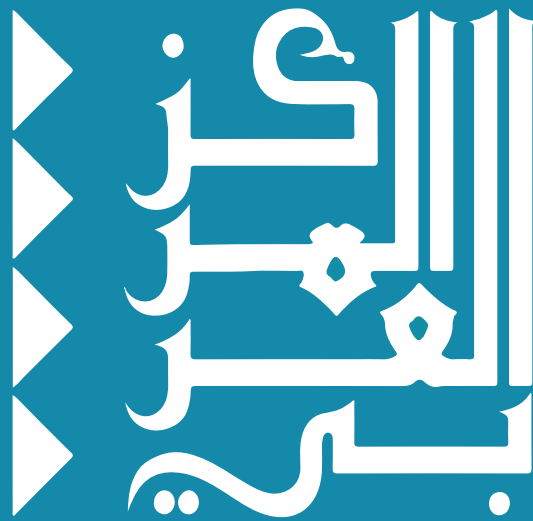# The Arab World after ISIL's Defeat

ACW Research & Analysis Unit

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المركز العربي واشنطن دي سي

Current efforts to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) will, with time and sustained commitment, eventually lead to the physical destruction of the organization and its so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Unfortunately, however, its physical disappearance and the lifting of its writ off large swathes of territory and their inhabitants will not likely result in the collapse of its ideological underpinning, one that has made it both a usurper of tolerant Islamic teachings and an implementer of a millennial vision for the Muslim and wider worlds. Indeed, if recent history is any guide, ISIL's ideology has a very good chance of regenerating itself, albeit under different conditions, at the hands of alternate cohorts and in other locales.

Previous iterations of the jihadist organization, some still active, used its general understanding of scripture and contrived responsibility to carry out the proverbial "will of God." While not as violent and nihilistic as ISIL has proven to be, those formations also saw the world in binary terms: the believer and the apostate, the righteous and the perverted, the legitimate leader and the usurper, the deliverer of God's word and the unfaithful, and similar bifurcations of divisive rhetoric and praxis. The active ones still spout what they deem is required and preordained and constantly preach that if the world wants salvation, it better accept their existence and participation as inevitable.

Indeed, looking into the potentialities of the post-Islamic State period raises a number of important, and in some cases, existential questions regarding Syria, Iraq, and the surrounding countries and the world. Under what conditions would the revival of ISIL or similar organizations be possible? Is there credence in arguments about the importance of political, economic, and social circumstances helping or hindering such a revival? What can the Iraqi or Syrian cases teach us about the relations between civil wars, governance, national aspirations, identity, sectarianism, and other considerations and the rise and sustenance of jihadist salafism? What dangers lurk in the future? What are the limits of the responsibility of international stakeholders? Finally, how can the probable return and revival of jihadism be challenged or addressed after the fighters are repatriated?

To try to answer as many of these questions as possible, the Arab Center Washington DC asked several of its analysts to reflect on the post-ISIL period in the Arab world. Dr. Imad Harb responded with an analysis of what he sees as the regional and international conditions conducive to a revival of the organization or the rise of similar outfits. Dr. Abdulwahab al-Qassab wrote on what he sees as considerations pivotal to the Iraqi case study. Dr. Radwan Ziadeh analyzed those related to Syria. Mr. Joe Macaron stepped outside of the borders of ISIL's current battlefield in Iraq and Syria and looked at possible repercussions for Lebanon and Jordan as two adjacent Arab entities incapable of escaping the vagaries of the ISIL challenge. Finally, Dr. Tamara Kharroub

analyzed the ways receiving countries could deal with Islamic State decamped fighters.

I. Conditions Conducive to an ISIL Revival

Imad K. Harb

Despite the overwhelming opposition to ISIL in the Arab world—a fact made clear by the latest Arab Index survey—Arab countries are likely to find themselves after the military collapse of ISIL in Iraq and Syria besieged by the possibility that the organization's ideas are alive and well. What they will most likely find is that despite the death of thousands of ISIL fighters in Syria and Iraq, not to mention those in Libya, Yemen, and farther afield in the wider Muslim world and beyond, many recruits will return to their countries of origin only to plot a feared reincarnation. Arabs and others know that ISIL rose from the ashes of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and fed upon both the Syrian regime's brutal response to peaceful demonstrations for democracy and the Iraqi government's sectarian policies and neglect of marginalized constituencies. Alas, such conditions in these two countries still obtain, and it is hard to see how that is going to prevent jihadist wannabes from exploiting extant realities to regenerate their millennial desires and recruit perennially disillusioned adherents.

