

A PROBLEM OF YESTERDAY, TODAY, OR TOMORROW?

EXPLAINING VARIATION IN REPATRIATION POLICIES FOR ISIL- AFFILIATES FROM SYRIA

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ABSTRACT

Since ISIL gave up its last stronghold in 2019, the Syrian Democratic Forces have detained tens of thousands of supporters of the so-called Caliphate, including thousands of foreign fighters in northeast Syria. They have been held without any form of prosecution, and live under severe human rights violations. Moreover, they pose a significant security risk due to radicalization and possible breakouts. Therefore, international organizations, human rights defenders, and experts have repeatedly called on governments to repatriate their nationals from northeast Syria. Despite these calls, most governments are reluctant to repatriate their foreign fighters and only a few countries have taken a proactive approach. This thesis sets out to explore what explains variation in repatriation policies between countries by employing a crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis. This was followed by five interviews with experts from international organizations and NGOs who were directly involved in repatriations. My results suggest that countries with a sufficient level of development (below 60.0 on the Fragile States Index) and a substantial Muslim population (above 44 per cent) repatriate. Countries that miss either condition do not. Those lacking development may miss the resources to carry out such complex and resource-intensive operations, and those without a substantial Muslim population are less inclined to repatriate. I argue that this is due to selective empathy, which may lead to foreign fighters having their citizenship virtualized. Non-Muslim countries may not view their foreign fighters as proper citizens, leading to a perception of these individuals being outside the legal protections of the state.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DEV</i>	QCA indicator for ‘high level of development’
FTF	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
<i>FTF</i>	QCA indicator for ‘high number of ISIL-affiliates’
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
ISIL	the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
<i>ISL</i>	QCA indicator for ‘substantial Muslim population’
KNB	National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan
<i>MIL</i>	QCA indicator for ‘high relative military expenditure’
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PRR	Prosecution, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration
QCA	Qualitative Comparative Analysis
csQCA	Crisp-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis
fsQCA	Fuzzy-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
<i>TER</i>	QCA indicator for ‘high impact of terrorism’
UNSRCT	United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has become an increasingly transnational phenomenon due to globalization, with terrorists operating across countries and continents, committing attacks internationally, and forming transnational alliances (Cronin 2003; Bacon 2018). Moreover, global communication networks allow terrorists to inspire supporters across the globe to travel towards the terrorist groups and fight alongside the local terrorists.

These travellers are called foreign fighters and have been recorded going back centuries, including in the American Revolutionary War and the Spanish Civil War (Malet 2013). In contemporary history, however, foreign fighters have been primarily analysed in the context of Islamic terrorist groups, as they have employed foreign fighters on the largest scale. For instance, Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Mujahideen in Afghanistan and Bosnia recruited thousands of foreign fighters (Hegghammer 2010). However, the organization relying most on foreign fighters in contemporary history, by far, has been the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)¹. Around 40,000 foreigners travelled to Iraq and Syria between 2013 and 2018 to support the self-proclaimed Caliphate in various (fighting) roles (Cook and Vale 2019, 19).

Despite the large number of supporters, ISIL lost its last territory in 2019, and the remaining foreigners have been detained or imprisoned in camps in northeast Syria, such as the infamous Al-Hol camp. Here, they and their families live in several detention centres and prisons under appalling human rights conditions (Human Rights Watch 2022; 2023b; Ní Aoláin 2023c; OHCHR 2023). Moreover, security analysts express concerns over ISIL's resurgence due to the current situation in northeast Syria (International Crisis Group 2019; Mehra and

¹ While ISIL is also known as Islamic State (IS), Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and *Daesh*, I will use ISIL due to its higher degree of territorial specificity as compared to IS and ISIS, and the higher familiarity among an international audience compared to *Daesh*. I will only use Islamic State (IS) when speaking about the global collective of ISIL franchises, such as those operating in various parts of Africa, Central Asia, and the Philippines.

Paulussen 2019; Malet and Hayes 2020). Detainees are at an increased risk of radicalisation, and breakouts of radicalised individuals pose a continuous security threat to Syria and beyond, as escapees may relocate to future conflicts (Sudkamp et al. 2023; Garshasbi and Maleh 2024).

In standard post-conflict settings, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is a key component of peacebuilding (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, 562). The actors most involved in DDR are the UN and the EU (Knight 2008, 30–33), who have predominantly employed it in countries like Burundi, El Salvador, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, 532). DDR, according to one UN guide, aims to “contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin” (UN IDDRS 2010, 24). The three respective phases of DDR typically overlap and it is crucial for a successful peace process that all stages are successfully implemented (Knight 2008, 33).

