to use very actively.

3.2.2.2   Hussein al-Maadidi's writings

As we already noted in the Introduction, there may be online content produced or shared by persons who live or have lived in Finland which is difficult to link to Finland. One case in which the Finnish connection is possible to track down is Hussein al-Maadidi. Originally from Iraq, he is a journalist who lived in Finland for several years in the 2010s.

Information about al-Maadidi's background has been obtained mostly from press interviews he gave while living in Finland. When still living in Iraq, he worked as a journalist and wrote for several different media and news agencies, both in his own country and internationally. During the war in Iraq in late 2003, however, he was seized and sent to prison for a term which was a life sentence in practice. After spending approximately one year in Abu Ghraib prison, he was unexpectedly released. Once released, he continued to work as a journalist but said his situation became so difficult that he was forced to leave Iraq in autumn 2007. He finally ended up as a quota refugee in Finland. He said in an interview that he lived in Finland until 2015, in which year he moved back to Iraq on a temporary basis. In 2013 he

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[86] "The Bullied Finnish Teenager who became an ISIS Social Media Kingpin - and then got out", *Newsweek* 6 May 2015; Sonja Saarikoski, "Sinun puolestas elää ja kuolla", *LongPlay* #59 (2017).

published a book where he related his experiences, especially from his time in prison.[87]

Quite obviously, the book *Here in the Land of Caliphate* published in 2015 by a journalist named Hussein al-Maadidi was also written by the same person. In this book, al-Maadidi describes his visit to the caliphate in late 2014–early 2015 when he was still living in Finland. Parts of this text were also published online, first in Arabic and soon also in English. Sections of the book were uploaded to a number of different websites, and it has also been disseminated by the pro-ISIS Al-Batār Media Foundation, which has published a great deal of jihadist material. Al-Maadidi has also appeared on YouTube videos containing similar ideas. These videos were available earlier but have since been taken down.

Al-Maadidi reports on his trip to Mosul in a tone that is appreciative of the ISIS caliphate, describing the vibrant life in areas ruled by it and the friendliness of the persons he encountered. In his description, he repeatedly juxtaposes life in the caliphate with the brutal image given of ISIS on the media and stresses the difference between live under ISIS and the repressive atmosphere of fear, which according to him prevailed in Iraq before ISIS's rule. The text also talks about Shias, Kurds and Americans in a very negative tone.

His writings create a strong impression that his sympathies for such actors as ISIS have continued for years, and that he has written for jihadist online forums even before the period examined in this study. Little is known of al-Maadidi's activities in Finland, but in the course of the study, indications were found that he had known some persons who left Finland for Syria and Iraq.

3.2.2.3   An-Nida

The most relevant example of Finnish online content showing open support for ISIS is a blog titled An-Nida. This site was active between August 2016 and October 2017 and, among other things, it published speeches by the leader of ISIS and articles from ISIS online magazines as Finnish translations. The identity of the person who maintained the site is not known for certain. As Wordpress has since deleted the site, we also do not know exactly what the scale of the site's publication activities was and how many readers it had. By using the online archive of archive.org and archive material saved by researchers in earlier years, however, it has been possible to form

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[87] E.g. Angélique Ferrat & Hajar Smouni, Hundreds of journalists forced into exile in five years since launch of US-led invasion in Iraq. Reporters without Borders (2008); "Hussein al-Maadidi", *SixDegrees* 18 June 2013, http://www.6d.fi/index.php/wemet/612-hussein-al-maadidi; Heidi Höök, "Irakissa ihmisellä on vähemmän arvoa kuin eläimellä länsimaissa", *Pakolainen* 4/2013; Jeanette Östman, "Pennan och kameran är mina vapen", *Österbottens tidning* 24 July 2015.

a general idea of the type of content and threads found on the site when it was still publicly accessible online.