Country and Regional Conditions

Indeed, the post-"Arab Spring" period has not only seen a recession of the euphoria of possible change—except for Tunisia, though to a worrying degree—but also a return to the status quo ante of a corrupt political environment, dire economic conditions, and poor social indicators. A cursory look at the Arab world's largest states paints an unflattering picture. After the revolution of 2011, Egypt has reverted to a stronger version of authoritarianism in which the old and proverbial "deep state" has regenerated itself and the hoped-for democratic transformation has been thwarted. In Algeria, a comatose political system led by an ailing president and buttressed by centers of power still decides the future of tens of millions of Algerians who have inherited what arguably was a model war of liberation from colonialism. A poorly run state in Sudan led to unprecedented deterioration that six years ago produced the only breakup of an Arab country into a dependent and stagnant north and a disenchanted and civil war-riven non-Arab south being systematically destroyed by its own elites.

Yemen is in the throes of the aftermath of a power takeover by an alliance between a former president who refused to abide by the will of millions of demonstrators during the Arab Spring and an illegal sectarian militia hoping to establish its own state. The turmoil there poses the greatest danger to the future of Yemen and its people and is a major challenge to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and its end is thus essential for stability in the Arabian Peninsula. That ISIL is already in Yemen, which is simultaneously home to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), makes it a

candidate for a future hub of jihadist activity and salafist agitation.

Neither are prevalent conditions in Syria and Iraq a panacea for resisting the return of ISIL-like thinking. Jabhat Fath al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) may be defeated on the battlefield in Syria but has assured for itself a constituency in its areas of control that has become accustomed to a watered-down Islamic state. ISIL's expected defeat in Iraq's Mosul and the entire north will very likely be followed by one or more of the conditions that helped the rise of the organization and its predecessor, AQI. These conditions include the prosecution of Shiite sectarian policies and interests, the marginalization of the country's Sunnis, Iranian interference, and the ineffective American intervention.

To be sure, only the monarchies of the Arab political order appear to be relatively successful in fighting the rise, return, or sustenance of jihadism in the post-ISIL period. Having the largest population in an Arab monarchy, Morocco has taken good strides in both fighting the jihadist scourge and laying the foundations for a positive moderate change in the political and economic fortunes of the country. Morocco has conducted two rounds of democratic elections in the post-Arab Spring era that have produced a more representative political makeup. Its security services have been effective in fighting al-Qaeda-inspired jihadism. While still facing serious economic problems like unemployment, low per capita income, debt, and slowed economic growth, the

government continues to work for a sustained recovery.

Perhaps Jordan is most vulnerable among the monarchies because of its proximity to the current hot spots of jihadist activity in Iraq and Syria, its limited economic resources, and the attendant problems that come with the presence of hundreds of thousands of Syrian and Iraqi refugees and Islamist groups. However, the recent successes of the security services give hope that the government will be able to prevent the country from becoming a hotbed for future jihadist activity.

GCC countries are by far the best equipped to deal with the feared radicalization in the post-ISIL period. What appears to be at work is a general acceptance of the efficacy of the renewed social contract between the governments and the governed, despite serious reductions in hydrocarbon revenues. Indeed, GCC countries may have found a workable formula to assure the social peace necessary for depriving jihadists of the justification for their ideology and practice. There are, of course, the occasional incidents of terrorist activity that may point to a receptive environment, but security organizations are scoring important successes in countering jihadist violence. Perhaps what is most needed is the speeding up of the work to create the necessary avenues for a more open political space and a vigorous participatory culture. What is also needed is a greater emphasis on economic change and diversification that are likely to offer opportunities for entrepreneurship and

economic freedoms outside the confines of the rentier state organs.