While the disarmament and demobilization of foreign ISIL fighters has at least partly taken place in the camps and prisons in northeast Syria, reintegration in the country is virtually impossible. Foreign fighters have never been part of Syrian society outside ISIL’s rule and, as a consequence, have no place in Syria to be reintegrated into. They are thus a special case for whom the usual DDR practices do not suffice. As they cannot be reintegrated into Syrian society – and to finalize the crucial step in the DDR process of ISIL’s foreign fighters – experts and international organizations unanimously call for foreign fighters to be repatriated to their countries of origin (Baker-Beall 2019; Mehra and Paulussen 2019; El-Matrah and Dabboussy 2021; Widagdo, Indrayanti, and Saraswati 2021; Guterres 2023; Human Rights Watch 2023b; McKeever 2023; Saul 2024). Repatriation is a human-rights-compliant approach as former foreign fighters can be prosecuted in courts operating under the rule of law. Furthermore, repatriation enhances Syrian, regional, and global security by allowing the completion of DDR and removing the possibility for former ISIL fighters to remobilize in future conflicts.

Despite international calls and repatriation being the only viable option to deal with foreign fighters, most countries do not repatriate their citizens, and academic literature has not provided an answer as to why. Previous academic literature on foreign fighters has extensively analysed the impact they have on conflicts (for example Bakke 2014; Chu and Braithwaite 2017; Bacon, Ellis, and Milton 2021; Mathieson 2022) and their motivations to join terrorist groups (for example Hegghammer 2013; Borum and Fein 2017; Pokalova 2019; Benmelech and Klor 2020), but less so on the aftermath of foreign fighting. This thesis sets out to address the gap in academic literature by answering the question “Why are some countries actively repatriating their foreign fighters from Syria while others do not?”

To answer this question, I employ a crisp Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA), followed by case-intensive research through literature and interviews with experts who worked directly on repatriation operations. I find that countries with a substantial Muslim population (above 44 per cent) and a sufficient level of development (less than 60.0 on the Fragile States Index) are likelier to repatriate due to a closer religious proximity with the foreign fighters and the availability of resources. My results offer academic insights into the causal nexus between policy analysis, religion, and counterterrorism. Furthermore, I provide knowledge to international organizations that deal with the aftermath of future instances of foreign fighting.

Before diving into the thesis, an important disclaimer must be made. Some (adult) foreign fighters may be guilty of voluntarily joining a terrorist group and committing the horrendous crimes ISIL is responsible for. However, the question of guilt falls outside the scope of this thesis. This thesis merely uses the rule of law, human rights, and due process as a foundation for the analysis of foreign fighting. Furthermore, it aims to provide an explanation for the puzzling fact that only a few countries have repatriated their foreign fighters, even

though this is widely understood to be the most effective and human-rights-compliant way of dealing with foreign fighters.

In the following chapter, I engage with the academic literature on foreign fighters, the current situation in northeast Syria, and possible policy options countries have in dealing with their detained foreign fighters. The third section describes the csQCA method and my further methodology in detail. The final section goes into case-intensive research and describes the process of repatriation in Kazakhstan, the chosen positive case. It further explains how the lack of development or the lack of a substantial Muslim population may lead to non-repatriation.

CHAPTER 1: ISIL'S RISE, ITS FOREIGN FIGHTERS, AND THE AFTERMATH

Few terrorist groups have instilled as much fear and controlled as much territory as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). ISIL emerged from Al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004 but disappeared from public view following the American surge of troops in the country (Glenn et al. 2019). In 2011, the chaotic conditions created by the Arab Spring in neighbouring Syria allowed the group to quickly rise to power by seizing territory, attracting new recruits, and launching terrorist attacks both domestically and abroad (Glenn et al. 2019).

At its peak in 2014, ISIL controlled over 110,000 km² in Iraq and Syria, an area larger than Austria and Slovenia combined (Kaczkowski et al. 2021, 7). In the same year, the group's estimated annual income rose to \$2.4 billion (Martin and Solomon 2017, 42). With this money, ISIL launched large-scale propaganda campaigns and quickly boasted up to 31,500 fighters (Sciutto, Crawford, and Carter 2014). ISIL's influence expanded internationally as well, which manifested in the increasing amount of deadly attacks and the rising levels of foreign citizens travelling to join the newly formed Caliphate. At least 37,500 foreigners from more than 80 countries have been confirmed to make the journey to Syria or Iraq to join ISIL between 2013 and 2018 (see Figure 1) (Cook and Vale 2019). Reliable numbers, however, are difficult to obtain and numbers vary² due to the illegal routes that many travellers took to reach ISIL (Pokalova 2020). These travellers came from all over the world and included men and women, young and old, and born Muslims and recent converts. Soon, they came to be known as "foreign (terrorist) fighters" (FTFs) in political discourse.

