



THE KHORASAN TERRORISM ECONOMY

ISLAMIC STATE'S OPERATIONS AGAINST CHRISTIANS

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The Khorasan Terrorism Economy: Islamic State's Operations Against Christians

Daniel St John

“They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.”

Gospel of John 16:2-3 (NKJV)

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Introduction

Objective of Report

This report builds on my previous two reports: *Nigeria's Terrorism Economy* and *The East African Terrorism Economy: Systematic Targeting Christians*. In this series of reports, I examine Islamic State's (IS) transitional targeting of Christian communities and how its international financial networks implement it. *The East African Terrorism Economy* explains how Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) generates income in Afghanistan, Turkey, and Pakistan. Analysts define the Khorasan region to include modern-day Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.¹ ISKP works closely with its affiliates in Turkey, and those affiliates contribute to ISKP operations.

This report focuses on ISKP and does not examine other terrorist groups or Islamic State provinces that target Christians. This structure keeps the report focused on the ISS–ISKP financial network. ISKP target Christian's in Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Europe. However, this report does not recount casualties. It analyses the methods, systems, and administration that enable such violence.

Islamic State Targets Christians

Islamic State targets non-Muslims. The Islamic State targets Christians for religious and geopolitical reasons. Often analysts dismiss or downplay Christian persecution because the Islamic State persecutes those who reject its ideology. The Islamic State targets Christians because it rejects the Christian doctrine that Jesus Christ is divine. Islamic traditions regard Jesus Christ as a human prophet rather than divine.

Halummu, one of Islamic State's media outlets, released posters to their audience between December 26 to 28 2025. It stated: **"Their shirk [polytheism or idolatry] and claim of the divinity of Issa [Jesus] (peace be upon him) is enough motivation and that makes it an obligation to fight them..."**²

Islamic State believes Western foreign policy is an extension of Christianity. The poster stated: **"It is the duty of a Muslim to treat the Christians the same way they treat Muslims. Thus, just like they shred the Muslims with their airstrikes and bombshells, the duty the Muslim holds is to turn their celebrations into funerals and tragedies."**³

¹ Gerçek, Artı. "İŞİD, Horasan Kolunu Güçlendirmede Türkiye'yi Üs Olarak Kullanıyor." *Artı Gerçek*, January 22, 2024. <https://artigercek.com/guncel/isid-horasan-kolunu-guclendirmede-turkiyeyi-us-olarak-kullaniyor-281276h>.

² Memri. "Posters-Pro-Islamic-State-Isis-Media-Outlets-Incite-Attacks-Christians-and-Jews-During-Holiday." Memri, December 29, 2025. <https://www.memri.org/jttm/posters-pro-islamic-state-isis-media-outlets-incite-attacks-christians-and-jews-during-holiday>.

³ Ibid

Islamic State's official editorial – 526, titled *Pride of Sydney*, contained a section encouraging their subscribers to commit terrorist acts during the Christmas period. The editors titled the section: *Be The Next Wolf*. It commanded: “...**rise above the pastures of asylum, and then comply with the divine commands to fight Jews and Christians**—who are on every street among you... Their synagogues and churches stand in your way.”⁴

Intercepting Islamic State Financially

Islamic State considers Christians a critical target worldwide. If Islamic States financial networks and pipelines remain intact, they will continue to persecute Christians. If ISKP continue to receive funding, they will escalate targeted Christian attacks in the Khorasan territories and beyond.

Former **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** President Je-Yoon Shin said, “Terrorism needs money. Preventing and disrupting terrorist financing creates a hostile environment for terrorism. Lack of money limits the capability of terrorist groups to prepare or carry out attacks.”⁵ This report aims to equip policymakers; supporters of Christian advocacy and organisations information that helps them understand how international Islamist financing impacts Christians. Je-Yoon Shin stated: “Preventing and disrupting financial flows must be at the centre of any successful strategy to defeat ISIL. ISIL needs access to the financial system to move money and pay for supplies.”⁶

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Yoon Shin, Je. “Combating Terrorist Financing as Part of a Complete Strategy to Defeat ISIL and Prevent Terrorist Attacks.” Financial Action Task Force, February 8, . <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Fatfgeneral/Chatham-countering-terrorist-financing.html>.

⁶ Ibid

Chapter 1:

Governance & Media

IS Somalia & IS Khorasan

Islamic State Somalia (ISS) funds its affiliates in Afghanistan (ISKP). ISKP transfers funds to their affiliates in Pakistan and Turkey. Counterterrorism experts categorise Pakistani affiliates as members of ISKP, not a separate Islamic State province. United Nations Member States reported that ISS provides ISKP with at least \$25,000 per month in cryptocurrency.⁷ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) identifies that ISS's physical growth coincides with its increased financial support to ISKP.⁸ ISS financing ISKP is tied to its strategy to extend a more effective global insurgency, including targeting Christians. According to a UN member state, if ISKP can withstand resistance from the Taliban it "would then be positioned to develop a global threat capability from Afghanistan."⁹

The United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 30, 2021, demonstrated ISS's strategy in financing ISKP. 170 Afghans and 13 American troops at the Hamid Karzai International Airport died on August 26, 2021.¹⁰ On March 2025, member of ISKP, Mohammad Sharifullah was extradited from Pakistan to be put on trial for participating in Islamic State terrorism.¹¹ He was responsible for surveillance, assisting in the transport of the suicide bomber, and providing instructions to the attackers of the Crocus City Hall near Moscow in March 2024.¹² Now, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borders have greater geopolitical security significance. In 2026, counterterrorism experts identified 45 ISKP camps in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.¹³

Mohammad Nasim Haqqani, former Director of Zayed University in Khost Province (Afghanistan), stated: **"The Pakistani government is under the influence of Jews and**

⁷ United Nations. "Letter Dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council." United Nations Digital Library, 2023. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4002636?ln=en&v=pdf>.