Collectively, however, such enduring issues as unemployment among the youth, sectarian polarization, weak institutionalization, worsening governance, lethargic enforcement of the rule of law, corruption and nepotism, and myriad other political and social problems will undoubtedly make the rebirth of ISIL-like organizations possible in the future. A failure by the region's governments to address certain groups' targeting of minorities and non-Muslims in Arab countries will also feed a misguided salafist ideology and help ISIL and potential cohorts. Importantly, a malaise or weakness in state structures will allow jihadist upstarts to probe again at both the edges and center of the Arab political order for opportunities to emerge. As things stand today, Libya and Yemen appear to be prime examples of such conditions, despite past and future local, regional, and international efforts to derail jihadist wannabes. On the other hand, only the states of the GCC seem to be partially immune to the challenge that will threaten all others.

The International Factor

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is an expression of deep ideational differences between two versions of an extreme: a radical vision of Islam as a religious and civilizational opposite, and a revisionist interpretation of western ideology that reflects a distinct cultural and human identity. ISIL and its predecessors, especially al-Qaeda, have used this divide to justify a violence that has not distinguished Muslims from non-Muslims or even considered Muslims to be a unified whole. Subsequently, a post-ISIL period will necessarily be exposed to the vagaries of that divide and will continue to experience its repercussions.

What unfortunately characterizes the current western response to ISIL and similar organizations is a siege mentality justifying a military challenge to the West. Just like Arab governments that emphasize security policies in dealing with calls for change, western governments have neglected the benefits of soft power in their interactions with the Muslim East. Populist and unbounded nationalist forces are exploiting misdirected policies to worsen the purported contradictions between religious teachings and identity preferences. The result is a combination of electoral gains and possible victories and the exacerbation of the original divide that serves extremists on both ends. In the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and many other European countries, xenophobic and chauvinist politicians are on the rise while governments continue to duck their responsibilities toward their marginalized immigrant communities, thus helping radicals win hearts and minds among the alienated youth.

The United States has become the case par excellence of a country that is getting close to abandoning the efficacy of soft power and exchanging it for a fit-for-all policy that relies on the hard power of the blunt military instrument. President Donald Trump has recently proposed

a $54 billion increase in the defense budget at the expense of the foreign aid that has since the Second World War helped US foreign policy. The chaos and confusion that pervades the White House have also spread to the Department of State and other diplomatic venues, whose work is crucial in supporting America's relations with the Arab world. President Trump seems to be more at ease dealing with Presidents Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt and Bashar al-Asad of Syria than with the necessary civil society organizations American diplomacy should sustain and help advance.

The Trump Administration's betrayal of international law regarding the question of Palestine is certainly not conducive to ameliorating the jihadist threat in the Arab world and the Middle East. Nor is the American president's travel ban on citizens from predominantly Muslim countries the way to prevent the rebirth of jihadism. The president's advisor, Steven Bannon, is on the record speaking of a "global war" against what he called "jihadist Islamic fascism." Indeed, neither regional factors limited to the Middle East nor international conditions may be able to prevent the resurgence of a scourge in the form of ISIL and al-Qaeda sometime in the future, after the guns fall silent in Syria and Iraq.

II. Iraq After ISIL

Abdulwahab Al-Qassab

ISIL's defeat in Mosul suggests a series of questions about the future of Iraq. Will the organization simply disappear? Will is change

form? Will a more radical group be created instead? Will a stable Iraq emerge from the rubble of almost 15 years of chaos, bloodshed, and destruction?

Each one of these questions has its share of truth and doubts. In fact, the "day after" scenarios for Iraq are multilayered because the actors are different and have conflicting aims and goals in Iraq. Indeed, the new period will be characterized by four important considerations.

First, it will be important to watch how relations develop between the country's three main factions: Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. They have had both difficult and smooth relations in the past. But the reality is that they have shared the land for a long time. Arabs and Kurds have lived together in the same areas for at least three millennia. Sunnis and Shiites have coexisted for almost 1,400 years without animosity. But the Iranian revolution and its consequences in Iraq helped to create a sectarian split within the Arab community of Iraq even though Sunnis and Shiites belong to the same tribes, worship the same God, and share the same values. The future will thus likely bring cooperation if political leaderships prove to be willing partners in building the country's future.