² For example, a factsheet from the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (2021, 1) discloses that "more than 40,000 [individuals] from 110 States" travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIL. The European Union Radicalisation Awareness Network (2019, 6) reports that at least 42,000 individuals from more than 120 countries have travelled between 2011 and 2016. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) estimates that 53,000 individuals from 80 countries joined ISIL (Mehra et al. 2023, 1).

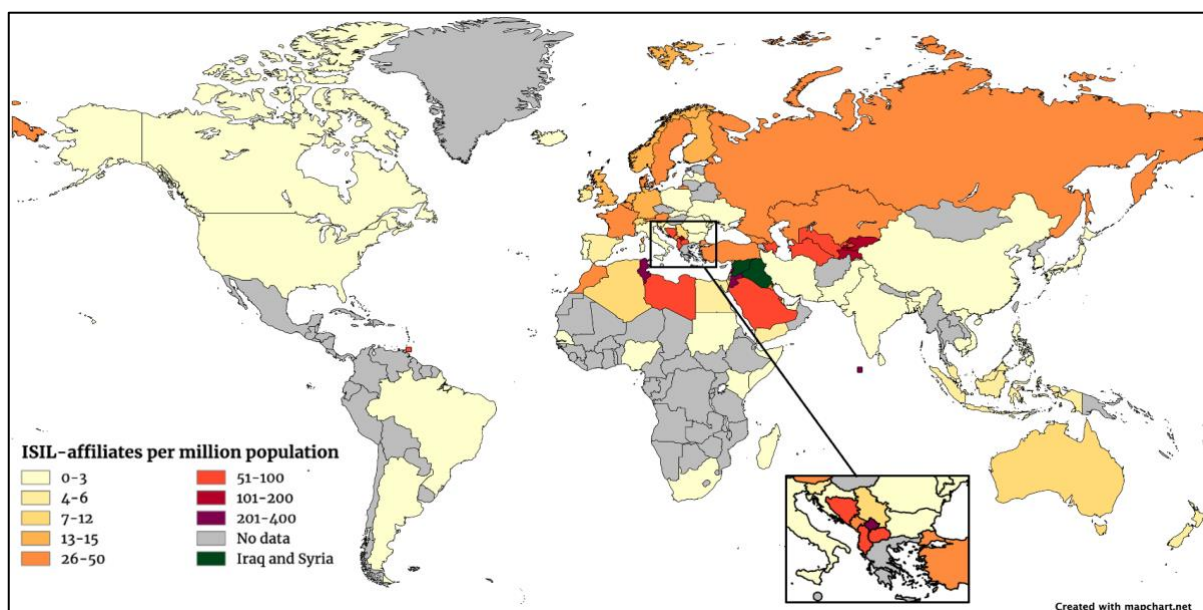


Figure 1 – Map of countries by number of ISIL-affiliates per million population who have been confirmed to travel to Iraq and Syria between April 2013 and June 2018. Data from Cook and Vale (2019) and the World Bank (2022).

Foreign Terrorist Fighters or ISIL affiliates?

Foreign fighters have been recorded going back centuries. Curry (2016, 303) describes that the English army had at least 21 “nationalities” during the Hundred Years War of the early 15th century. In his seminal work on foreign fighters, Malet (2013, 35) even highlights instances of foreign fighters as far back as the Vikings and the Crusades. After the establishment of nation-states in the late modern period, the phenomenon became more far-reaching, most notably during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, when an estimated 40,000 international volunteers fought for the Spanish Republic (Thomas 1990, 982).

A more recent phenomenon is foreigners fighting for rebel or terrorist groups³. Hegghammer and Colgan define foreign fighters as “individuals who join an insurgency abroad

³ There is still no academic consensus on the definition of terrorism. I will use B. Hoffman’s (2017, 44) definition, who classifies terrorism as “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence in pursuit of political change. [It] is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack”. Unlike other prominent definitions (see for example Saul 2006, 65–66; Schmid 2023, 22), B. Hoffman’s definition does not exclude terrorism occurring in armed conflict, which is crucial in analysing ISIL in the Syrian context. There is near unanimous agreement that ISIL is a terrorist organization (see Cronin (2015) for a dissenting opinion). However, by excluding armed conflict, ISIL’s actions in Syria would not be seen as terrorism, as Syria’s conflict has been classified as a Non-International Armed Conflict since 2012 (International Committee of the Red Cross 2012; Arimatsu and Choudhury 2014, 15).