⁸ Haken, David. *Letter Dated 19 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. July 22, 2024.

⁹ Mavrodin, Carla. *Letter Dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. July 15, 2022.

¹⁰ AFP. "US Jury Convicts Afghan Man of Daesh Conspiracy, Deadlocks on Kabul Airport Role." *US Jury Convicts Afghan Man of Daesh Conspiracy, Deadlocks on Kabul Airport Role*, April 30, 2026. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2641904/world>.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Memri TV. Memri. Accessed September 5, 2026. <https://www.memri.org/reports/wakhan-front-pakistan-iskp-and-battle-influence-afghanistan>.

Christians, and Jihad against them is necessary.”¹⁴ Pakistani Christians will continue to be direct targets and casualties, as ISKP attacks the Pakistan government. Sheikh Abdul Sami Ghaznavi stated: “Pakistan was an ally of the Americans during the American and international attacks on Afghanistan. The U.S. and its allies were defeated. Now there will be a war against Pakistan.”¹⁵

Financier Bilal al-Sudani Neutralised

On 25 January 2023, US Special Forces killed ISS leader Bilal Al-Sudani (Suhayl Salim Abd el-Rahman). Bilal Al-Sudani was a key operative and facilitator for Islamic States global network. It enabled international transfers and funding between affiliates.¹⁶ In 2012, the US designated Bilal Al-Sudani Executive Order (EO) 13536 for terrorism.¹⁷ In 2015, he defected to join ISS. His financial contacts and expertise in international terrorism financing enabled him to reach senior leadership position within ISS. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin stated that: “Al-Sudani was responsible for fostering the growing presence of ISIS in Africa and for funding the group’s operations worldwide, **including in Afghanistan.**”¹⁸ Analysts Tricia Bacon and Austin C. Doctor emphasise that al-Sudani would likely have possessed financial records of transnational financial networks at the time US Special Forces killed him and retrieved intelligence.¹⁹

Tricia Bacon and Austin C. Doctor stated: **“The intelligence collected and the loss of al-Sudani will probably have the most impact at the transnational and regional levels because of his role as a key financial facilitator for the Islamic State in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.”**²⁰ No new successor has replaced al-Sudani since he was neutralised.²¹ Though, South Africa has become ISS’s financial facilitator for financial distribution.²²

On November 2021, the US Department of The Treasury sanctioned ISKP financier, Ismatullah Khalezai under EO13224.²³ Afghanistan native, born in January 1995.²⁴ He

¹⁴ Hashimi, Zaman. “Counter-Pakistani-Airstrikes-Afghanistan-Afghan-Islamic-Scholars-Issue-Religious-Decrees.” Accessed September 5, 2026. <https://www.memri.org/reports/counter-pakistani-airstrikes-afghanistan-afghan-islamic-scholars-issue-religious-decrees>.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ “Somalia, the Death of Bilal Al-Sudani.” ICRC, January 26, 2023. <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/somalia-death-bilal-al-sudani>.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of the Treasury. “Treasury Targets Regional Actors Fueling Violence and Instability in Somalia.” July 5, 2012. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/tg1630>.

¹⁸ J. Austin III, Lloyd. “Statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on Somalia Operation.” U.S. Department of War, January 26, 2023. <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3279923/statement-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-somalia-operation/>.

¹⁹ Bacon, Tricia Bacon, and Austin C. Doctor. “The Death of Bilal al-Sudani and Its Impact on Islamic State Operations.” Program on Extremism, March 2, 2023. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/death-of-bilal-al-sudani>.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ MP-IDSA. “The Resilience and Internationalisation of ISIS Somalia.” April 23, 2026. <https://idsa.in/publisher/issuebrief/the-resilience-and-internationalisation-of-isis-somalia/>

²² Ibid

²³ U.S. Department of the Treasury. “Treasury Designates Key Financial Facilitator for the Islamic State’s Afghanistan Branch.” November 22, 2021. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0502>

²⁴ Sanctions Finder. “Ismatullah KHALOZAI.” Accessed September 20, 2026. <https://sanctions-finder.com/sanction/ismatullah-khalozai/Ismatullah%20KHALOZAI>.

operated human smuggling operations or foreign fighters for ISKP from Afghanistan to Turkey.²⁵ The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) identified him as an international financier for ISKP. He had a "Turkey-based hawala business to transfer funds to finance ISIS-K operations."²⁶ The Treasury noted he: "operated a United Arab Emirates-based financing scheme, which involved sending luxury items to international destinations for resale to generate funds in support of ISIS-K."²⁷

The Yemen Connection

After US Special Forces neutralised Bilal al-Sudani, leader of ISS, Abdul Qadir Mumin, held the responsibility to rebuild the organisations financial infrastructure. Al-Sudani's death meant his network and trusted allies diminished. In 2024, the UNSC reported that Mumin travelled to Yemen to expand their recruitment operation around January to March 2024: "The recruitment relies on a network of spotters that put prospective recruits in touch with logisticians that arrange and pay for their transfer from departure to Puntland."²⁸ The report notes that the physical growth of ISS is interconnected to its intention to increase its financial support and resources to ISKP.²⁹