An-Nida published 18 articles in Finnish, which comprised both text and visual content, including images and calendars as well as posters and pictures with religious themes. The screen captures below show how An-Nida disseminated ISIS's jihadist content, including the aforementioned article in *Dabiq* magazine, in which reference was made to Finland. An-Nida additionally published Finnish translations of such texts as speeches by ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and the organisation's information officer, Abu Hassan al-Muhajir.
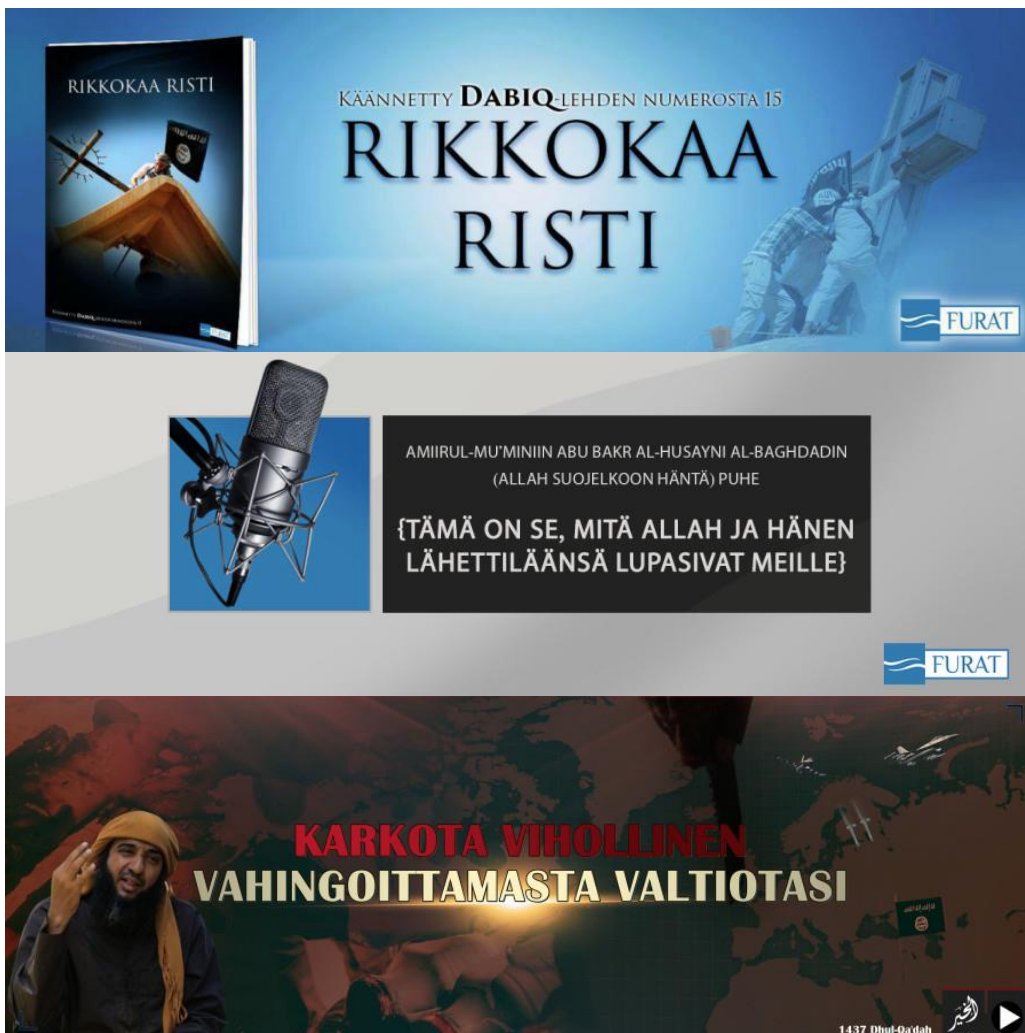

Figure 30. Screen captures from visual content on An-Nida website

Good examples of An-Nida's activities include an article published in January 2017 titled "You Will Remember what I have told you", which contained typical themes associated with violent jihadism and, in particular, those common in pro-ISIS publications. The excerpt below refers to key themes of ISIS, which have been translated into Finnish in the article:

> O hosts of Iraq and Sham! O ghuraba of Islam! The camp of lies has been bewildered by the transitory world, led astray by lust, and it has become vain. Shaytan made conceit go into their heads. So it rose senselessly, showed itself proudly, foamed angrily and trembled with fear, and launched a campaign against the stronghold of Islam and the land of Khilafa, the likes of which history has not experienced in recent times. Here are crusading America and Europe, ex-communist Russia, fire-worshipping Iran, secularist Turkey, Kurdish atheists, Raafidah, Nusyayriyyah, shahawaat, militias, Arab tahguuts and their soldiers, all in a line, armed with modern weaponry, accompanied by their filthy and garish media, all of which have the same motto: "bring down Islam and its people", and the same logic [as did the infidels of 'Aadi when they said], "Who is mightier than us?" (Fussilat 15).