and whose primary motivation is ideological or religious rather than financial” (Hegghammer and Colgan 2011, quoted in Krähenmann 2014, 5). Mercenaries and private military companies are thereby excluded, as their recruitment is (usually) not prohibited by states (Krähenmann 2014). While foreigners appeared in more conflicts in recent history – most notably in Afghanistan (1978-1992), Bosnia (1992-1995), and Iraq (2003-2011) – no conflict mobilised as many foreign fighters as the Syrian Civil War (Hegghammer 2010; Cook and Vale 2019). Most foreigners in Syria joined ISIL or Al-Nusra Front (Pokalova 2020), but Shia Muslims from neighbouring countries also flocked to the country to support Assad’s government (Solomon 2016).

Foreigners joining ISIL or other designated terrorist organizations have since been called “Foreign Terrorist Fighters” (FTFs) by governments and international organizations. The term was popularized through The Hague-Marrakesh Memorandum in 2014 and subsequently used in Security Council Resolutions and government discourse. FTFs in The Hague-Marrakesh Memorandum are defined as “individuals who travel abroad to a State other than their States of residence or nationality to engage in, undertake, plan, prepare, carry out or otherwise support terrorist activity or to provide or receive training to do so” (Global Counterterrorism Forum 2014, 1).

Since then, some academics have criticised the term foreign *terrorist* fighters. Baker-Beall (2019; 2023) and Tayler (2016) argue that the term conceptualizes a narrow understanding of the phenomenon and securitizes individuals who join ISIL, which has led to abuse by governments. According to them, the term falsely implies that all those who are labelled FTFs unequivocally commit terrorist acts. Baker-Beall (2023, 37–38), drawing on Arielli (2018), argues that the term “foreign volunteers” offers a more nuanced view.

Other criticism lies in the fact that all those joining ISIL are generalized as foreign terrorist *fighters* even though many – especially women and children – have not served in fighting roles (Tayler 2016; Baker-Beall 2019; 2023). This discursive logic has also led to women and girls being called “mothers of the Caliphate” and “Jihadist brides” (Strømme 2017). Similar gendered narratives in terrorism have been in place for decades and might have some truth to them (Cunningham 2007; Sjöberg and Gentry 2011). Religious terrorist groups have indeed not relied much on women as operatives when compared to non-religious terrorist groups (Rapoport 2022, 206), and some women seem to have been coerced into travelling to Syria with their husbands (Cook and Vale 2019, 26). However, Pokalova (2020, 175–80) points out that several women have become active combatants or suicide bombers in ISIL, and that social media posts of some women before departure have demonstrated their intent to become active terrorists. Furthermore, scholarship has widely criticized this gendered understanding of women in terrorist groups as it diminishes the agency and political will of (particularly Muslim) women (Sjöberg and Gentry 2007; 2011; 2016; Strømme 2017; Pokalova 2020; Stenger 2023).

In their seminal work on the women and children of ISIL, Cook and Vale (2019) use the term “IS affiliates” to describe all men, women, and children who (willingly or unwillingly) travelled to join ISIL or were born in Iraq and Syria to parents who did. As the term is (gender-) neutral, inclusive, and steers clear of legal criticism, this thesis will henceforth use the term “ISIL-affiliates” instead of the commonly used FTFs. Exceptions are made when referring to foreign fighters outside the context of ISIL. While ISIL-affiliates can be understood to encompass Iraqi and Syrians as well, they are outside the scope of this thesis, in line with the original term developed by Cook and Vale.

The decline and aftermath of ISIL

After 2015, ISIL's capacities decreased as it lost more territory to the US-led Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, and their local allies, a coalition of Kurdish-led militias known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (Pokalova 2020, 53). The inflow of ISIL-affiliates declined and revenues dwindled, and by July 2018 ISIL had lost 99.89 per cent of its territory, controlling a mere 109 km² (Kaczkowski et al. 2021, 7).

While IS has continued to be among the deadliest terrorist groups in the world since (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019; 2020; 2022; 2023; 2024)⁴, the capture of the last ISIL stronghold – Al-Baghuz – by the SDF in March 2019 marked the end of the self-proclaimed Caliphate (Glenn et al. 2019). Many of the surviving ISIL-affiliates surrendered to the SDF, who subsequently detained them in detention camps across northeast Syria.