The report states that these recruits are primarily from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and more broadly from Central Asia.³⁰ The IS-Yemen financial node is a critical affiliate in which ISS transfer their funds to ISKP. According to a UNSC report, the financial office for IS-Somalia (Maktab al-Karrar or al-Karrar office) facilitates financial transactions to ISKP via IS-Yemen.³¹ The ISS and IS-Yemen relationship also enables ISS to attain unmanned aerial systems.³² In 2022, ISS procured from Yemen weapon trafficking of light arms and explosives, equating to hundreds of thousand dollars.³³ The US Treasury identified **Abdirahman Mohamed Omar (Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Umar)** – a weapon smuggler for ISS. His Islamic State affiliate in Yemen was **Sayf Abdulrab Salem**

²⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury. "Treasury Designates Key Financial Facilitator for the Islamic State's Afghanistan Branch." November 22, 2021. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0502>

²⁶ Sanctions Finder. "Ismatullah KHALOZAI." Accessed September 20, 2026. <https://sanctions-finder.com/sanction/ismatullah-khalozai/Ismatullah%20KHALOZAI>.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Haken, David. *Letter Dated 19 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. July 22, 2024.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ [https://www.justsecurity.org/98429/security-council-report-isis-qaeda/#:~:text=While%20ISIS%2DK%20currently%20poses%20the%20main%20terrorist,Al%2DKarrar%20office%2C%E2%80%9D%20headed%20by%20Mumin%20\(discussed%20above\).](https://www.justsecurity.org/98429/security-council-report-isis-qaeda/#:~:text=While%20ISIS%2DK%20currently%20poses%20the%20main%20terrorist,Al%2DKarrar%20office%2C%E2%80%9D%20headed%20by%20Mumin%20(discussed%20above).)

³¹ Haken, David. *Letter Dated 19 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. July 22, 2024.

³² [https://www.justsecurity.org/98429/security-council-report-isis-qaeda/#:~:text=While%20ISIS%2DK%20currently%20poses%20the%20main%20terrorist,Al%2DKarrar%20office%2C%E2%80%9D%20headed%20by%20Mumin%20\(discussed%20above\).](https://www.justsecurity.org/98429/security-council-report-isis-qaeda/#:~:text=While%20ISIS%2DK%20currently%20poses%20the%20main%20terrorist,Al%2DKarrar%20office%2C%E2%80%9D%20headed%20by%20Mumin%20(discussed%20above).)

³³ "Fact Sheet: Countering ISIS Financing." June 16, 2023. <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/2023.06.16-Fact-Sheet-on-Countering-ISIS-Financing.pdf>.

al-Hayashi.³⁴ The Australian government also confirm that Islamic State Yemen (ISY) support ISS in this capacity.³⁵

ISKP's Financial Leadership

In July 2023, Turkish authorities arrested Tajikistan national ISKP fundraiser and recruiter, Shamil Hukumatov.³⁶ In December 2022, Turkish authorities identified the cryptocurrency address owned by Hukumatov. He received \$2 million in cryptocurrency Tether (USDT) on the Tron blockchain.³⁷ Tether (USDT) is a commonly used cryptocurrency in emerging markets, with global accessibility in countries such as Turkey, Russia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and the UAE.³⁸ Tron has no US nexus. It means the US cannot regulate or enforce policies on the blockchain. The Guaranteed Emergency National Income and Unemployment Support Act (GENIUS Act) cannot apply to Tether (USDT). It only pertains to US-domiciled stablecoin issuers. A US-domiciled stablecoin issuer is an American-based company that creates a stablecoin and is obligated to comply with US financial regulation.

Turkish authorities retrieved intelligence that identified two additional ISKP conspirators in Tajikistan. Authorities made arrests through international cooperation.³⁹ According to a UN report, Tajik national Abu Manzar replaced Shamil Hukumatov following his arrest.⁴⁰ Based in Afghanistan, he provides ISKP with financial, logistical, and recruitment support.

He coordinates with “super-connectors,” clandestine facilitators who create ISKP cells in Turkey and Europe.⁴¹ Abu Manzar worked closely with senior ISKP leadership, including Ismatullah Khalezai, who oversees the organisation’s finances in Europe and Turkey. Examining ISKP’s senior leadership is critical for understanding the organisation’s standard procedures against Christian communities. The UN report stated: “Some Member States attribute responsibility for the armed attack carried out

³⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury. “Treasury Sanctions Terrorist Weapons Trafficking Network in Eastern Africa.” November 1, 2022. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1066?>

³⁵ “2. Newly Listed Terrorist Organisation.” Accessed September 5, 2026. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/Completed_Inquiries_46th_Parliament/6relistings/Report/section?id=committees%2Freportjnt%2F024300%2F27520.

³⁶ TRM Labs. “Turkish and Tajik Authorities Make Key Arrests in Terror Network Disruption.” August 28, 2023. <https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/turkish-and-tajik-authorities-make-key-arrests-in-terror-network-disruption>.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Kapron, Zennon. “Tron Settles Close to Half of All USDT, and Washington Cannot Reach It.” Forbes, June 17, 2026. https://www.forbes.com/sites/digital-assets/2026/06/17/tron-settles-close-to-half-of-all-usdt-and-washington-cannot-reach-it/?utm_source=copilot.com.

³⁹ TRM Labs. “Turkish and Tajik Authorities Make Key Arrests in Terror Network Disruption.” August 28, 2023. <https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/turkish-and-tajik-authorities-make-key-arrests-in-terror-network-disruption>.

