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# Europe support for Egypt's 'counter terrorism' plan

5 MAGGIO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that the crisis in the Middle East could be solved through negotiations with Egypt because of the crucial role the country has been playing in the region, MENA reported.

During his first visit to Egypt, Steinmeier will be meeting Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and also a number of Egyptian officials to discuss deepening bilateral relations between both countries.

The German foreign minister also iterated his country's support to Egypt's fight against terrorism.

"Egypt is dealing with real terrorist threats and also social and economic needs for Egyptian youth; accordingly Germany and Europe are willing to show support to Egypt to overcome all challenges," Steinmeier was quoted as saying to MENA.

He also said that the aim of his visit is to understand the vision of the country and what has been accomplished since the revolt in 2011 that ousted former autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

Steinmeier is also expected to meet with Al-Azhar Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb and a number of officials from political parties and civil society.

# FINANCIAL TIMES

GLOBAL INSIGHT

May 5, 2015 1:46 pm

## Russia rattles sabres to keep Ukraine from the west

Neil Buckley in London



A Ukrainian soldier on patrol in the Donbass region where Russia is supporting the separatists but not the civil authorities

Violations of the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine have reached their highest level since the Minsk II agreement was signed in February, and President Petro Poroshenko has warned that war could re-erupt “at any moment”.

US officials accuse Russia of again massing its troops along and within Ukraine’s borders and international concerns are mounting — each time fighting breaks out, the risk of full-blown confrontation increases.

The problem is that while Minsk II reduced the violence its longer-term political elements have barely begun to be implemented. Stalemate reigns. But the longer Minsk goes unfulfilled, the greater the chance of renewed conflict.

More than 14 months after the annexation of Crimea, Moscow — outside a small circle of hardliners — does not want further large swaths of Ukrainian territory. Though it might back separatist moves to grab a few more towns — notably the port city of Mariupol — to

make the rebel-held Donetsk and Lugansk republics more economically viable, it cannot afford much more.

Indeed, hit by sanctions and low oil prices, Moscow is doing all it can to avoid shouldering the costs of Donbass. Its aim, rather, is to thwart Ukraine's further integration into the EU and Nato — using the separatist regions as levers.

That means either imposing a Bosnia-style political settlement on Ukraine, making it both a dysfunctional state and giving eastern regions a veto over Nato membership, or freezing the conflict in a way that makes Ukraine indigestible to the west.

The aim of Russia's military build-up may be to pressure Kiev to comply with Minsk II — and get nervous western capitals to press it too — rather than prepare for an actual offensive.

For Russia would, in fact, like Minsk II implemented. It was a much better deal for Russia, and worse for Ukraine, than its predecessor last September.

Moscow-backed separatists won the crucial concession that they do not have to hand control of 450km of the Ukraine-Russia border back to Kiev until the end of the year. That step was also made conditional on Ukraine devolving powers to its regions and passing a law granting “special status” to rebel-held eastern ones.

That gives Russia, in effect, oversight over Ukraine's constitutional reforms. A footnote to Minsk II on what special status should entail moreover is highly unpalatable for Kiev

Institute for Strategic Studies, it has elements of a “confederal” structure, where central authorities lack supremacy over regional ones. “Maybe this is good enough for Putin, but I don't know if it's good for Ukraine,” says Mr Charap.

Kiev's parliament passed a special status law for Donbass in March. But it added conditions: special status comes into force only after separatist regions hold free elections under Ukrainian law, and all “illegal armed groups” must withdraw before the polls.

As Moscow and rebel leaders have complained, while Minsk II called for elections, it did not make such linkages.

Senior Ukrainian officials insist they are complying fully with Minsk. They say elections are vital to produce lawfully elected officials Kiev can engage with, in place of the “criminals” who took power in unrecognised, separatist-organised ballots last November.

That leaves Kiev and Moscow in a stand-off. Russia hopes military posturing will persuade

## Ukraine to comply.

But renewed conflict could destroy any hope of western sanctions being lifted in June, in an EU review, or at the year-end — which could theoretically happen if Minsk is fully implemented.

Kiev, meanwhile, is gambling that the prospect of prolonged sanctions, and having to pay for Donbass — Ukraine stopped budgetary transfers to rebel regions last autumn — will make Russia accept its version of the settlement.

The danger is that, through the Georgia war in 2008, and the east Ukraine conflict, Moscow has made abundantly clear that Nato membership for either country is a “red line”. Unless it feels that prospect has been put firmly out of reach, Russia may decide what it sees as its fundamental security concerns matter more than economic damage from further sanctions.

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## US-Dominated NATO Ready for War on Russia?

05/05/15

03:17:14 am

by Stephen Lendman



Mounting evidence should scare everyone - especially with neocon lunatics in Washington driving policymaking.