This text is a direct translation into Finnish from content spread by ISIS. Among other things, it contains numerous references to key themes that also appeared in such magazines as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, including references to the hosts of Iraq and Sham as well as to America and Europe as crusaders.

An article titled "Kafir Blood is Halal to you", which was published in 2017, also attracted the attention of the mainstream media. This article is a direct translation from the first issue of ISIS's *Rumiyah* magazine, and it talks approvingly of violence against infidels, for example as follows:

> Muslims who now live in Dar al-Kufri should remember that the blood of infidels is halal, and killing them is a form of worship of Allah – the Lord, King and God of humankind. This includes a businessman in a taxi on his way to work, youth ('children' past puberty) taking exercise in the park, and an old man queueing for a sandwich. Indeed, even shedding the blood of a kafir selling flowers to passers-by from a kiosk is halal – and sowing terror in the hearts of all infidels is the duty of a Muslim. There is no shar'ii requirement of aiming at soldiers, police officers or judges and politicians, as all kafirs who are not under the dhimma agreement are free game.

Images and graphics from *Rumiyah* were used in the article directly. The screen captures below show the visual similarities between the English and the Finnish version. For example, An-Nida uses the same picture of a bloody knife.

Figure 31. An example of the similar visual imagery on An-Nida site and in ISIS's *Rumiyah* magazine

While this article is mainly a translation, some references to Finland have been included in it. For instance, an image of a man dressed in a shell suit taking exercise in the forest has been added to the end of the article. The caption under the image says "thus do not even let a Nordic walker to walk all the way home", which invokes the impression that the article wishes to incite to acts of violence at people in Finland.

Siispä älkää antako edes sauvakävelijän kävellä kotiinsa asti.

Figure 32. A screen capture from images in an article titled 'Kafir blood is halal to you' published on An-Nida site

Several other ISIS publications in a similar style, often translated into Finnish word for word, were released on An-Nida. It should also be noted that even if the site was active for a year, there are no comments on its articles. This is not uncommon for blog-type websites, of course. We do not know how popular this site was and to what extent it was read. The site was deleted soon after its existence became more widely known to the authorities and journalists.

The last fact worth mentioning about An-Nida is that in one of its final articles in January 2017, the readers were urged to join the site maintainers' Telegram channel if they wish to read more ISIS publications. The article only contains the address of An-Nida's Telegram channel. This site is an example of how, due to countermeasures, jihadist content has been moved to so-called encrypted channels also in Finland, or at the very least, plans to move it have existed. The screen capture on the following page shows a link to a Telegram channel on which the writer claims Finnish translations of ISIS publications are available. The channel has since been deleted.

Liity Telegram-kanavaamme saadaksesi islamilaisen Valtion julkaisuja

https://telegram.me/nidafin

January 6, 2017January 6, 2017 annidamediaLeave a comment

Figure 33. The last post on An-Nida urges readers to go to a Telegram channel where ISIS publications would be available

3.2.2.4 Writings on Islamtieto website

Chats with jihadist sympathies can also be found on certain open discussion platforms. The best-known example of this are the writings of Abdullah Rintala. Rintala has translated and published under his own name a large selection of religious material. On Islamtieto website, he has participated actively in discussions on different religious themes for years, writing numerous comments that support radical interpretations of Islam and abusing Shias and other infidels. In addition to Rintala, for example a person using the pseudonym Ummuyusuf have shared partly similar views on the website.

Among other things, Rintala's comments included strong language inciting to violence combined with disdain for and hostility against Shia Muslims, in particular. For example, he wrote that "we Muslims hate Shias as they have the power and full international freedom to kill Muslims in Iraq and Syria, and no-one can stop them. This is why us 'Finnish-speaking jihadists' must ourselves go to Syria to wipe out Shias with Kalashnikovs and put them into mass graves." Rintala also actively showed support for the foreign fighters who went to Syria and Iraq. His comments in the same chatroom include "this is why us Muslims have to give our full support to ISIS", or "it is not necessary to learn how to build bombs or carry out suicide attacks in order to shed blood, it is enough to know how to use automatic weapons".