⁴⁰ Haken, David. “Letter Dated 19 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council.” *United Nations Security Council*, n.d.

⁴¹ Ibid

on 28 January 2024 against the Santa Maria Church in Istanbul to the Salman al-Farisi Brigade, an ISIL affiliate operating in Türkiye.”⁴²

Media Recruiting Strategy

ISKP’s multilingual media outlet is a core strategy in recruiting foreign fighters. ISS funds ISKP, enabling the group to support and train their new operatives. ISKP assigns recruited operatives to conduct assignments to harm Christian communities.

According to a UNSC report, ISKP translates its propaganda campaigns into Tajik and Uzbek. ISKP encourages recruits to conduct attacks outside Afghanistan by Tajik and Uzbek diasporas.⁴³ This includes Afghan and Central Asian diasporas in Europe who seek asylum or refugee status.⁴⁴ Ismatullah Khalezai oversees this operation.⁴⁵

In Afghanistan, ISKP’s media outlet, *Al-Azaim Foundation* and social media accounts, aim to recruit disaffected terrorist from other groups including the Taliban.⁴⁶ New recruits remain unknown to international security and intelligence agencies.⁴⁷ Its propaganda campaigns are in Uzbek, Tajik, English, Pashto, Russian, Hindi, Persian and Uyghur.⁴⁸

Senior Associate Fellow, Abdul Basit notes: **“Of all IS branches, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) has shown the capability to produce multilingual propaganda matching that of the parent group.”**⁴⁹ *The Al-Azaim Foundation* release two magazines each month in English and Pashto: *The Voice of Khorasan* and *Khorasan Ghag*.⁵⁰ The foundation also produces terrorist propaganda books, videos and infographics through its other media outlets: AL-Millat Media (books), Khalid Media (video production) and more.⁵¹

ISKP’s strong media production is in direct correlation with ISS concentrated financial funding. ISKP uses their media outlets to influence transnational terrorists to attack against Christian communities. Convincing their international operatives to commit to these atrocities are simultaneously critical to financially supporting them.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Basit, Abdul. “ISKP Flexes Its Propaganda Muscles on Social Media.” *The Diplomat*, January 2, 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/iskp-flexes-its-propaganda-muscles-on-social-media/>.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

Chapter 2:

Cryptocurrency

Sanctions

The UN Security Council designated Shahab al-Muhajir under Resolution 2368 (2017).⁵² This entails global asset freeze, worldwide travel ban and comprehensive arms embargo. Taliban incorrectly reported al-Muhajir died during a 2023 raid in Afghanistan.⁵³ The Counter Extremism Project reported media outlets confirmed that al-Muhajir survived the raid and relocated to the border of Pakistan, near the province of Balochistan.⁵⁴

As of 2026, the US Department of State Diplomatic Security Service is providing \$10 million for information on Al-Muhajir.⁵⁵ This demonstrates the challenges even the United States encounter in neutralising ISKP's terrorist capability. Analysts doubt the effectiveness of rewards for information, stating it is ineffective without broader security and political strategy.⁵⁶ The Taliban government initiated counter military measures against Al-Muhajir. ISKP relies less on domestic revenue-generation methods and more on direct funding from ISS and donors. Extortion, taxation and ransom is no longer a primary-income generating tactic. Equally, international funding through illicit methods like cryptocurrency enables ISKP to bypass traditional avenues.

Research for Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) stated: "There is a reportedly persistent appetite for crypto-currencies within Afghanistan, with some analysts suggesting that usage has "mushroomed" since the Taliban's takeover...this demand comes a willingness of some money traders to disregard the threat posed by the Taliban and continue facilitating the conversion of digital currencies into cash."⁵⁷

Bitcoin

ISKP's financial pipeline stays strong despite military pressure from the Taliban and several significant arrests. International funding has increased. The UNSC reported:

⁵² vitro, callie. "Select Jihadist Leadership Resources as of April 27, 2023." NCITE, April 27, 2023.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-05/select-jihadist-leadership-resources.pdf>.

⁵³ Khan, Asma. "The Elimination of Sanaullah Ghafari: A Major Blow to ISIS-K." Modern Diplomacy, June 12, 2023.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/06/12/the-elimination-of-sanaullah-ghafari-a-major-blow-to-isis-k/>.

⁵⁴ Counter Extremism Project. "Shahab Al-Muhajir." Accessed September 6, 2026.

<https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/shahab-al-muhajir>.

⁵⁵ didpress. "US Offers \$18 Million for Information on IS-K Leaders." *DID PRESS AGENCY*, August 26, 2026.

<https://en.didpress.com/36678/>.

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Overton, Iain. "Financing Terror: The Islamic State in the Khorasan Region." AOAV, October 18, 2023.

<https://aoav.org.uk/2023/financing-terror-the-islamic-state-in-the-khorasan-region/>.

“that ISIL-K received \$2.5 million in 2023...another noted \$1 million went to the group in December 2023 alone.”⁵⁸ Stephen Reimer from Project Craaft, noted that Blockchain analytic firms have identified donations made to ISKP media unit derived from Bitcoin, Ethereum and TRX (Tron).⁵⁹ Reimer notes that propaganda and recruitment campaigns generated \$2 million in USDT (Tron).⁶⁰

Amateur operators and donors use Bitcoin, which provides analyst a trace of their public log information. However, sophisticated operators and donors use privacy coins like Monero. These coins conceal information on the sender, recipient and its amount.⁶¹ This explains the arrest of some donors in Western countries. In 2021, British authorities arrested Islamic State supporter Hisham Chaudhary.