They deplore peace. They demand endless wars against all nations not subservient to America's will - puppet vassal states serving US interests, letting their resources be plundered for profit.

Russia and China are prime targets - the only nations able to challenge America militarily, economically, and/or politically.

Washington pressuring Japan and other Asian nations against China shows what Beijing faces. So does America's planned increased regional military presence.

Growing numbers of US combat troops close to Russia's borders reflect confrontation waiting to happen - between the world's preeminent nuclear states risks the unthinkable.

Provocative US-dominated NATO military exercises in Russia's backyard ups the ante for trouble. More on this below.

In late April, US-installed NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said dealing with Russia requires "a strong collective alliance" - code language for preparing for military confrontation?

He lied about what he called the "disturbing...behavior of Russia in Ukraine" - using "force to change borders."

"(W)e have to keep NATO strong"- especially in Eastern Europe, Stoltenberg said.

"(W)e are making our forces more ready, more prepared (by more than) doubling" the

Alliance's Readiness Action Plan strength - including a "High Readiness" force able to act within 48 hours.

Stoltenberg repeated NATO commander General Philip Breedlove's Big Lies claiming:

- nonexistent "Russian aggression;"
- "substantial Russian buildup along the border with Ukraine, but also inside eastern Ukraine;"
- arming Donbass freedom fighters with heavy weapons; and
- violating other Minsk ceasefire terms.

False on all counts! Russia threatens no one. No evidence suggests menacing troop buildups along Ukraine's border, its forces operating inside its territory, or supplying Donbass freedom fighters with heavy or other weapons.

In contrast, hundreds of US combat troops operate in Ukraine - readying its Nazi-infested National Guard and likeminded extremist groups for war.

Washington supplied Kiev with heavy weapons since conflict erupted last spring. Planeloads more arrive regularly.

America threatens Russia and world peace. Its numerous provocations risk direct confrontation.

Military exercises begun on Monday involve thousands of US, UK, German, Belgian, Dutch, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Polish combat troops readying for possible confrontation with Russia.

Poland's President Bronislaw Komorowski signed a resolution establishing a Polish/Lithuanian/Ukrainian military brigade for the same purpose.

At full operational strength scheduled for 2017, it'll include 4,500 combat ready troops.

According to Komorowski, the joint force is "part of a wider plan...to support Ukraine, among others, in the area of modernization" for greater combat readiness against Moscow.

Washington and Brussels want NATO members spending more on "defense." They want homeland needs sacrificed for greater militarism at a time America and rogue Alliance allies pose the world's only threat.

Russia poses none. So-called "Russian aggression" is nonexistent. Moscow is the continent's leading peacemaker.

On Monday, US, German, Norwegian and Swedish submarines joined 13 surface ships from America, Britain, Canada, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, and Turkey for Exercise DYNAMIC MONGOOSE - despite no regional submarine or other threat affecting the participating nations.

Finland reservists are being enlisted in Washington's growing belligerence toward Russia.

Defense Minister Carl Haglund sent 900,000 reservists a letter explaining their role in a potential "crisis situation" - insinuating confrontation with Russia.



Both countries share a 1,340 km border with Russia - running mostly through uninhabited forests and sparsely populated rural areas.

It bears repeating. Mounting evidence suggests US-dominated NATO heading for direct confrontation with Russia. If initiated with nuclear weapons, all bets are off.

#### A Final Comment

No nation in world history along with its prostitute media proliferate more provocative propaganda than America - Big Lies by any standard.

None pose humanity a greater threat. None more leave world peace hanging by a thread.

US-pressured EU leaders intend developing new ways to counter Russian proliferated hard truths irresponsibly called propaganda.

Sputnik News called it a planned "new Iron Curtain" at a time US-dominated NATO alone threatens world peace enhanced by relentless Russia bashing - malicious disinformation substituting malicious Big Lies for hard truths.

According to the Brussels-based EUobserver, "Russian propaganda disseminated by outlets such as RT and Sputnik News is finding receptive audiences in various EU member states" - because it's some of the most reliable news and information found anywhere, polar opposite Western rubbish.

Washington and Brussels call truth-telling on vital issues "propaganda." They want nothing interfering with their mind-manipulating disinformation. No alternative views are tolerated - especially on major geopolitical issues.

Western free expression is just a figure of speech. State-sponsored lawlessness threatens to eliminate it altogether.

Perhaps it's just another 9/11-type major US and/or EU-instigated false flag away - followed by martial law and suspension of fundamental democratic rights.

Police states are born this way - especially when people are duped to believe sacrificing freedoms enhance their security. They end up losing both big time.

-###-

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# ISIS Claims Link to Attack at Texas Event Showing Muhammad Cartoons

By DAN BILEFSKY and BEN HUBBARD MAY 5, 2015

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LONDON — [The Islamic State](#) extremist group has sought to link itself to last weekend’s [attack in Garland, Tex.](#), during which two assailants shot a security guard before being killed by police officers outside an event devoted to cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, news agencies reported on Tuesday.