As a result of his writings on Islamtieto website, Abdullah Rintala was sentenced for aggravated ethnic agitation in October 2017. In addition to being active on Islamtieto, Rintala has made literature supporting jihadism available as Finnish translations and published it on such content sharing platforms as Scribd. The content he shared also included publications of the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

3.2.2.5 Dissemination of radical religious material of a more generic nature

When we talk about disseminating material important for jihadist activity, it is at the same time both essential and extremely difficult to draw a line between jihadist content and other religious and political material. When the content includes direct incitement to violence, it is easy to identify it as jihadist material. In addition, however, those interested in jihadism read plenty of other material besides content produced by the movements they support, and this material is equally essential in laying down the ideological foundation for jihadist movements. Such material also includes many types of salafist or wahhabist content.

A highly important body of such material is comprised by radical religious sermons and texts (which do not necessarily contain direct incitement to violence). A good example of this type of material associated with jihadism are the sermons of the radical preacher Anwar al-Awlaki. Awlaki was considered one of the most influential theoreticians and preachers of modern jihadism who, based in Yemen, also planned al-Qaeda attacks in Western countries. He is also considered a key ideologist in the context of using the Internet to support jihadist activity and recruitment. Additionally, however, Awlaki has published plenty of religious online material that does not directly incite violence.

Drawing a line between jihadist material that directly incites violence or supports it on the one hand, and more general religious material based on a similar worldview on the other, is open to interpretation. In Finland, the greatest difficulty in drawing this line is perhaps encountered in the case of material distributed by such actors as the Iqra-Islam association. The association's Facebook profile is one of the groups and profiles that have disseminated content essential for jihadism (in the wider sense described above), especially in the early years of the conflict in Syria and Iraq in 2012–2014. In the two screen captures below, links to Awlaki's videos are shared on the association's Facebook page, both through its own and other parties' Facebook pages.

Figure 34. A Facebook group shares a link to a sermon by Anwar al-Awlaki on another user's wall.

Figure 35. Iqra-Islam association shares a link to a sermon by Anwar al-Awlaki on its own wall

Iqra-Islam association was established in the early 2000s, and it announces that its objective is translating literature on Islam into Finnish and disseminating it. As a rule, the translated literature has emphasised such material as that represented by the Islamic University of Madinah. The convert mainly responsible for its work has also been active in other ways and participated in Finnish social media discussions. Last year, the association's blog explained that the association is about to become active again in delivering Qurans and other religious material to prisons, while it was also increasing the range of languages in which the material was to be available.[88]

As noted before, while the material disseminated by the association is not exclusively jihadist, especially when examined as a whole, it contains texts that are also important for jihadist movements.

Similar material that, while not actually jihadist, is also important for jihadist movements can be found among videos. An example of this are two videos published in 2013, which contain religious material aiming to recruit fighters for the war in Syria and which were shared on the social media in the early years of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. The original videos were in Arabic, but a Finnish translation had been added on top of the Arabic text. At the time this study was conducted, both videos were still publicly available on YouTube, where they had been viewed a few hundred times. Judging by the alias, the account may belong to a Finnish person who visited Syria before the caliphate was declared.

On the first video, "Declaration from the community of religious scholars in Syria", Syrian scholars explain why orthodox Muslims should join the fight against Assad. It provides numerous examples of how Assad's atrocities oblige Muslims to join the front against him. The second video, "Mujahid's message from the holy land of Levant" contains a soundtrack describing life in Syria and also urges Muslims to join the fight in Iraq. The soundtrack is accompanied by an image from Syria, where smoke is rising in the background as an illustration of battles and war.

Whether or not these videos can be regarded as part of jihadist online communication is not clear. They do not contain themes directly associated with violent jihadism or, for example, direct references to ISIS. On the other hand, however, these videos have been used in the Facebook profiles of foreign fighters who went to Syria and Iraq.

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[88] "Uusia tuulia…", 23 April 2018, https://iqraislamkirjat.wordpress.com/2018/04/23/uusia-tuulia/. About the association, see also Juntunen et al., *Suomesta Syyrian ja Irakin konfliktikentälle suuntautuva liikkuvuus*, 23–24.

3.2.2.6   Jihadist 'memes' and other visual content

The final category in the data were so-called jihadist 'memes' and other visual content which was shared on the social media in the early years of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. This content rehashed themes typical of jihadist communication and drew on the extensive visual production of ISIS, in particular. Such content has not been archived for research as widely as the profiles of those who travelled to the conflict zone, for example, and analysing the phenomenon at a later date is thus difficult. It should also be stressed that we do not know how widely this type of content was shared, or how many persons have actively produced or disseminated it. The images show pro-ISIS "memes" translated into Finnish that were shared on the social media around 2014.