Second, the split between Arabs and Kurds is a recent phenomenon. Ethnic Kurds constitute about 18 percent of Iraq's population. They and the Arabs have had common national aspirations that occasionally played a negative role in bringing both parties together to have a common Iraqi identity. The presence of ISIL in

Iraq worked to downplay the differences between the central government in Baghdad and the country's Kurds. But after its defeat, there will likely be discord regarding oil revenues and the disputed territories around Kirkuk and other areas the Kurds won while fighting ISIL. In addition, the talk by Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barazani about independence is not supported by all the Kurds. This independence factor will likely push all parties to war: the central government, the KRG government in Erbil, and the faction in Sulaymaniyah which follows former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. Iran will stand by the central government and Sulaymaniyah. Turkey will likely support Erbil, with a sort of war by proxy that is waged with Iraqi blood.

Third, if Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's government fails to behave as an inclusive one—which is the expectation if it remains under Iranian influence—a deeper split would take place between Sunnis and Shiites. Another type of insurgency may erupt, and internal fighting would depend on which warlord succeeds and whether a sort of radical Sunnism could prevail. This is one of the most dangerous scenarios that could unfold as it would pave the way for a more radical form of Islamism, one that is more extreme than ISIL's ideology. It would also mean the destruction of Iraq: the country would be devastated completely and the growth of this radical faction would spread fiercely in the country, way beyond the current reach of ISIL. Neither Iran, Turkey, nor the Gulf

states would be immune from such an eventuality.

Fourth, though the aforementioned scenarios are very negative and grim, there is room for hope if the central government of Iraq is pressured by the US-led international coalition to be inclusive, treat the Mosul population in a humane manner, pull out the Popular Mobilization Forces from Mosul and Tal Afar completely, and appoint a senior officer from Mosul to govern the battleground area. Reports leaked from Mosul indicate that many atrocities have taken place and civil quarters have been destroyed. To assume that everyone in Mosul is affiliated with ISIL is neither right nor just. Similar pressure should be applied to the KRG to justify its claims, behave as an Iraqi region, peacefully settle its differences with the central government, and integrate Sulaymaniyah.

A resolution at the UN Security Council is needed to outline plans for disarming all the paramilitary and militia forces in Iraq, curbing Iranian influence, and convening an international-regional conference to build a task force that would undertake the rehabilitation of Iraq. Time will tell if such plans will be effective in bringing Iraq back to life after ISIL is vanquished.

III. Syria after ISIL

Radwan Ziadeh

When it was established in April 2013, ISIL fought pitched battles against the al-Qaeda-

affiliated Nusra Front, over which of them has Islamist legitimacy. After ISIL took control of Mosul in June 2014, it became clear that it is different from other terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq and it commanded sizable military assets, most of which it acquired from the Iraqi army. It also had an effective propaganda campaign that helped it recruit fighters in both countries and from around the world.

When ISIL controlled Raqqa after defeating all other armed groups in the city, including Nusra, it became a major party to the Syrian civil war. With its hoped-for demise in 2017, and its rollback from Raqqa and such other cities as Deir al-Zor, al-Bukamal, Manbij, al-Ayn, and others, it would be possible to diminish its psychological, social, and educational impact on Syrian society. It will be a complicated matter, especially with the Syrian regime's continuing daily bombardment of Syrian cities outside the control of the government, as Aleppo and the countryside areas of Hama and Idlib attest. Conditions in post-ISIL Syria will likely be as follows:

- Socially: Perhaps this is where the worst repercussions for ISIL's long control of some of Syria's cities (some more than three years) will be evident. There are also about 300,000 citizens living in ISIL-controlled areas now where they have endured an extremist military-religious administration that determined dress codes, work patterns, and quality of life. ISIL has also radically changed educational curricula to produce a

new understanding for Muslims and non-Muslims, a situation that may have lasting repercussions on future generations. Important concepts also were under attack, such as tolerance, pluralism, and coexistence. There also was a rise in the number of young people who conducted suicide operations in 2016. But there also was vigorous social resistance to ISIL in many parts of Syria, prompting the organization to conduct assassination operations against Free Syrian Army personnel, even in Turkey, as happened with members of the group "Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently," who were attacked in Urfa, Turkey. It is thus possible to say that a new generation of ideological adherents may be susceptible to future recruitment inside and outside Syria in the future.