The group, which is fighting an insurgency in Syria and Iraq, said on its official radio station Al Bayan that “two soldiers of the caliphate” had carried out the attack, [The Associated Press](#) said.

The statement provided few details, however, and it remained unclear whether the extremist group was in fact involved even indirectly in the attack or whether it was making the claim purely for propaganda value, following a pattern of trying to attract recruits by praising terrorist attacks against Western targets for which it may have provided ideological inspiration rather than weapons or training.

Although the Islamic State,

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also known as [ISIS](#) or ISIL, is seen as well organized in the territory in Iraq and Syria where it has declared a caliphate, or Islamic state, there is little evidence that it has actively planned and directed attacks abroad.

“Normally, it is sufficient for a person to say they are affiliated with ISIS even if they haven’t been trained by ISIS, as it is in keeping with ISIS’ call for people to carry out attacks on the west,” said Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, a researcher at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel. “It is not as if ISIS has a cell in the United States or trains people. This is not ISIS coming to America.”

In voice recordings released online, Islamic State leaders have called on their followers to launch attacks on “infidels” where ever they may be, by running them over with cars, stabbing them or throwing them off cliffs. Most attacks associated with the group outside of Islamic State territory appear to have been planned and executed at the local level with little more than inspiration provided by the organization.

The little information publicly available about the attackers in Texas suggests that they had been influenced by different currents of jihadist thought. A Twitter account believed to be associated with the gunmen used a profile picture of Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni-American cleric who had been with Al Qaeda before he was killed in an American drone strike in Yemen in 2011.

But a post from the same account pledged fealty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of the Islamic State, which has broken with Al Qaeda and competes with it for prestige and recruits.

In its statement on Tuesday, the Islamic State was quoted as saying by The A.P., “We tell America that what is coming is more bitter and harder and

[Gunman in Texas Shooting Was F.B.I. Suspect in Jihad Inquiry](#) MAY 4, 2015

[Texas Police Kill Gunmen at Exhibit Featuring Cartoons of Muhammad](#) MAY 3, 2015

[Video Shows a Paris Gunman Declaring His Loyalty to the Islamic State](#) JAN. 11, 2015

[The Saturday Profile: Victim of Extremists Comes to Understand the Siren Song of ISIS](#) APRIL 24, 2015

[6 Minnesotans Held in Plot to Join ISIS](#) APRIL 20, 2015

you will see from the soldiers of the caliphate what harms you.”

American law enforcement officials are still trying to piece together whether others were behind the attack that was carried out by two men, Elton Simpson, 30, and Nadir Hamid Soofi, 34, in Garland, a suburb of Dallas. The authorities have started to examine the backgrounds of the two men, who lived in the same apartment complex in Phoenix.

One has been [identified by the F.B.I.](#) as a jihadist terrorism suspect, who regularly attended a mosque in Phoenix. The other ran a carpet cleaning business and also attended a mosque.

The event at which the attack took place included a contest for the best caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, with a top prize of \$10,000.

The Texas attack bore some resemblance to [January's attack](#) by Islamic extremists on the offices in Paris of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, during which 12 people, including several cartoonists, were killed after the newspaper published cartoons lampooning Muhammad. However, in the Texas shooting, only the gunmen were killed.

After January's terrorist attacks in and around Paris, during which [Amedy Coulibaly](#), a French citizen of African descent, also killed four people at a kosher supermarket before he was shot to death by the police, a video made before the attack surfaced. In that video, Mr. Coulibaly [declared his allegiance to the Islamic State](#), described his role in what he called a

coordinated attack to defend Islam, and urged young people to take up the fight.

However, the extent of direct involvement by the Islamic State in the Paris attacks has not been determined. Lone-wolf individuals can declare allegiance to an extremist group such as the Islamic State, and extremist groups can exploit attacks for their propaganda value.

In the case of the Paris attacks, the two brothers who attacked Charlie Hebdo said they were followers of a rival militant group, Al Qaeda in Yemen, also known as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Both extremist groups praised those behind the attacks.

The organizers of the event in Texas contend that they held the event as a celebration of free speech. [Pamela Geller](#), an outspoken blogger, who organized the event, has said that Muslims are being singled out as a special group about whom American values of freedom of speech are not being applied. However, pro-Muslim advocates, while strongly criticizing the violence, have decried what they see as a provocation that offended many Muslims. In most interpretations of Islam, cartoons or visual representations of the Prophet Muhammad are considered blasphemous.

Mr. Simpson, who attended an Islamic community center in northwest Phoenix, was convicted in 2011 of lying to F.B.I. agents about whether he had made plans to travel to Somalia. He said he had not when, in fact, he had. Federal prosecutors charged that he had aimed to go to engage in violent jihad. But a judge ruled that the government had not been able to prove that part of the charge, and he was sentenced to three years' probation.