He attempted to use Bitcoin to free the Syrian IS terrorists.⁶² Chaudhary assumed his Bitcoin transactions were anonymous. Bitcoin functions on a transparent and public blockchain – transactions, wallet addresses and fund movements are permanently recorded.⁶³

His last message before his arrest: “We’ve been doing this for years but no one has been caught by the virtue of Allah.”⁶⁴ UK Counterterrorism agencies identified £50,000 in fundraising donations, sent between 2018 and 2019.⁶⁵ Blockchain experts *Chainalysis*, state that private and public sectors must collaborate in order to combat terrorism financing.⁶⁶ It is very likely UK terrorism agencies collaborated with British banks as well as using sophisticated Bitcoin analysis tools.

The UNSC noted that: “The Monitoring Team has previously reported \$2 million in donations from some Western countries to ISIL-K on the Tron blockchain.”⁶⁷ The Tron

⁵⁸ “Letter Dated 19 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council.” July 22, 2024. <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/556>.

⁵⁹ Reimer, Stephen. *The Islamic State in Afghanistan: A Golden Opportunity for a ‘Golden Child’*. 2023.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ TRM Labs. Accessed September 5, 2026. <https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/fundraising-campaigns-for-isis-families-analyzing-the-use-ofcryptocurrency#:~:text=About%20TRM%20Labs.%20TRM%20provides%20blockchain%20intelligence,and%20manage%20crypto%2Drelated%20fraud%20and%20financial%20crime>.

⁶² News, Arab. “British Daesh Member Convicted of Terror Offenses.” *Arabnews*, July 8, 2021. <https://backup.arabnews.com/node/1890841/world>.

⁶³ TRM Labs. Accessed September 5, 2026. <https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/fundraising-campaigns-for-isis-families-analyzing-the-use-ofcryptocurrency#:~:text=About%20TRM%20Labs.%20TRM%20provides%20blockchain%20intelligence,and%20manage%20crypto%2Drelated%20fraud%20and%20financial%20crime>.

⁶⁴ Dearden, Lizzie. “British Isis Member Who Used Bitcoin to Free Jihadis from Syrian Prisons Jailed for 12 Years.” *The Independent*, September 3, 2021. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/isis-bitcoin-syria-sentence-jail-b1913864.html>.

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ TRM Labs. Accessed September 5, 2026. <https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/fundraising-campaigns-for-isis-families-analyzing-the-use-ofcryptocurrency#:~:text=About%20TRM%20Labs.%20TRM%20provides%20blockchain%20intelligence,and%20manage%20crypto%2Drelated%20fraud%20and%20financial%20crime>.

⁶⁷ TRM Labs. Accessed September 5, 2026. <https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/fundraising-campaigns-for-isis-families-analyzing-the-use-ofcryptocurrency#:~:text=About%20TRM%20Labs.%20TRM%20provides%20blockchain%20intelligence,and%20manage%20crypto%2Drelated%20fraud%20and%20financial%20crime>.

blockchain avoids identifiable characteristics the Bitcoin blockchain uses. It makes Tron blockchain extremely difficult for international counterterrorism agencies to identify donor information.

Tron Blockchain

During the arrest of Shamil Hukumatov, counterterrorism multi-agencies followed certain protocols similar to those used in the arrest of Hisham Chaudhary. TRM Labs and Binance acted before formal law enforcement requested or made any initiation. ISKP shifted from Bitcoin to stablecoin networks such as Tron (USDT) on the Tron network (TRX) due to low monitoring.

First, the TRM Labs team identified ISKP's fundraising campaign via social media: "One such fundraising campaign, which has been active for over a year..."⁶⁸

Second, from the campaign, the team identified the fundraisers' cryptocurrency information: "...controlled an address that received around USD 2 million in USDT on Tron in 2022."⁶⁹

Third, after tracing their funds on the Tron blockchain, they waited for the fundraisers to retrieve their donations. From the exchange platform Binance, the system reveals the user's identity only when they attempt to withdraw.⁷⁰ TRM Labs stated they "...notified the exchange used by the group to cash out some of their funds."⁷¹

Fourth, TRM Labs collaborated with Binance (the exchange) which aided them in identifying the fundraisers records. TRM Labs stated: "Aided by its know-your-customer (KYC) controls, the exchange identified the person operating the account and alerted the local authorities, who went on to disrupt their activities."⁷² This information entails a passport photo, taking a selfie and their phone number. TRM Labs went further to confirm that they identified cryptocurrency addresses controlled by ISKP's media production, Al Azaim Foundation, and its Pakistani group.⁷³

The private sector identified this information with speed and efficiency to then assist public authorities. Bureaucracy and legal prohibitions prevent Western governments from exhibiting the same efficiency. If Western governments are to protect marginalised Christian communities targeted by ISKP, they must adapt to a rapid evolving world.

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Systems, Match. "Can You Identify Who Owns a Crypto Wallet?" *Match Systems*, April 5, 2026.

<https://matchsystems.com/blog/articles/can-you-identify-who-owns-a-crypto-wallet>.