Data on detention camps and prisons in northeast Syria is scarce and hard to come by, partially due to the large number of “free” internally displaced population camps in Syria, which cloud the data. However, at least five detention camps and fourteen high-security prisons exist (Sudkamp et al. 2023, 14; OCHA 2024). Women and children are primarily detained in the camps, while most men and adolescent boys are imprisoned in prisons (Sudkamp et al. 2023). There is no reliable figure for the total number of detainees or prisoners, but in 2023, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2023) stated that the two largest camps – Al-Hol and Al-Roj – held around 19,000 Syrians and 37,000 foreign nationals. Approximately 10,000 men and boys are additionally presumed to be held in prisons (Sudkamp et al. 2023, 1).

⁴ The Institute for Economics and Peace did not publish the Global Terrorism Index in 2021

The current situation in northeast Syria

Al-Hol, the largest camp, has been named the “worst camp on earth” by Antonio Guterres (2023) and is an example of the inhumane living conditions of detainees. Originally built for Iraqi refugees of the Gulf War and intended to house 10,000 people, it currently holds around 43,000, including some 7,000 third-country nationals who are neither Iraqi nor Syrian (OCHA 2024). Detainees reportedly include suspected ISIL-affiliates, families of suspected ISIL-affiliates, those without links to ISIL, and even Yazidi victims of ISIL (Amnesty International 2024). The camp's formal administration and security management are overseen by the SDF, but according to the UN Security Council (2022), it “continues to be under the social control of ISIL”. This is due to radicalized individuals within the camp and the presence of a “*Hisbah* brigade”, akin to ISIL’s female morality police (Feghali 2019; Khani 2020).

Figure 2 depicts Al-Hol’s population growth and a map of Al-Hol, illustrating the size constraints, multiple phases, and amenities per phase. The camp is divided into three strictly separated sections for Iraqi, Syrian, and third-country nationals. The map shows how the first phase includes considerable amenities such as water towers, religious facilities, and food distribution centres. Later phases and the annex – where third-country nationals live – have little to no amenities. This is indicative of the camp outgrowing its intended size and the years of inadequate funding⁵.

⁵ In 2019, for example, the five main UN agencies (The World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Program (WFP), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) working in Al-Hol reported a funding gap of \$24 million (OCHA 2019). In 2020, this had risen to \$34 million (OCHA 2020).