Dan Bilefsky reported from London, and Ben Hubbard from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

# Syria war: 'unthinkable atrocities' documented in report on Aleppo

Regime accused of crimes against humanity and opposition groups accused of war crimes in Amnesty report

Kareem Shaheen in Beirut

Tuesday 5 May 2015 11.47 BST

Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity by systematically using barrel bombs to kill civilians and destroy infrastructure in Aleppo, says Amnesty International.

The accusations come in a report released on Tuesday, two days after the regime bombed a school and community centre in a rebel-held district in the city where students were sitting exams.

Based on more than 100 interviews with current and former residents - many of them survivors and activists - and analysis of images and videos from the besieged city, the 74-page report documents "unthinkable atrocities". These include air strikes that have mostly killed civilians, as well as arbitrary detention and torture by both sides of the conflict, it says.

The report also accuses armed opposition groups of committing war crimes by using improvised and inaccurate artillery against civilians.

Philip Luther, Amnesty's Middle East and North Africa director, said in a statement: "Widespread atrocities, in particular the vicious and unrelenting aerial bombardment of civilian neighbourhoods by government forces, have made life for civilians in Aleppo increasingly unbearable.

"These reprehensible and continual strikes on residential areas point to a policy of deliberately and systematically targeting civilians in attacks that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity." He added: "By relentlessly and deliberately targeting civilians, the Syrian government appears to have adopted a callous policy of collective punishment against the civilian population of Aleppo."

Aleppo, Syria's commercial capital, has endured three years of devastation since becoming a key battleground between the Assad regime and mostly Islamist rebels who control swaths of the city. A regime offensive aimed at severing rebel supply lines failed in February.

The rebels announced last week a joint "liberation" campaign to oust the regime from the city. Aleppo has long been the target of an unforgiving air campaign on rebel-held

areas, which has killed and wounded thousands of civilians, particularly with the use of the barrel bomb, an improvised explosive device packed with TNT and other material and dropped manually from planes and helicopters.

The weapon, which is so inaccurate that its use is considered by some a de facto war crime, is often dropped far behind rebel front lines in order to avoid accidentally striking regime troops, contributing to its high civilian toll.

More than 3,000 civilians died in barrel-bomb attacks in Aleppo province from January 2014 to March 2015, along with 35 fighters, and over 12,000 have been killed by the weapon across Syria since 2012, according to monitoring groups. Last month alone, 110 people died in the city in 85 attacks. Assad categorically denies that barrel bombs even exist.

But, according to data gathered by rights organisations, the devices have struck dozens of public markets, mosques, schools, hospitals and medical centres in Aleppo.

The Amnesty report paints a grim picture of the reality of civilian life in the city, besieged on all sides and facing starvation, with limited electricity, water, medicine and fuel, a city where cats have become “fast food” in rebel-held territories and where humanitarian access is imperilled by attacks on roads used by aid workers.

“The civilians that we spoke to really describe a collective trauma and fear that they have living under constant threat of barrel bombs in particular,” said Lama Fakih, senior crisis advisor at Amnesty.

One factory worker who survived a 2014 barrel-bomb attack is quoted in the report describing the scene: “After the bombing, I saw children without heads, body parts everywhere. It was how I imagine hell to be.” The use of indiscriminate weapons, and specifically barrel bombs, was condemned in a UN security council resolution that remains unenforced.

The report focuses on eight specific attacks that it says illustrate the “pure horror” of barrel bombs, including one on a market where 150 people were queuing for food baskets, and a so-called “double-tap” attack where a second barrel bomb is dropped when civil defence workers and residents rush to the scene of the first attack in an attempt to rescue survivors.

“It is a war crime to intentionally make civilian objects and civilians who are not directly participating in hostilities the target of attacks,” the report concludes. “Such a systematic attack on the civilian population, when carried out as part of government policy as appears to have been the case in Aleppo, would also constitute a crime against humanity.”

Amnesty also accused rebels of committing war crimes by using “hell cannons” - an inaccurate improvised artillery shell made of gas canisters, used to level buildings, which the rights group said have killed 600 civilians in 2014.

“Given the nature of the weapons used, many of these attacks are likely to constitute indiscriminate attacks, which, when they kill or injure civilians, are war crimes,” the report said. “Some of these attacks may have also constituted deliberate attacks on

civilians or civilian objects, which are also war crimes.”

The report also accused both sides of the conflict of widespread torture of detainees, arbitrary arrests and hostage-taking. But the rights group reserved the most opprobrium for the regime, which it accused of precipitating the crisis and committing the overwhelming majority of abuses.

It concluded: “Both sides are violating international humanitarian law and must be held to account. However, throughout the more than four years since the crisis began, government forces have been responsible for the large majority of violations and crimes.