⁷¹ TRM Labs. Accessed September 5, 2026. [https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/fundraising-campaigns-for-isis-families-analyzing-the-use-](https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/fundraising-campaigns-for-isis-families-analyzing-the-use-of-cryptocurrency#:~:text=About%20TRM%20Labs.%20TRM%20provides%20blockchain%20intelligence,and%20manage%20crypto%2Drelated%20fraud%20and%20financial%20crime)

[ofcryptocurrency#:~:text=About%20TRM%20Labs.%20TRM%20provides%20blockchain%20intelligence,and%20manage%20crypto%2Drelated%20fraud%20and%20financial%20crime](https://www.trmlabs.com/resources/blog/fundraising-campaigns-for-isis-families-analyzing-the-use-of-cryptocurrency#:~:text=About%20TRM%20Labs.%20TRM%20provides%20blockchain%20intelligence,and%20manage%20crypto%2Drelated%20fraud%20and%20financial%20crime).

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid

Public Sector vs Private Sector

Western governments need to adapt to the sophistication of counter-terrorism financing (CTF) similarly to the way the private sector has. If not, Islamic State will be able to execute operations against vulnerable Christian communities seamlessly. In 2024, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Brian Nelson, stated before the Committee on Financial Services, U.S. House of Representatives that: “We continue to lead the world in mitigating the illicit finance risk from emerging technologies, including sharing information with other governments and the private sector to help them do the same...However, to root out illicit finance by players in virtual asset markets and forums, we need additional tools and resources.”⁷⁴ Even if Western governments receive these tools, bureaucracy and laws still restrain them.

Expertise Deficit

The private sector contains most experts in fintech, and cryptocurrency-blockchain technology in comparison to the public sector. This places the private sector at an advantage. Binance, the largest crypto-trading platform, initiated its Global Law Enforcement Training program to equip public sector officials to better detect financial crimes.⁷⁵ This demonstrates the expertise and knowledge gap between the two sectors.

Bureaucratic Hurdles

Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) treaties facilitate international legal cooperation between governments. They require strict judicial oversight, formal diplomatic requests, and legal evidence procedures.⁷⁶ This process moves extremely slowly in comparison to the private sector. Analysts proceed with investigations with assistance once they have discovered social media accounts and dark web forums promoting illicit fundraising campaigns. Their proprietary AI software scans cryptocurrency wallets and blockchain quicker and efficiently than the public sector. TRM Labs state: “Law enforcement agencies cannot afford to rely on yesterday’s tools... Blockchain intelligence — which provides critical insights and analytics for following the flow of funds on blockchains — has become an essential tool in disrupting crypto-enabled crime.”⁷⁷

Automated AI vs Manual Tracing

TRM Labs highlights the technological deficit within governments. For governments to use automated AI for counter-terrorism finance in crypto-tech, there must be experts

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury. “Testimony of under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson Before the Committee on Financial Services, U.S. House of Representatives.” February 14, 2024. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2093>.

⁷⁵ Euclid. “Prospects and Models of Combating Cryptocurrency Crimes.” Accessed September 20, 2026. <https://euclid.eu/articles/prospects-and-models-of-combating-cryptocurrency-crimes/>.

⁷⁶ FATF. Accessed September 7, 2026. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/guidance/Updated-Guidance-VA-VASP.pdf.coredownload.inline.pdf>.

⁷⁷ TRM Labs. “Why Law Enforcement Agencies Need Blockchain Intelligence.” September 8, 2025. <https://www.trmlabs.com/reports-and-whitepapers/why-law-enforcement-agencies-need-blockchain-intelligence>.

that understand how to use these systems. Secondly, those experts would need MLA treaties to stop restricting them. Otherwise, the private sector will resolve the majority of Islamic State financial crimes instead of governments. TRM Labs describes blockchain intelligence as: “technologies and techniques that enable investigators to detect, trace, and analyze cryptocurrency transactions for signs of criminal activity.”⁷⁸ It “turns the transparent data on public ledgers into actionable intelligence — enabling investigators and analysts to translate digital breadcrumbs into real-world leads.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

Chapter 3:

ISKP Operations

Case Study 1: Santa Maria Church Terrorist Attack

On 28 January 2024, 52-year-old Turkish citizen, Tuncer Murat Cihan, died after Islamic State terrorist attacked him at the Santa Maria Church in Istanbul. Reports note that one out of two of the terrorist's weapons malfunctioned while attempting to murder more Christians inside the church. The Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya stated, the Polish Consul General visited this church at the time of the attack with approximately 35 people present.⁸⁰

Reports state that the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı) was aware of ISKP surveillance operative, Mohammed Khlef Ibrahim (Abu Leys). He entered the country as a refugee. He worked with an accomplice from the Islamic State affiliate *Salman the Persian Brigade* (Selman-I Farisi Taburu), Mijbel al-Shuwaikhi (Abu Yaqin al-Iraqi).⁸¹ Ibrahim obtained a Turkish national ID number 99906003680, enabling him to access public services and start a business.⁸²

On 28 November 2023, Ibrahim and al-Shuwaikhi conducted surveillance on Christian churches in Beyoğlu, Balat and Karaköy in Turkey. They avoided these churches due to high security presence.⁸³ On 30 December 2023, local police forces retrieved public and private CCTV footage capturing the duo. Reports state they chose the Church of Santa Maria due to an escape route they identified.⁸⁴ Their reconnaissance operation involved taking photographs of potential Christian communities to attack.⁸⁵

Turkish government and intelligence services compromised

Reports reveal that MIT obtained information on Ibrahim's identity, his code name, and status within ISKP.⁸⁶ MIT obtained hundreds of documents from an IS safe house in

⁸⁰ YetkinReport. "Istanbul Church Attack Reveals ISIS Infiltration Concerns." Yetkin Report - Murat Yetkin, January 30, 2024. <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2024/01/30/istanbul-church-attack-reveals-isis-infiltration-concerns/?hl=enGB>.