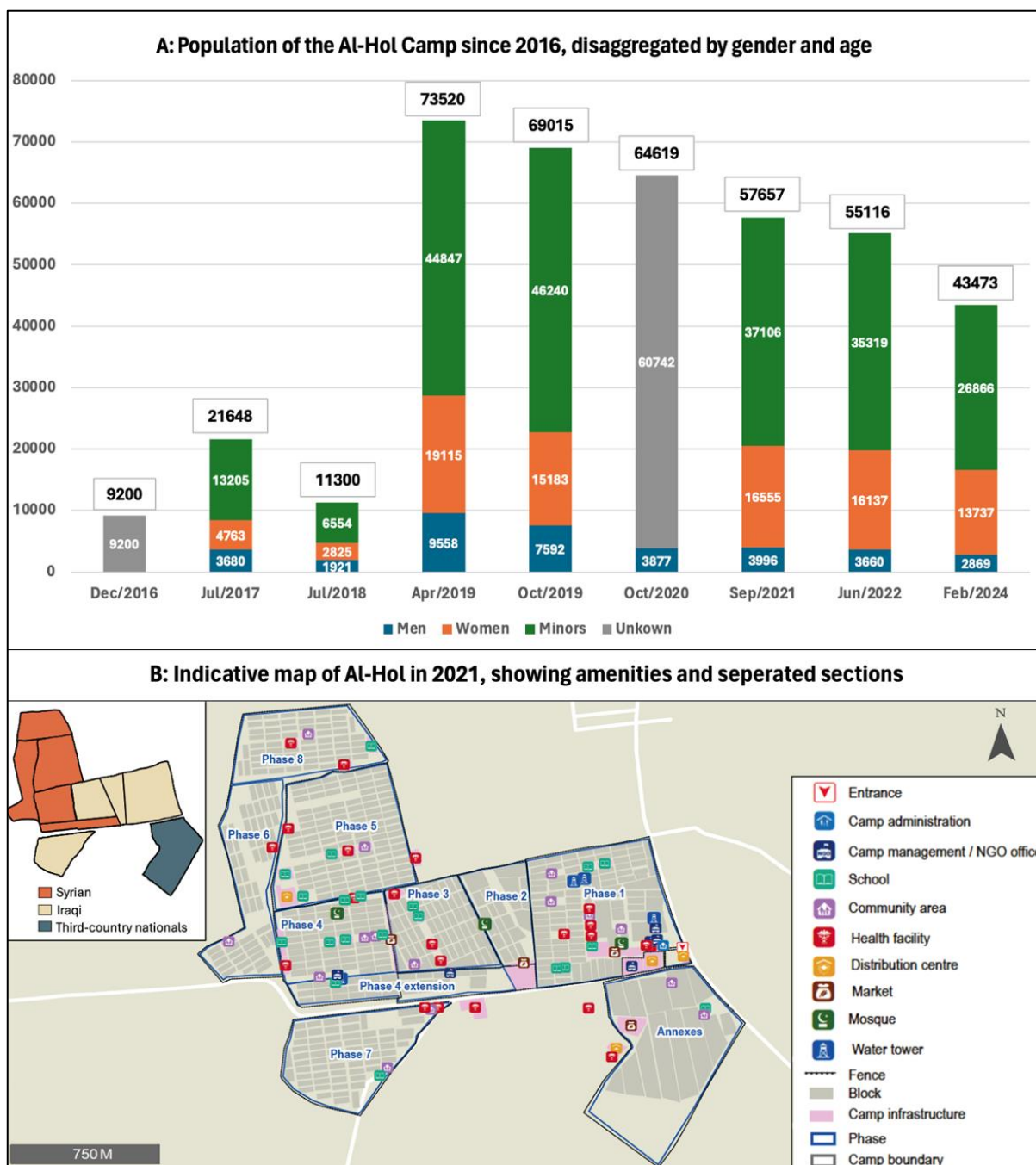


Figure 2– A combined visual aid to the overcrowding of the Al-Hol Camp. Figure A shows the population numbers over the years, disaggregated by gender and age. Since 2019, the population has declined due to detainees (in large part Iraqi) having been transferred to other camps in Syria and Iraq. Figure B shows a map of Al-Hol in 2021 and the three segregated sections. There are considerable amenities in Phases 1 to 4, which were built before 2017, but the amenities decreased with the increase of the camp. A fence is constructed around the entire perimeter of the camp. Based on UNHCR (2016), REACH (2017; 2018; 2019; 2021; 2023), Global Protection Cluster (2022), and UNOCHA (2020; 2024).

According to Human Rights Watch (2022) and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (2023c) – the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism (UNSRCT) – the detention conditions of Al-Hol amount to torture under international law due to the inadequate housing, health

concerns, and incommunicado detention. Furthermore, the former UNSRCT notes grave concerns of further violations of international law and calls it a “European Guantanamo” and a “cradle to grave cycle” for detained children (Sivenbring 2021, 536; Ní Aoláin 2023c, 2).

Human rights conditions in the camps

Access to medical care is a primary concern as there is no hospital in the facility and detainees are not allowed to leave the camp without security escorts, including to hospitals, which are frequently denied (Saad 2020). Detainees are also at increased risk of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and diarrhoea due to a lack of clean drinking water and sanitation. In combination with hypothermia and constant malnutrition, this has led to alarming levels of childhood mortality, with 27 per cent of deaths being under 5 years old (WHO 2022, 2). The camp is also known for rampant violence at the hands of radicalised individuals and criminals, which was the leading cause of death in 2021 at 38 per cent, a staggering number considering that COVID had reached the camp as well (WHO 2022, 2; Global Protection Cluster 2022).

Women and girls, in particular, are at risk of various forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation, assault, and rape (Feghali 2019). As foreign women are detained without their husbands, pregnancy is seen as evidence of sex outside marriage and considered immoral. Pregnant women are therefore particularly targeted by radicalized individuals and have been threatened or even killed by lashing, according to a recent report by Amnesty International (2024). A highly publicized case occurred in November 2022, when two sisters under the age of 15 were found dead in a ditch in the camp. According to OHCHR (2022), they were both raped just days before, after which they and their family were shamed and harassed by a group of radicalized women.

The detainees are also at risk of being targeted by the camp guards. The former UNSRCT (2023c) and Human Rights Watch (2023b) both report on a systemic policy of

separating young boys from their mothers in Al-Hol. The boys are snatched without prior warning and brought to prisons for “security reasons” as soon as they approach adolescence. According to Human Rights Watch (2023b), some female detainees have reported that they hide their children in tents to protect them from “sexual predators, abusive camp guards, and ISIS recruiters and fighters”. One Canadian woman also told Human Rights Watch about the increased traumatization of children in the camp. Her young son had tried to hang himself in the tent just days earlier.