“Their responsibility for creating one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent history cannot be overstated. This crisis started with the state’s brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters. Its response seemed tailored to send the message that they would stop at nothing to quash dissent.”

Amnesty called for the referral of the situation in Syria to the international criminal court, the punishing of all sides committing abuses and unhindered access for the UN’s independent commission of inquiry into the crisis.

“The government has been emboldened by the lack of response from the international community and specifically the security council,” said Fakhri.

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# How Isis is recruiting migrant workers in Moscow to join the fighting in Syria

Up to 4,000 central Asian migrants are said to have travelled to Syria after being recruited by Chechens in Moscow. reports

Daniil Turovsky in Kulyab for Meduza, part of the New East network

Tuesday 5 May 2015 05.00 BST

Gulru Olimova grew up in Tajikistan, near the Afghan border. As a child she dreamt of becoming a doctor or maybe a nurse. But when she was 16, Gulru met a man called Loik Rajabov, and it wasn't long before they were married.

The couple went to live on the outskirts of the town, Kulyab, where they had three children. But like many young Tajiks, Rajabov struggled to earn a living for his family and had to make frequent trips to Moscow to work on construction sites.

On his return from one of these trips, his mother-in-law told me, the black flag of Islamic State (Isis) was raised outside the family home.

In autumn 2014, Rajabov took his wife and children with him to Moscow. A few months later he phoned his wife's mother, Mairambi Olimova, from an unfamiliar number to say the family had moved to Syria. Olimova reported the conversation to the Tajikistan authorities, but says that nothing has been done.

"Most of all, I want them to bring him [Rajabov] here, pour gasoline on his head, and set him on fire," she said.

Olimova told me this tale when I visited Tajikistan to investigate claims by the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, that Isis fighters posed a threat to the country - and therefore to Russia. While I was there I was told that the majority of Tajik fighters in Isis, like Rajabov, were recruited while working as migrant labourers at Moscow's construction sites, apparently by "Chechen gangs". As a result of their efforts, up to 4,000 central Asian migrants are said to be in Syria.

Olimova said her daughter had phoned from Syria several times. During their last conversation in April, Gulru told her that Isis had given the family \$30,000 for their journey to Aleppo. They had settled into a four-bedroom apartment with a television, refrigerator and carpets. Her husband barely takes any part in military activities. Rather he inspects cars for alcohol and cigarettes, which Isis has banned.

Isis pays them \$35 a month in child benefits for each of their three children. Gulru told her mother that she believed "the Caliphate will come to Tajikistan, so that Muslims will be able to live with Allah".

I asked Mairambi to show me a photograph of her daughter, but she shook her head. Rajabov had burned them all.

## Plague of the century

In December Tajikistan's president, Emomali Rahmon, called Isis "the plague of the century and a serious danger" for the country. Then in April Lavrov reiterated the threat.

He said Isis was actively recruiting allies in Afghanistan and sending them to Tajikistan. Russia promised support, offering to send 70 billion roubles (\$890m) for weapons and to secure the border with Afghanistan. The border is almost 840 miles long and poorly guarded, with the Afghan side under full control of the Taliban.

Ahmad Ibrahim, the editor of Paik, a newspaper based in the Tajik-Afghan border city of Kulyab, agrees with the official assessment.

"In Afghanistan, there have been groups of Islamic State fighters numbering up to 100 people for a long time now," he says. "There are Tajiks, there are Uzbeks. They're being trained to attack their own states. They could seize Tajikistan within two days."

Ibrahim said Tajik fighters in Isis have rallied around Nusrat Nazarov, a fighter who comes from Kulyab.

While fighting in Syria, Nazarov took the nom de guerre Abu Kholidi Kulobi. Ibrahim says that Nazarov told him on the phone that he now leads groups from Syria but is prepared to attack Tajikistan from Afghanistan.

In a recent video message (posted on 19 March but since deleted from social media), Nazarov stands surrounded by men in military fatigues and announces that "there are around 2,000 Tajiks here. You see them here and feel like you're in Tajikistan. If this continues, there will be no one left in Tajikistan. They'll all come to fight in Syria." At the end of the video, he says that his next message will be recorded from Tajikistan or the Kremlin. "We're bringing jihad to Tajikistan to establish the laws of Allah," he says.

## 'Brash and hot-headed'

Some say it's easy to find Nazarov's older brother Hairullo around Kulyab's bazaar. Locals told me to "look for a man in red near a red car". I work my way through the market and find a red car. There's no one in it. A voice from behind me asks, "Taxi?" I turn around. There's a man squatting and chewing *chukri*, a crunchy mountain grass. He's wearing a red t-shirt and red sneakers.

The man is Hairullo Nazarov, the brother of the head Tajik in Isis.