Figure 36. Screen captures from pro-ISIS Finnish visual material shared on the social media

In addition, high volumes of visual material and memes supporting jihadism that were similar in style but in English were shared on the social media in 2014−2018. As this content was neither produced in Finland nor specifically targeted at Finland, it is not discussed in greater detail in this report.[89] It is known, however, that ISIS has also actively trained its supporters to produce this type of visual material on such channels as Telegram. However, the study did not find any references with particular links to Finland in these activities.[90]

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[89] See Laura Huey, "This is Not Your Mother's Terrorism: Social Media, Online Radicalization and the Practice of Political Jamming.", *Contemporary Voices: St Andrews Journal of International Relations* 6, no 2 (2015), 1–16.

[90] Gilad Shiloach, "Where ISIS Fanboys Learn Graphic Design", *Vocativ* 31 January 2017, https://www.vocativ.com/398135/where-isis-fanboys-learn-graphic-design/index.html.

3.2.3   Telegram and encrypted channels

As noted in the Introduction, the study did not look at such closed channels as Telegram, as this was not possible within the limits of the available resources. Based on earlier research in jihadist online communication, we know that a significant part of activities supporting jihadism and especially ISIS has been transferred to Telegram and other encrypted platforms.

What we do not know, however, is how extensive and prolific Finnish activities on different Telegram channels have been. The Finnish Nidafin channel, which was linked to An-Nida-media, has already been taken down. Abderrahman Bouanane, who perpetrated the knife attack in Turku, is known to have watched jihadist content on Telegram in the weeks preceding the attack and possibly written some comments on it. He also recorded a video manifesto on a mobile phone, which he published just before carrying out the attack on at least three Telegram channels. Apart from this incident, the relevance of these Telegram channels to Finland is questionable, however, as they mainly operate in Arabic and are not produced in Finland.[91]

Even though communication on Telegram was not examined, we did consult a number of international researchers who actively monitor communication on Telegram and have saved large sets of Telegram content. There were few or no observations related to Finland in any of these sets. While this does not mean that persons living or having lived in Finland do not participate in Telegram discussions, the complete absence of hits indicates that persons or channels having attracted international attention which could be easily linked to Finland do not appear to be active on Telegram. The possibility of Finnish activities related to this theme continuing on Telegram, too, cannot be excluded either.

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[91] Piia Leino and Olli-Pekka Paajanen, "KRP: Turun puukottaja ihannoi ISISiä ja näki itsensä "ISISin sotilaana", *Keskisuomalainen* 7 December 2018.

4   Conclusions

The purpose of this report was to produce the first ever study on jihadist online communication related to Finland in 2014–2018. The study charted and analysed jihadist content that was openly available online during that period. The report began with a review of the international development of jihadist online communication, making it possible to put observations significant for Finland in a broader context and assess their importance. The report then moved on to discuss references to Finland and the appearance of persons linked to Finland in jihadist online communication as well as the types of textual, video and other visual content persons who lived or had lived in Finland have shared and produced on different online platforms and channels.

4.1   Key findings

The key findings of the study can be summed up as follows:

- More jihadist online communication related to Finland than ever before existed in the early years of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. By online communication related to Finland we mean in this report content that either was about Finland, that was produced by persons living/having lived in Finland, or that was produced in Finnish. Internationally, the volume of jihadist online communication, and especially content produced in Western languages, has increased significantly in recent years.

- This change should not be exaggerated, however, as the volume of communication related to Finland remains relatively small by international standards. Additionally, the advancing digitalisation of societies has affected this change at least as much as aspects specifically associated with Finland. The wider use of the social media, in particular, has made it easier than ever before to produce and share content, even with meagre resources.

- Finland and persons from Finland have featured in publications and videos produced by ISIS a few times. Persons originating from Finland have appeared in articles and videos intended for Western audiences in general (including the Finnish audiences). They feature persons originating from several European countries, and it is likely that those coming from the distant Finland have been mainly included for effect and that the added value of Finland has been rather symbolic.