- Economically: Liberating Manbij and al-Bab from ISIL has exposed a slow response on reconstruction efforts by local and international actors. Civilians find themselves facing a period of instability—a situation that is likely to extend to Raqqa after its liberation. Post-ISIL governance is essential to provide assurances for traumatized civilians. So far, however, no plans are being discussed regarding reconstruction in Raqqa and Deir al-Zor, which were subject to widespread bombardment, including from the international coalition. In fact, Raqqa today is almost completely destroyed; reviving it requires international efforts and serious economic programs to fill the void and

disallow other organizations to step in to exploit civilians' needs in liberated areas.

- Politically: It is not clear who will liberate Raqqa. But whenever it gets done it will leave a political vacuum. If the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) succeed in controlling the city with the help of American troops, fears of partition will increase and deepen since the SDF is mainly composed of Kurds pushing for self-rule despite their minority status in the area. Raqqa will thus become susceptible to short- and long-term destabilization, which will lead to civic conflict or maybe ethnic struggle in light of the historical dispute between Arab tribes and Kurds in the region. Thus, concentrating on the military campaign without political solutions is likely to deepen the security vacuum and expose the area to the potential of the emergence of other organizations as heirs to ISIL, just like what happened in Iraq in the post-2004 period.

IV. Jordan and Lebanon after ISIL

Joe Macaron

As neighbors to Iraq and Syria, Jordan and Lebanon wrestled with the spillover from the rise of ISIL. Both countries had some similarities and dissimilarities in their efforts to address that emerging threat in 2014 before managing to contain it in 2015. One of the striking dissimilarities has been the enemy they are facing. While ISIL and the al-Qaeda affiliate al-Nusra Front (now Fath al-Sham) originally worked together against the Lebanese authorities, ISIL alone has been targeting the Jordanian government. The "divide and rule" approach in Jordan has been a contrast to the "attack and engage" approach in Lebanon.

In the case of Jordan, the boiling moment was the December 2014–January 2015 period during the capture and burning to death of Air Force Lieutenant Muath al-Kasasbeh, whose fighter jet was shot down over Syria. That development was a defining moment in turning public opinion against ISIL and in shuffling the cards of the country's jihadist salafist movement. While the Jordanian government forcefully reacted in the short term, it had since gradually withdrawn from the Syrian quagmire. "The divide and rule" approach resulted in the release of two prominent salafist clerics known to be supportive of al-Qaeda, Abu Qutada and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, on the condition of counterbalancing ISIL's propaganda. However, another influential salafist figure, Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, who issued in 2011 a fatwa to encourage fighting in Syria, still refuses an offer to be released in return for publicly denouncing ISIL. Yet, the salafist base in Jordan is largely pro Fath al-Sham and is more keen to focus on the Syrian war instead of confronting Jordanian authorities or using the Jordanian border to launch attacks inside Syria. ISIL's threats in Jordan are tangible but remain limited, concentrated in areas like the Zarqa, Balqa, and Irbid governorates.

In the case of Lebanon, the path has been mired with challenges as well. The defining moment came in August 2014 when ISIL and al-Nusra Front launched a joint attack on Arsal, a Lebanese village on the border with Syria, after Lebanese security forces arrested a commander from al-Nusra. Subsequently, 10 Lebanese soldiers and 17 policemen were taken hostage, followed by a five-day battle that ended with the Lebanese Army pushing ISIL close to the border with Syria. In December 2015, al-Nusra freed the Lebanese policemen in a prisoner swap with the Lebanese authorities, while the fate of the soldiers held by ISIL remains unknown. Since June 2016, the Lebanese armed forces seized control of 95 percent of territories held by ISIL and Fath al-Sham; what remains is 50 square kilometers (19 square miles) on the border. Where things stand now, Fath al-Sham is concentrated in Arsal, while ISIL's presence is more in Ras Baalbek, south of the Bekaa Valley.