In the summer of 2014, Hairullo was called to the GKNB, Tajikistan's national security force. That's how he learned his brother was in Syria. The agents even showed him a recent picture of his brother, in which Nazarov had a beard and was holding an assault rifle. Behind him hung the now infamous Isis flag.

The security agents explained that according to what they knew, he had become the leader of the Tajik detachment of Isis. "I wasn't that surprised. He was always so brash and hot-headed, such a problem person," said Hairullo.

According to Hairullo, it was always Nazarov's dream to live lavishly and easily.

Nazarov turned 18 in 1993. He was drafted into the army but ran off to Moscow five days later. There, he worked as a *bombila* - a driver in Moscow's fleet of semi-legal private taxis. He returned to Tajikistan in 1999 and began selling cannabis at the bazaar.

In 2005, Nazarov - who by that time was trading heroin - was sent to prison. He was released a year later, and again left for Moscow. Throughout the 2000s, he travelled to the Russian capital five times.

"He became more and more religious. After 2013, he returned and began calling all those around him 'kaffirs' [unbelievers]," his brother says. "He said that in Moscow he had met some Chechens in the mosque on Prospekt Mira who opened his eyes to 'proper Islam'. He said that Tajikistan had to be changed.

"Everyone who comes from Moscow now says that Chechens come to the mosques and the building sites, explaining to migrants that they have to go live in Syria, where the caliphate is. I think that those who go there, to Isis, they hate Russia for the conditions they have to endure to live," Nazarov's brother says.

"You can't work here, you have to break the law to make money here. In Russia the conditions are impossible, even if there's a bit of money to be made. In Isis they're promised both money and freedom. Why not go then? There are already 5,000 Tajiks there."

According to official Federal Migration Service data, in April 2015 about one million migrants from Tajikistan were living in Russia.

Nazarov's acquaintances from Kulyab say that he set out for Syria from Moscow, going through Turkey, where foreigners are met by Isis at the border, and are handed instructions and sent out in groups to nearby cities, usually to Gaziantep near the Mursitpınar border crossing.

Nazarov is now in Raqqa in the north of Syria, serving the emir of the Khorasan division, whose aim is to spread the caliphate across the historical territory of Khorasan, covering the modern states of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

At the beginning of 2015 during the phone call to the editor of Paik, Nazarov threatened the publication for publishing photos of Tajik fighters. Ibrahim said: "He said to me, 'We're scary. We cut people's heads off. We'll set you all on fire, we've got people here'."

## **Recruitment**

Beyond the first stalls of the bazaar where they sell flatbread, meat, fruits and herbs, there are closed pavilions with small, poorly-lit shops inside. Here, they sell pop CDs, and there's also a small door to the "rear market" - the domain of the cannabis dealers and currency changers.

Four men who used to work at construction sites in downtown Moscow confirm that "the Chechens came" to visit their trailers to encourage them to join Isis. According to the men, several groups of Chechen recruiters would go back and forth between the

spots usually frequented by migrants, their construction trailers and their dorms. The recruiters came in groups of three to four people, and they were usually about 30 years old. They would come after 8pm.

“You shouldn't live like slaves,” the recruiters told them. They would go on to explain that in Isis fighting wasn't obligatory, that they would be able to lead a comfortable life. There was no mention of war against Tajikistan, or the need to take part in terrorist activities.

A lean Tajik man with very white teeth who worked in Moscow on numerous occasions said that he would definitely join Isis if they asked him to. “There's a caliphate there. You can live there as a Muslim and you don't have to fight, Allah be praised. You can go and become a part of the only state of Allah. Without homosexuals, lesbians and other filth.”

The migrant workers didn't know which regions in Chechnya these recruiters came from. It's probable some are from the Pankisi Gorge, the home of Omar Ash-Shishani, a Pankisi Chechen who is allegedly one of the leaders of Isis.

In December 2013, the Syrian ambassador to Russia announced that around 1,700 people from Chechnya were fighting in Isis.

Hoji Mirzo, a former imam at a Kulyab mosque, told Paik newspaper that he often gets calls from his former congregation who are now in Moscow. “They tell me, ‘There's a proper jihad there [in Syria]. We want to go there. What should we do?’”

“Poverty is one of the main reasons our young people get involved with extremist groups,” said Gulnazar Keldi, the author of Tajikistan's national anthem, at a special session of Tajikistan's parliament.

“Many of our young people are busy with difficult work, their lives are very hard and they live in a foreign country. At this very point, people appear who promise good money and heaven on earth, and they attract them into the jihad,” he said.

## **Merger**

In a recent report, the International Crisis Group said that in the last three years, between 2,000 and 4,000 people have travelled to Syria from Tajikistan.

“The call of Isis - which says it wants teachers, nurses and engineers, not just fighters - can appear to some as an attractive alternative,” says the report, adding that the new caliphate is seen by inhabitants of central Asia as a change from “the post-Soviet life”.