- Many of those who have travelled to Syria and Iraq from Finland have been active on the social media. In addition to everyday interaction, these activities have included reporting on local conditions, answering questions asked by other people about them, and also encouraging others to travel to Syria or Iraq. The communication has additionally contained some threats against Finland. These activities appear to have been the most prolific on Facebook and Twitter, while similar content can also be found on such discussion platforms as Ask.fm.

- Persons who are and were living in Finland have disseminated and in some cases also produced jihadist content in Finnish. The majority of the content available and distributed outside the social media, including on websites and in blogs or discussion forums, has been translated from other languages. The volume of Finnish material has been rather modest.

- Persons living/having lived in Finland have also produced and disseminated jihadist content in other languages. The data available for this study indicate that the social media profiles with the highest international visibility were the Twitter accounts of Mujahid4life and Umm Irhabi, who operated in English. The probable reason for this is the international character of Twitter. On Twitter, the language of pro-ISIS threads related to Western countries generally was English.

- As in other countries, open jihadist online communication related to Finland has declined significantly in the last three years as technology companies have launched active efforts to remove this type of content. Apart from a few exceptions, the content discussed in this study is no longer available online. The time for open jihadist online communication is to a great extent over, also regarding content related to Finland or published in Finnish.

- While the openly accessible content relevant to Finland has almost completely disappeared from sight, this does not mean that it no longer exists. The research data indicate that it has existed, and may continue to exist, on such closed and encrypted channels as Telegram. However, a separate study would be needed to investigate closed channels.

4.2 Significance of jihadist online communication for Finland

What, then, is the significance of these observations for Finland? The fact that Finland has been mentioned in ISIS publications and that Finnish speakers have been seen on jihadist videos has attracted attention and elicited questions, especially since this is a new phenomenon in many ways. News of Abu Shu'ayb as-Somali appearing on an ISIS video and the stories of female converts published in *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* were released in all main media. They were also referred to later a number of times in news items related to this theme. Threats sent to Finnish politicians under the name of ISIS by a foreign fighter calling himself Abu Hurairah Finland received even more attention.[92]

Over time, it was rather unanimously concluded from these cases that Finland had now become a target country for jihadist activity, and the threat level in Finland had increased. If the purpose of this communication was to make Finland experience itself more strongly as a potential target for ISIS, it was successful. Of course, many other factors besides ISIS's online communication contributed to this.

On the other hand, news reports on references to Finland or Finnish persons featured in jihadist content were strongly centered and limited to the national context. Finland's almost non-existent role in jihadist communication in earlier decades was almost exclusively used as a point of comparison, whereas few attempts were made to put the recent developments in the international context of development in jihadist online communication. The national focus of the public discussion has also resulted in seeing the significance of jihadist online communication in a narrower sense than what would have been appropriate.

The impacts of jihadist online communication on Finland are not limited to content linked to Finland, and the content in which 'Finland is mentioned' in one way or another is not always automatically the most essential in terms of Finland (either). The relationship between jihadist online communication and Finland is more complex than this. We will now turn into attempting to make sense of this multidimensional relationship.

From a strictly national point of view, perhaps the most significant individual conclusion of this study concerns the image of Finland carried across by jihadist online communication. If this type of content begins to show a heavy emphasis on Finland as an enemy, it may influence the likelihood of attacks in Finland. Whereas

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[92] For more information on these threats, see the report *Jihadism in Finland*.

Finland was almost invisible before 2014, Finland has now appeared on the long list of ISIS's enemies and it has also been referred to as a heathen country where orthodox Muslims are not understood. At the same time, it should be noted that these references have been few and far between, and they do not add up to an image of Finland as an important target. Making threats such as those described in this report against different countries is common.

In addition to the image communicated by jihadist content, an essential role is also played by the image of Finland in the mainstream media and the extent to which images created in jihadist content are filtered through to it. Denmark, for example, did not attract the attention of jihadist actors exclusively because of what was said in jihadist communication but also through the attention the cartoon controversy was given in the mainstream media. According to an initial investigation carried out for this study, Finland still has a relatively positive image in the Arabic mainstream media. Arabic media consider Finland a well-organised welfare state where human rights are respected and which attracts people because of its high standard of living, even if some critical articles have been published since 2015 and especially around the so-called refugee crisis.[93]

Featuring persons from Finland in jihadist magazines and videos was most likelya device mainly used for effect by ISIS. However, these articles and videos together with the social media activities of those who left Finland for Syria and Iraq are significant in the sense that they offer a point of identification for people interested in jihadism. Jihadist activism may no longer appear such a distant issue and possibility for someone living in Finland when you see persons like yourself participating in it. How strong an impact this ultimately has on the development of jihadist activity in Finland should not be overestimated. It is likely that the developments described in the report *Jihadism in Finland* related to establishing networks and contacts have a greater influence on it than the content discussed in this report.