Following her visit to the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps in July 2023, the former UNSRCT reported that no one in the camps has faced any form of judicial process or been able to challenge their detention to an independent authority (Ní Aoláin 2023a, 32:30). Moreover, a tuberculosis outbreak in one of the prisons has infected 50 to 70 per cent of the prisoners due to the lack of treatment and measures in place to prevent the spread of tuberculosis (Ní Aoláin 2023a, 33:30). In combination with grave malnourishment, the former UNSRCT has called this detention in the camps a “death sentence without any legal process” (Ní Aoláin 2023a, 34:50). She concluded that repatriation is “an absolute imperative” due to the following findings:

“[M]ass arbitrary detention specifically for children, incommunicado detention, disappearances, structural and systematic discrimination for detained persons on the basis of age and nationality, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment as well as the deprivation of the fundamental capacity to live a dignified life including access to water, food, healthcare and education, which undermine the right to life.” (Ní Aoláin 2023c, 2)

Security concerns

Aside from the human rights concerns, experts, intelligence agencies, and international organizations have also warned of the security risks that the camps and prisons pose to Syria, the Middle East, and beyond (Mehra and Paulussen 2019; Malet and Hayes 2020; Pokalova 2020; Rigotti and Barboza 2021; UN Security Council 2021; Sudkamp et al. 2023). They are described as incubators for ISIL’s resurgence, and as “the world’s largest and most effective

extremist and terrorist school” (Sivenbring 2021, 546). Children are at a specific risk of radicalisation through exposure to psychological trauma, ISIL recruiters, and a lack of psychological support (International Crisis Group 2019; Sudkamp et al. 2023; Garshasbi and Maleh 2024). Aid workers in Al-Hol have also been targets of attacks, homicides, and kidnappings by detainees (Aid Worker Security Database, n.d.), which recently led the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to suspend all humanitarian activities except some life-saving elements such as bread and water distribution (OCHA 2024).

Men and adolescent boys are mostly held in prisons, under similar humanitarian conditions as those in detention camps, but with more restrictions on movement. The fourteen prisons in northeast Syria hold an estimated 10,000 ISIL suspects, including 2,000 ISIL-affiliates from 58 countries (Sudkamp et al. 2023, 1–2). Breakouts pose a significant risk, as was demonstrated in January 2022 when a large-scale prison break was staged at Al-Sina’a prison. This facility – the largest in the region – held at least 2,500 ISIL suspects, including 700 minors (Hassan and al-Ahmed 2022). Hundreds of ISIL fighters stormed the prison as prisoners staged a riot from within (Loveluck and Cahlan 2022). In the week-long fighting that ensued, 117 SDF guards and soldiers were killed, and an estimated 300 prisoners, including ISIL leaders, escaped (Hassan and al-Ahmed 2022). With nowhere else to go, they are likely to re-join ISIL’s ranks and pose a further security threat to the region.

Policy options in dealing with ISIL-affiliates

Countries with ISIL-affiliates in northeast Syria must decide what policies to take concerning their ISIL-affiliates. They essentially have four options; maintaining the status quo, revoking citizenship, supporting international prosecution, or actively repatriating. The reader must keep in mind, however, that most countries employ a mix of tactics. The Netherlands, for example, has revoked citizenship, repatriated some women and children on a case-by-case basis

following court rulings, and mostly employs a status quo approach (Ingram et al. 2022). The only countries following just one policy are those that fully and actively repatriate their citizens. To understand the options that countries have in dealing with their ISIL-affiliates, this section outlines the policy options and critically evaluates each in turn.

Option 1: Maintaining status quo

Countries maintaining the status quo do not *actively* repatriate, nor revoke citizenship on a large scale. The humanitarian and security concerns of the current situation in the camps have been outlined before, and the consequences of reinforcing the status quo will therefore not be mapped out again. Despite these disadvantages and repeated calls from international organizations, most countries maintain the status quo and leave the responsibility of their ISIL-affiliates in the hands of the SDF (Mehra and Paulussen 2019; Human Rights Watch 2022).

In the past few years, some countries have allowed their ISIL-affiliates to return, provided that they make it to an embassy or consulate (Mehra and Paulussen 2019; Sivenbring 2021). This, however, is only a theoretical solution as neither the countries nor the SDF assist detainees in leaving the camps or prisons to get consular assistance. Even if detainees were able to leave the camps, most of them would not find an open embassy in Syria, meaning they must cross the border into Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, or Türkiye and report to an embassy there⁶. Aside from the difficulty this poses for camp detainees (mostly women with children), detainees have had their personal documents confiscated by the SDF, which hinders them from leaving Syria in the first place (Global Protection Cluster 2023). Births often are not reported to any official authorities and therefore children born in the camps have no official documents. This means that they are unable to travel and are at increased risk of being stateless (Global

⁶ For example, of all the EU member states, only the Czech embassy in Damascus remained open throughout the Syrian War, but even there, consular assistance is carried out in Lebanon (Hutt 2021; ‘Embassy of the Czech Republic in Damascus’, Accessed 19 March, 2024).