“In Russia, migrants are marginalised, often finding themselves there illegally, they earn little money and find meaning and companionship in religion,” the report says.

The International Crisis Group also believe the situation in central Asia is rapidly deteriorating, as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan unites with Isis.

Founded in 1996, the movement's aim is the creation of an Islamic government in the Ferghana Valley, a ravine running between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The group has taken responsibility for bombings, kidnappings and attacks on Afghan security forces.

The unification of the group with Isis was announced on 26 September by its leader, Usmon Gozi. "In the name of each and every member of our Islamic movement, I declare to the whole world that we are uniting with the Islamic caliphate. This is the duty of all of us in Islam, in this continuing war between Islam and unbelief."

This move was confirmed in October by Uzbekistan's security agencies. According to their intelligence, the movement's military camps are actively recruiting and training fighters in the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In January 2015, news broke of the arrest of dozens of members of the movement who planned to attack a police station in Tajikistan to seize weapons and ammunition. The Tajik security services announced that the leader of the group had been recruited in Russia, where he had been a migrant worker. Along with several fellow workers he formed a small cell, which the Isis leadership tasked with collecting money for the group's war in Syria.

### **'Congratulations, your brother's a martyr'**

Ibrohim lives in a small village near the Tajik-Afghan border. He is the father of Bobojon Kurbonov, one of the fighters killed in the battle for Raqqa in Syria in October 2013.

Ibrohim is a grey-haired old man who walks with a cane. He doesn't want to talk about his son. "What's there to say? Why bother? I have disowned him," he explains. "He never listened, did everything without permission. Then he went to Moscow in 2013. What did he go there for? How was I to know what he was doing there?"

"I stopped talking to him after he left. When we came back, we didn't see each other. Then he left again. I don't understand how they could convince him to go [to Syria]. He left his family – me, his children. He left and has dishonoured us all."

Ibrohim says that in September 2014, a stranger called another one of his sons and said, "Congratulations. Your brother's become a martyr." Bobojon Kurbonov was 41. He is survived by his four children.

"I expected something like this from him," Ibrohim said. "But I couldn't strangle him myself, they'd put me away for that. And now I'm suffering because of it. It would have been better just to strangle him."

*A version of this article first appeared on Meduza, part of the New East network*

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# Mediterranean migrants crisis: 'Dozens drowned' in new tragedy off Libya

By *Gianluca Mezzofiore*

May 5, 2015 11:30 BST

Dozens of migrants are feared to have been killed in a new Mediterranean tragedy after one of the rubber boats they travelled on sank off the Libyan coast.

Witnesses rescued by the Zeran merchant ship told Save the Children they saw people falling into the sea and drowning as the rescue vessel was approaching. "Some people saw 10 migrants dying, others up to 40 because they couldn't swim," Giovanna di Benedetto, spokeswoman for Save the Children, told **IBTimes UK**.

The rescued migrants – 194 from Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Ghana, including 30 minors and 15 women – arrived in Catania on 5 May. Italian authorities also carried five bodies, who are thought to have died during the journey, off the merchant ship.

Flavio Di Giacomo, spokesman for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), told IBTimes UK the death toll was 46 people, who had drowned.

"The dinghy sailed from Libya on Saturday night and started to have problems and taken on water after 24 hours," he said. "The tragedy happened after they saw the merchant ship approaching. The migrants panicked and fell off the boat into the sea."

Di Giacomo reported of 1,600 new arrivals in Southern Italy on 5 May only – 369 in Pozzallo, Sicily, 104 in Trapani, 115 in Lampedusa, 353 in Salerno and 210 in Crotone. "Italy coastguards are overwhelmed by dozens of emergency calls every day," he said.

The UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, reported 11 migrants had died during the Mediterranean sea journey. More than 6,000 people have been rescued in several operations while making the perilous crossing from Libya to Europe.

A ship operated by Médecins Sans Frontières and Migrant Offshore Aid Station rescued 369 people and is disembarking in Pozzallo, Sicily.

"The boat is absolutely crammed full and last night, as the men, women and children we rescued curled up under blankets to sleep, there wasn't a centimeter to spare.

The scale of this crisis is just heartbreaking, I wish we could do more," Will Turner, emergency coordinator for Médecins Sans Frontières, said.

Its teams in Pozzallo, Sicily, are providing support during the landing of more than 800 survivors of the Mediterranean crossing.

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Africa

# Kerry makes historic stop in Somalia in bid to show American support

By **Carol Morello** May 5 at 7:58 AM

MOGADISHU — Secretary of State John Kerry arrived Tuesday on an unannounced trip to Somalia and immediately went into a series of meetings with the country's president and other top leaders at the city's airport under tight security.

The stop marked the first time a sitting American secretary of state has visited Somalia.