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Bozkurt, Abdullah. "Turkish Intelligence Knew of ISIS Surveillance, but Remained Silent, Leading to Attack." Middle East Forum, November 21, 2024. <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/turkish-intelligence-knew-of-isis-surveillance-but-remained-silent-leading-to-attack?hl=en-GB>.

⁸³ Bozkurt, Abdullah. "ISIS-K Exploits Turkey for Logistics, Fighter Transfers and Terror Attacks." Middle East Forum, February 12, 2024. <https://www.meforum.org/isis-k-exploits-turkey-for-logistics-fighter>.

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Bozkurt, Abdullah. "Turkish Intelligence Knew of ISIS Surveillance, but Remained Silent, Leading to Attack." Middle East Forum, November 21, 2024. <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/turkish-intelligence-knew-of-isis-surveillance-but-remained-silent-leading-to-attack?hl=en-GB>.

⁸⁶ Ibid

Haseki, Syria. This intelligence detailed Islamic State's operations and their operatives.⁸⁷ Once translated into Turkish, MIT had intelligence on ISKP operatives such as Ibrahim and al-Shuwaikhi. However, MIT did not intercept ISKP operations that were planning to attack Christian places of worship.⁸⁸ MIT shared intelligence with police concerning the Santa Maria Church attack on 21 December 2023, using a secret communication code: 2023122116261198715.⁸⁹ Thereafter, Western embassies announced the closure of their diplomatic missions Ankara and Istanbul.⁹⁰

Reports indicate police were 100 metres away from the church on the day of the attack. The lawyer of Santa Maria Church, Afşin Hatipoğlu, stated: "Normally, the police are here. There is a small room in the church's entrance, and the police use that room on worship days. But they were not there that day. They were patrolling upstairs."⁹¹

Investigative journalist Abdullah Bozkurt, from the Middle East Forum, narrates the May 2013 car bombing in Reyhanlı that killed 53 people. Prosecutors revealed MIT had intelligence prior to the terrorist attack. MIT only shared intelligence with local police the night before. The criminal investigation began before the Erdogan government stopped it.⁹² Nordic Monitor reported that MIT contracted Islamic State operative İlhami Balı, of the 2015 terrorist attacks.⁹³

Case Study 2: ISKP Officer Defector

Investigative journalist Hale GÖNÜLTAŞ from Artigercek reported details of ISKP derailed plan. Their terrorist plot included a suicide bomb attack against the Swedish and Dutch consulates after the Quran burning in Stockholm, Sweden in March 2023.⁹⁴ Further intelligence revealed ISKP planned to attack several Christian Churches in Istanbul.⁹⁵ The Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office provided the official indictment documents that Hale used for her report.⁹⁶ Released 5 days beforementioned Santa Maria Church terrorist attack, the report unveils ISKP operational methods, finance, and resource chain of command. According to the

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Bozkurt, Abdullah. "Turkish Intelligence Knew of ISIS Surveillance, but Remained Silent, Leading to Attack." Middle East Forum, November 21, 2024. <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/turkish-intelligence-knew-of-isis-surveillance-but-remained-silent-leading-to-attack?hl=en-GB>.

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ YetkinReport. "Istanbul Church Attack Reveals ISIS Infiltration Concerns." Yetkin Report - Murat Yetkin, January 30, 2024. <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2024/01/30/istanbul-church-attack-reveals-isis-infiltration-concerns/?hl=en-GB>.

⁹² Bozkurt, Abdullah. "Turkish Intelligence Knew of ISIS Surveillance, but Remained Silent, Leading to Attack." Middle East Forum, November 21, 2024. <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/turkish-intelligence-knew-of-isis-surveillance-but-remained-silent-leading-to-attack?hl=en-GB>.

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Gerçek, Artı. "İŞİD'in Konsolosluklar, Kilise Ve Sinagoglara 'Canlı Bomba' Saldırısı Planları Ortaya Çıktı." *Artı Gerçek*, January 23, 2024. <https://artigercek.com/guncel/isisdin-konsolosluklar-kilise-ve-sinagoglara-canli-bomba-saldirisi-planlari-ortaya-cikti-281391h>.

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Ibid

indictment, the ISKP's Officer defected is a 45-year-old Kyrgyzstan citizen of Tajikistan origin.⁹⁷ Mainstream news mainly covered the 18 men Turkish authorities arrested after intercepting their plans.⁹⁸

ISKP Planned Suicide Bombs Against Turkish Churches

ISKP planned coordinated terrorist attacks on Christian Churches in Istanbul, Turkey, including the Surp Pirgiz Church. The defector stated, "we expanded the scope of the attack." The defector indicated suicide bombers were the planned method.⁹⁹

The Defector's Role – Fake ID's and Greet Recruits

Hale wrote in another report that the defector's role was to assist new recruits from Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) with housing, travel, financial resources, weapon supply and fake IDs.¹⁰⁰ Hale notes that, "Almost all of those who use fake passports are those who were previously deported by security forces after being detained in operations against ISIS, but came to Turkey again."¹⁰¹

Hawala Financial Networks and Russian Banking

The defector stated he moved to Turkey in 2022, and rented a family home in Maltepe. He identified an ISKP leader named Hattap based in Afghanistan. He uses the hawala money-transfer system to send \$3,000 every month. The money is received in a telephone store in Zeytinburnu, Turkey. The broker or hawaladar enables the transfer, while he takes his profit.¹⁰² Other transfers are received via Russian bank, SberBank. The defector notes this money is distributed to ISKP terrorists deriving from Russia.¹⁰³

Weapon Procurement and Logistics

The defector identified the point of contact for ISKP weapons, Umar. According to the defector, Umar was unable to provide all requested weapons for ISKP's operation. Umar suggested obtaining outstanding requested weapons and explosives from Chechens in Turkey. Remaining weapons and explosives to be received from Gaziantep.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Butler, Daren. "Turkey Jails 17 over Istanbul Attack, Blames Ex-Soviet Members of IS." *Reuters*, July 5, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-blasts-arrests-idUSKCN0ZL0F4/>.