How much importance should we ascribe to the fact that jihadist content is (or is not) available in Finnish? The existence of Finnish jihadist content indicates that there are people interested in jihadist thinking among Finnish speakers. This was already evident from other sources, however. Theoretically, publishing jihadist content in a

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[93] As part of the more extensive international media environment in which violent jihadist online communication takes place, an analysis of how Finland has been discussed in Arabic media and those in the Middle East region was conducted in the course of the study. The analysis covered *Al-Arabiya*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Al-Hurra*, *Al-Rasheed* and *Al-Sumaria*. Articles referring to Finland in these publications were collected using the keywords فنلندا (Finland) and *Finland*.

new language increases the number of its potential readers. It is questionable if this has occurred in the case of Finnish.

Based on the available information, forming a comprehensive overview of those involved and potentially interested in jihadist activism in Finland is difficult. What is known in any case is that this group of people has diverse language skills. Many of them have sufficient language proficiency to follow international channels in different languages or to participate in international online discussions with people from a similar cultural background. This includes a significant number of people who speak Finnish, some of them with native proficiency. At the same time, the majority of those whose native language is Finnish also speak other languages well, at least English. This has already allowed them to participate in discussions on numerous international channels that contain much more material.

Jihadism in general is a strongly international phenomenon, and the networks related to it are rarely delimited by national boundaries. This is even more so with online communication. The producers and consumers of jihadist online communication are often not based in the same country. Online communication is produced in countless languages, and it is often also consumed in languages other than the audience's native language. It is thus unlikely that the existence of Finnish content is a crucial question for very many of those who wish to familiarise themselves with jihadist content.

The social media and the possibilities it provides for virtual networking with persons interested in jihadism have led to a situation where it is easier than before to influence the thinking and actions of persons living in Finland, also from outside the country. The Ministry of Interior's situation overview of violent extremism from 2014 refers to "radical Islamic mentors operating abroad who — by inciting hate speech and urging support for operations associated with terrorism — strive to exert influence on persons in other countries".[94] The Finnish National Counter-Terrorism Strategy published in late 2018 also lists the "rise in radical Islamist propaganda" targeting Finland as a key factor that has raised the threat of terrorism against the country.[95]

The number of these attempts and their evolution over time are difficult to assess based on the information currently available for the researchers. Neither was this one of the objectives of the study. Some examples of cases targeting Finland and attempts to exert influence have come up in public sources, however. For example, an 'imam' living in the Netherlands used the Internet to lure a young Finnish convert to Syria through online discussions in 2013–2014. This person spent almost two years in

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[94] Ministry of the Interior, *Violent extremism in Finland — situation overview* 1/2014, 7.
[95] Government resolution on the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2018–2021.

Syria before returning to Finland.[96] The founder of the Salafist organisation *al-Muhajiroun* which operated in the United Kingdom, Omar Bakri Muhammed, has hinted that he had facilitated the travel of Finnish fighters to Syria while based in Lebanon, but no indications of such activities were found in the sources used for the study.[97]

While the open online communication examined in this study is part of this exertion of influence, closed one-to-one or small group discussions no doubt play a more important role. Rather than being a direct consequence of the type of online communication analysed in this study, the new social relationships enabled by the Internet and one-to-one discussions through the web played a greater role in the case discussed above.

As in social interaction in general, face-to-face communication and interaction through different media are in many ways interlinked also in the lives of those interested in jihadism. It is rare for people to be radicalised merely by finding jihadist content online; in most cases, the process has included face-to-face interaction, in connection with which the participants may have perused online content together.

However, online communication may have helped to establish highly significant interpersonal relationships. The importance of both public online communication and communication among a smaller group not accessible to outsiders may have a more pronounced role when a person is living in an environment where it is difficult to find others interested in jihadism. In this case, the Internet may become the only way of establishing contacts with persons with a similar ideological disposition, at least in the initial stage of interest in the movements.