Kerry's plane landed in the Somali capital just before noon local time where he was greeted by the president, the prime minister and other Somali officials.

The previously unannounced stop underscored American solidarity with the Somali government as it tries to fight militants allied to al-Qaeda and other Islamic groups and cope with hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the country.

Security was tight. Somalia's embattled government only found out very recently that Kerry was due to visit.

Top of the agenda was the government's fight against al-Shabab Islamic militants.

"The next time I come, we have to be able to just walk downtown," Kerry told the Somali leaders after arriving, adding he was glad to be in the Somali capital.

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud told Kerry that Mogadishu "is very different now than it was two years ago."

"The roads are less bumpy and we have traffic jams," he told Kerry.

Kerry joked that traffic jams were good and meant the country was "getting normal."

"Step by step," the American secretary of state said.

The stop came one day after Kerry said the United States will provide an extra \$45 million for the United Nations to help an overwhelmed Kenya cope with 600,000 refugees fleeing civil unrest, terrorism and violence in both Somalia and South Sudan.



After meeting with President Uhuru Kenyatta, Kerry said he was confident that Kenya would not close the world's largest refugee camp, now home to 350,000 Somalis. The government had threatened to dismantle the Dadaab camp complex — consisting of five camps near the border with Somalia — because it suspects that the militant group al-Shabab has planned attacks from the camp, including one last month at Garissa University College in which [147 people were slaughtered](#).

Authorities have provided no evidence to support that claim.

The United States has opposed dismantling the camps, which could leave many refugees with little choice but to

Only a small fraction of the camp's refugees have agreed to return through a U.N. voluntary repatriation program. The United Nations set up the first camps at Dadaab in 1991, and many who live in the sprawling complex are teenagers and children who have never been to the countries their parents fled.

*[\[Kenya is threatening to close the world's largest refugee camp\]](#)*

Kenyatta “made clear Kenya has a great tradition of hosting refugees, and that the key is to accelerate efforts to have a plan in place for the ability of the people in not just Dadaab but in all the refugee camps to be able to return home, in an orderly and voluntary manner, with dignity and with safety,” Kerry said. “That’s his goal. That’s our goal.”

The funding announced Monday brings Washington's refugee aid to Kenya to \$289 million in the past two years. The U.S. military footprint in the region is growing, too, with [drone strikes against al-Shabab in Somalia](#), largely from a military hub in Djibouti that Kerry will visit later in the week. This year, he said, the United States will spend \$100 million on anti-terrorism efforts in Kenya.

Speaking at a news conference after a day of meetings with government officials and opposition figures, Kerry also said that the United States would commit \$5 million to finance a court in South Sudan “to hold perpetrators of violence to account.” He blamed the war raging there since 2013 on a lack of leadership, and he urged President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar to “silence the guns.”

Kerry's trip to Kenya, the first by a senior U.S. official since 2012, effectively ends a year of estrangement between Washington and Nairobi after the International Criminal Court charged [Kenyatta](#) with crimes against humanity over post-election violence in 2007 and 2008. The charges were dropped late last year.

Kerry also paid an emotional visit to the site of the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi. As dozens of survivors and their families watched, he laid a wreath in front of a granite memorial wall bearing the names of the [218 people who died](#) when suicide bombers detonated a truck in front of the embassy.

“The terrorists who struck on Aug. 7, 1998, failed utterly in their purpose, which was to implant fear in the hearts of the Kenyan people and divide America from the citizens of this country,” Kerry said.

“They failed for the same reason that terrorists will always fail. Yes, they can reduce a building to rubble, and yes, they can even deprive innocent people of their lives. But they do not give anyone anything that really makes life worthwhile: a sense of community, of looking out for one another, of creating something valuable and new, of living in dignity and honor.”

Kerry declined to comment specifically about anti-gay remarks reportedly made by Kenya’s deputy president, William Ruto.

According to an online video posted by the Kenyan broadcaster KTN, Ruto told a Nairobi church congregation in Swahili, “The Republic of Kenya is a republic that worships God. We have no room for gays.”

Kerry said he had not read Ruto’s remarks but that gay rights are human rights, at least in the United States.

“The United States believes that all people are created equal, that all people have rights, and that includes people of every faith, every gender and every choice of partner. No matter who you love or who you are in your life, you have all the rights of every other human being. That is our position in the United States, and we will never, ever waver in that position,” he said.

Kerry looked and sounded tired, a day after arriving from a two-day visit to Sri Lanka. Jet lag and a packed schedule discussing issues of war and peace may explain his rare joke during the news conference.

When a Kenyan reporter asked him why he loves Kenya, Kerry replied quickly, “President Obama makes me love Kenya.” He paused, then added, “No, I’m just joking.”

Daniela Deane contributed to this report from London. Kevin Sieff also contributed.

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