⁹⁹ Gerçek, Artı. "İŞİD'in Konsolosluklar, Kilise Ve Sinagoglara 'Canlı Bomba' Saldırısı Planları Ortaya Çıktı." *Artı Gerçek*, January 23, 2024. <https://artigercek.com/guncel/isidin-konsolosluklar-kilise-ve-sinagoglara-canli-bomba-saldirisi-planlari-ortaya-cikti-281391h>.

¹⁰⁰ Gerçek, Artı. "İŞİD, Horasan Kolunu Güçlendirmede Türkiye'yi Üs Olarak Kullanıyor." *Artı Gerçek*, January 22, 2024. <https://artigercek.com/guncel/isid-horasan-kolunu-guclendirmede-turkiyeyi-us-olarak-kullaniyor-281276h>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Gerçek, Artı. "İŞİD'in Konsolosluklar, Kilise Ve Sinagoglara 'Canlı Bomba' Saldırısı Planları Ortaya Çıktı." *Artı Gerçek*, January 23, 2024. <https://artigercek.com/guncel/isidin-konsolosluklar-kilise-ve-sinagoglara-canli-bomba-saldirisi-planlari-ortaya-cikti-281391h>.

Hale identified in the indictment intelligence language and methods in weapon logistics ISKP used. They routinely used “dead drop,” for their weapons and items.¹⁰⁵ ISKP terrorists dropped coordinates of weapons that would be transported to Afghanistan, to then bury them.¹⁰⁶ This kept their resources concealed until they are retrieved.

Concluding Both Case Studies

Reviewing the Santa Maria Church case study in context to the ISKP Officer defector case study, it is evident MIT and the Turkish government understand the methods, procedures and operations of ISKP. Turkish authorities and its government are a vital international player in combating ISKP’s targeting of Christian’s due to ISKP base of operations in the country. After the Santa Maria attack, Turkish authorities detained 147 suspects in February 2024 who had operative connections to 33 provinces.¹⁰⁷ Turkish authorities arrested a further 25 suspects, including the killers, Tajikistan national, Amirjon Khliqov and Russian, David Tanduev.¹⁰⁸ However, the indictment revealed intelligence that MIT withheld critical information pertaining to the identities, operations and financial pipelines of ISKP. ISKP’s targeting of Christian communities is not merely specific, but highly sophisticated. Transparent communication with international agencies is required to intercept terrorist plots, especially against vulnerable Christians around the Khorasan region.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Abdulrazek, Saeed. “Türkiye Arrests Members of Cell Suspected of ISIS Links.” February 28, 2024. <https://english.aawsat.com/world/4882186-t%C3%BCrkiye-arrests-members-cell-suspected-isis-links>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

Recommendations

1. Western Governments to Improve Cryptocurrency Investigations

Western governments must modernise their counter-terrorism finance capabilities to address international funding used to violate human rights, including targeted Christian communities. Domestic investigative frameworks and MLA treaties must adapt to removing bureaucratic hurdles that decreases efficiency and delays identifying perpetrators.

2. NATO Allies Must Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms for Counter-Terrorism Inaction

NATO allies must ensure that any delay or withholding of counter-terrorism intelligence is subject to clear accountability procedures agreed upon by member states. Timely intelligence sharing is essential for preventing ISKP-related threats, including those targeting Christian communities.

3. Western Allies Must Support International Operations in Identifying Key Islamic State Leaders

The capture of senior Islamic State figures must be a shared operational responsibility across Western allies, rather than falling disproportionately on the United States. Joint force operations to target key financial facilitators are essential for decimating Islamic State's transnational networks.

4. Policy Review of Encrypted Social Media and Cryptocurrency Platforms

Domestic and international policies must be reviewed by Western allies to address the use of encrypted social media channels and cryptocurrency platforms in facilitating human rights violations, including the persecution of Christian communities. Encrypted technologies remain preferred tools for Islamic State operatives due to their ability to obscure communication, financial transfers, and recruitment activity.

5. Western Allied Intelligence Agencies Must Identify and Investigate Terrorist Sympathiser Networks

Islamic State operates as an international network dependent on individuals and support nodes across multiple regions. Interconnected intelligence sharing is essential for identifying perpetrators, detecting emerging plots, and monitoring hostile or inciting

language directed at Christian communities. Threat indicators of anti-Christian intent must be integrated into joint analytical frameworks to ensure timely intervention.

6. Western Allies and East African Governments Must Prevent ISS from Generating Income Through Territorial Control

Joint force operations must prioritise dismantling physical territory that enables Islamic State Somalia (ISS) to generate income through taxation schemes, extortion, and ransom payments. Preventing ISS from exploiting local populations and economic activity is essential for disrupting its financial support of ISKP. If not, campaigns against Christian communities in the Khorasan, Europe and beyond will continue.

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