This observation may be particularly significant for countries such as Finland, where the number of those attracted to jihadist activism is small and the phenomenon is mainly concentrated in cities. Some of those interested in travelling to Syria or Iraq, for example, have come from other parts of the country. The first contacts with jihadism of those persons living in more remote areas have inevitably been established online. The role of online communication in facilitating attachment to jihadist activity in Finland may in this respect have been particularly strong. Naturally, this is not a phenomenon specific to Finland alone, but it may be more pronounced due to the small size and regional concentration of the jihadist milieu.

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[96] "17-vuotias kantasuomalainen "Jouni" halusi tarkka-ampujaksi - Imaami värväsi ummikkopojan terroristiryhmään Syyriaan", *MTV Uutiset* 19 September 2016.
[97] Kari Ahlberg, "Radikaali muslimisaarnaaja Libanonissa Yle Uutisille: Syyriassa kymmeniä suomalaistaistelijoita", *Yle* 29 October 2013.

We should also be aware of the fact that producing and consuming jihadist online communication may comprise so-called keyboard jihadism. It is not linked to participation in violent activities or supporting them outside the web, nor does it necessary lead to such activities. Similarly to a large part of communication online and on the social media, it does not necessarily lead to other types of jihadist activism. In the same vein, those involved in jihadism outside the Internet do not necessarily communicate online as much as before, or they are able to hide their tracks better using the new encrypted communication channels. This is likely to become more common in the future as technology companies' and authorities' methods of deleting jihadist content advance further, and activists, in turn, invent new ways of avoiding detection. Consequently, the relationship between online and offline activity is not straightforward in this respect, either, and it changes constantly with time.

4.3   Needs for further research

The objective of the study was to produce a structured overview of jihadist online communication linked to Finland. The findings of the present study together with the further reflections in this Chapter will hopefully prepare the ground for further research in the topic.

Many essential questions still remain to be answered. This study focused exclusively on content that was openly available. Due to the authorities' countermeasures, openly disseminating content supporting jihadist movements has become extremely difficult, and the majority of the material has thus migrated to encrypted channels or the darknet in recent years. Comprehensive monitoring of these new channels and following relevant discussions as they move from one channel to another on different online platforms require plenty of time and persistence. It was not possible within the framework of the present study. Further research should thus be carried out to investigate the following questions:

- What type of jihadist content and interaction related to Finland can be found on closed channels and the darknet?

- What impact has the deletion of social media accounts and websites had on jihadist online communication relevant to Finland?

As the study has shown, in terms of understanding the significance of jihadist online communication, it is also crucial to analyse everything that happens around this communication, in other words the context in which such content is produced and

shared and the way in which it is consumed. How the content is used, who uses it and how it is interpreted is ultimately more significant than what can be found on the web. Research would be needed in at least the following topics:

- Which online content have persons who left Finland for Syria and Iraq and other persons interested in jihadism living/having lived in Finland followed, shared and produced?

- What type of online communication is associated with jihadism in Finland? What proportion of this communication is 'Finnish', and in what way is it linked to more extensive jihadist online communication and activism?

In terms of analysing the significance of jihadist online communication, it is additionally not sufficient to examine its use and interpretation among potential and actual supporters of jihadism only. Researchers analyse the significance of jihadist online communication in the 'new media ecology' as the sum of three different factors. In addition to the production of jihadist online content, these factors include the way in which the mainstream media present and describe the threat posed by online content and the reasons for this threat, and how different audiences understand this content and its potential effects on radicalisation, including how descriptions of the topic in news media have influenced this broader understanding.[98]

Research has shown that the large-scale attention received by jihadist online communication in mainstream media significantly accentuates its importance. While open jihadist content has been easy to access, its visibility and recognisability, and thus its potential impact, increase significantly when it is discussed by the mainstream media. ISIS and many other jihadist groups have learned to use the media buzz caused by their online communication to gain more influence.

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[98] Awan et al., *Radicalisation and Media*.

When we investigate the significance and impacts of online communication, we thus also need to analyse how different audiences interpret and consume this content, or even actively oppose to it. In concrete terms, this may mean analysing the following questions, for instance:

- How has jihadist online communication (also other than communication related to Finland or people having lived in Finland) been covered in Finnish mainstream media?

- How do different Finnish communities understand the significance and extent of the phenomenon, especially in relation to persons travelling to Syria and Iraq? How do these ideas vary between different population groups?

- What types of counter-messaging opposed to jihadist communication can be found?

Ministry of the Interior
Finland