In 2014-2015, a series of bombings also began to strike Lebanon, mostly targeting Hezbollah-held areas, in retaliation to the Shiite group's military involvement in Syria. These attacks were orchestrated by groups influenced by al-Qaeda, including Nusra Front and Abdullah Azzam Brigade. However, since last year ISIL began its own attempts to launch attacks inside Lebanon but have been repeatedly thwarted under intense scrutiny from Lebanese intelligence services. The rise of ISIL led to an undeclared truce between the Iranian-backed Hezbollah and the Saudi-backed Future Movement since December 2014, which, allowed the competing intelligence and security services in Lebanon to coordinate regardless of the political climate.

Moving forward, both Lebanon and Jordan will continue to function on a "tactical truce" with al-Qaeda affiliates. Since last year, Fath al-Sham halted its suicide attacks in Lebanon, in a tacit agreement with Lebanese authorities to maintain its lifeline support from the al-Qalamoun region, while al-Qaeda clerics in Jordan continue their attempts to balance the influence of ISIL in Jordan's salafist movement. However, clerics like al-Tahawi in Jordan and Shaykh Ahmad al-Assir in Lebanon (who are both in prison) continue to offer alternative voices that can attract additional followers in the coming years. The trend of infighting for influence between Fath al-Sham and ISIL, which we have seen since last year, will likely continue and expand. Palestinian camps in Lebanon (mostly in Ain al-Hilweh) and Jordan (mostly in Irbid) are also becoming a hub for jihadist activities where authorities have limited reach.

Indeed, there are concerns that Lebanon and Jordan might be the next target in the post-ISIL period—Lebanon for Hezbollah's role in the Syrian war and Jordan for the country's alliance with the United States. Indeed, if ISIL falls apart in Syria and Iraq, one of the biggest challenges for both Jordanian and Lebanese authorities will remain: how to deal with the young radicals returning home from the Syrian war and how to end the last pockets of ISIL influence without allowing al-Qaeda to resume its terrorist activities.

V. After ISIL: Revival, Criminalization, and Rehabilitation

Tamara Kharroub

The Islamic State is a state-building project that exists within defined geographic boundaries in Iraq and Syria. While this physical demarcation has greatly contributed to the success of ISIL, a potential military defeat of the group is unlikely to "eradicate"—in US President Donald Trump's words—the group's existence or its violent and extremist ideology.

Following ISIL's continued territorial losses in Iraq, and likely (even inevitable) demise in Syria, the future of ISIL members remains largely contested and controversial. Recent reports show Iraqi forces torturing suspected ISIL members, and even children who have links to ISIL, and detaining associated family members (who are often themselves victims of ISIL atrocities). These are all violations of the laws of war and abuses of human rights, including children's rights and the right to a fair trial.

However, preserving human rights and international law while ensuring security and military victory in a fight against one of the most vicious and violent groups is no easy task. The following questions remain: what happens to ISIL fighters after the group is defeated, and what is the most effective strategy for dealing with individuals suspected of having ties to ISIL?

Retreat and Return

As countries like Iraq and Syria still face serious security challenges, the problems of a political vacuum, and the absence of the rule of law, the conditions are ripe for ISIL to regrow in new and evolving ways. Such conditions will continue to provide an environment conducive for enabling violent extremist groups and ideologies to persist and flourish.

If, and when, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is defeated as a centralized physical presence, ISIL members, who know well that the alternative would be lifelong torture or death, are likely to flee and resurface in other locations and forms. In fact, ISIL spokesman and senior leader Abu Mohammad Al-Adnani said in a speech before he was killed in 2016 that loss of territory is not a defeat and that the group will retreat temporarily (what he called *inhiyaz*) into the desert and prepare for a comeback. For example, after ISIL was driven out of areas north of Baghdad, Islamic State fighters who retreated into the desert continued to engage in robbery, extortion, and other organized criminal activities while using sectarian attacks to create mistrust and fear. Preserving the conditions for the group's survival, ISIL fighters returned to those areas to recruit fighters and launch suicide attacks.

The change in tactics by ISIL fighters, including insurgency and sleeper cells in desert and mountainous areas, will present new challenges especially in Iraq and Syria. Poor neighborhoods and remote rural areas are often

overlooked in Arab countries and have become incubators for ISIL and similar groups, where they can easily hide and use "class warfare" to attract and recruit supporters.

Only political and economic stability and reconciliation and justice, including the capacity to counter organized crime in both urban and rural areas, can help set the underlying infrastructure to counter violent extremist groups.

Prosecution and Mass Incarceration

The numbers of ISIL members who traveled to Syria from the Middle East and North Africa are estimated at 8,000 from the Maghreb and 8,240 from the Middle East, with Tunisia (6,000), Saudi Arabia (2,500), and Jordan (2,000) as the largest exporters. From western Europe, 5,000+ traveled to Syria primarily from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Belgium while 4,700 joined ISIL from former soviet republics.

A study by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism estimated that 30 percent of European Union fighters returned home from Syria. While fighters return for different reasons—including disillusionment, trauma, and regret—many return with malicious intent to recruit and carry out attacks. Although exact numbers of returning fighters are not known, they are significant, and returning fighters present serious security threats in home countries. Several examples of returning fighters planning or committing attacks

demonstrate the scale of such concerns. In May 2014, French national Mehdi Nemmouche killed four people in Belgium, after returning from Syria.

Governments receiving returning foreign fighters face the challenge of how to deal with them. Most countries in western Europe and North Africa have taken a more aggressive approach, including prosecution, intelligence gathering and surveillance, revoking citizenship, and confiscating passports of suspects, even without sufficient evidence to incriminate them. Countries like France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Australia have implemented policies and measures to prosecute fighters and revoke their passports. In Tunisia, returning foreign fighters are arrested and prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws, although revoking citizenship violates the Tunisian constitution.

However, mass incarceration and ostracism risk further radicalization. Prisons can provide a space for returning fighters to congregate and reinforce radical ideologies, creating a situation similar to that of Camp Bucca in Iraq, out of which ISIL was born. Marginalization and ostracism can push returnees toward violence upon return. Seizing passports and other repressive measures serve as barriers and prevent reintegration of foreign fighters who have nowhere else to go. Out of fear of prison and torture, fighters desperate for a way out may resort to crossing porous borders and hiding in vulnerable countries such as Turkey; thus they remain stranded in the Middle East

with no chance for penance, potentially further destabilizing the region.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Scandinavian countries have taken softer measures to de-radicalize returning foreign fighters by providing psychological care and rehabilitation programs in the hope of full reintegration into society. Programs that seek to rehabilitate fighters face two potential paths: addressing the root cause of the returnee's radicalization, or forming wholesome relationships within the returnee's community.

Some rehabilitation programs that focus on ideological reform, such as the original de-radicalization program in Saudi Arabia, have proven unsuccessful in the long term because graduates from the program rejoined extremist groups. In response, Saudi Arabia changed its programs' emphasis to behavioral factors rather than ideology. However, the Saudi program has been criticized for its human rights abuses as a cover to prosecute critics, for its high costs of paying participants to find "an apartment, a wife, and a car," and for the fact that its success criteria are debatable.

Other efforts in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have been considered successful due to their emphasis on relationships, social engagement, and skills training. In Sweden for example, some cities are pioneering intensive rehabilitation programs for over 100 returning fighters, which include housing assistance, job training, and other support initiatives to decrease their reliance on criminal networks.

Denmark's program in its second-largest city, Arhaus, has taken the approach of rehabilitation over prosecution and has been considered largely successful due to its focus on strengthening returnees' ties to the community through housing, job assistance, and mentoring as opposed to targeting their beliefs. The program has processed returning foreign fighters who have not gone back to Syria nor committed violent crimes in Denmark, in addition to stopping over 330 departures, where in 2015 only one person left from Arhaus to Syria.

Germany's HAYAT program is a gradual three-step process of de-radicalization and reintegration. The success of this model is credited to its comprehensive approach addressing ideological narratives, pragmatic needs (employment, housing, and training), and an affective component incorporating emotional support.

The experiences in several countries show that rehabilitation and reintegration are more likely to yield long-term positive outcomes under certain circumstances. Such models deserve serious consideration in Arab countries like Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, and others.