Protection Cluster 2023). Due to the difficulties detainees would face – and its marginal impact on the situation – this policy is regarded as upholding the status quo.

Some countries have decided to repatriate as a last resort and only in exceptional cases. Belgium, for instance, has repatriated a number of young orphaned children, while the US has repatriated only those who were charged and found guilty of acts of terrorism (Annamaneni 2019; Mehra et al. 2023). Other countries such as France and Germany have been ordered by national or international courts to repatriate specific individuals (see for example H.F. and Others v. France. no. 24384/19 & 44234/20 2022; McKeever 2023). While Save the Children has welcomed such efforts (2021; 2022b), it has also calculated that it will take up to three decades to repatriate the children alone at the current pace of repatriations (2022a). Due to this long timeframe, this option is also considered status quo.

Option 2: Revoking citizenship

Countries can revoke their nationals' citizenship in non-arbitrary ways, as is the case of voluntary service in a foreign military, acquiring another nationality, or when individuals obtained their nationality through fraud. In most cases, this applies only to people who have dual citizenship, as having a nationality is a human right under Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN 1948).

Article 8(1) of the UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961) stipulates that a “[c]ontracting State shall not deprive a person of its nationality if such deprivation would render [them] stateless”. Regional legislative instruments have prescribed highly specific and non-arbitrary exceptions in line with the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness when it is possible to render citizens stateless. For example, Article 7.3 of the Council of Europe's European Convention on Nationality (1997), declares that Member States cannot render their citizens stateless unless the person in question has acquired their nationality “by means of

fraudulent conduct, false information or concealment of any relevant fact attributable to the applicant”.

In a highly criticized move, the United Kingdom has inserted a clause in the National Immigration Bill to grant the Home Secretary the power to revoke citizenship if it is ‘conducive to the public good’, even if it may leave the individual stateless (Krähenmann 2014; Ross and Rudgard 2014)⁷. This law is primarily meant for ISIL-affiliates and, even though Ministers have routinely refused to reveal updated figures, at least 200 British ISIL-affiliates have been deprived of their citizenship (Dearden 2020; McKinney, Gower, and McGuinness 2024, 5).

Most countries take slightly less draconian measures by only revoking the citizenship of those with dual nationality. However, this practice has also been widely criticised due to the likelihood of discriminatory effects (Van Waas 2016; Amnesty International 2017; Paulussen 2021; Achiume et al. 2022). The UN Special Rapporteur on Racism expressed concern after a visit to the Netherlands that revoking Dutch citizens’ nationality “disproportionately affects Dutch people of Moroccan and Turkish descent and therefore runs afoul of international human rights equality and non-discrimination principles” (Achiume 2019, 9).

Besides legal objections, experts have also raised practical concerns. Individuals without passports can still enter their countries through illegal methods, which would allow them to stay under the radar in case they want to commit terrorist attacks (Pokalova 2020). For this reason, intelligence and security agencies have regularly opposed revoking the citizenship of ISIL-affiliates. Moreover, prosecuting stateless people is inherently complex, as they fall under no state’s legal jurisdiction (Paulussen 2018; 2021). Lastly, individuals who are rendered

⁷ The UK is not a Party to the European Convention on Nationality and has made certain reservations to the UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which has enabled it to pass this law without violating its obligations under international law, according to the Supreme Court. Critics, however, disagree (see for example Equal Rights Trust 2013; Open Society Justice Initiative 2014).

stateless might be more susceptible to radicalization and are less likely to reintegrate into normal society (Braun 2018; Malet and Hayes 2020). Despite the legal and practical criticisms, several countries – including Australia, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom – have deprived their nationals of their nationality in cases of dual citizenship (Tayler 2016).

Proponents of this approach argue that they revoke citizenship to enhance national security or due to the highly symbolic value attached to the measure, with which they hope to underline their condemnation of terrorism and foreign fighting (Adriaanse 2017; Specia 2024). For example, the French Prime Minister Valls stated that stripping people of their citizenship is mostly symbolic, and that “efficacy is not its primary objective” (Dodman 2015). As mentioned above, experts agree that this option has limited effectiveness, discriminatory effects, and violates international law (Krähenmann 2014; Tayler 2016; Braun 2018; Mehra and Paulussen 2019; Malet and Hayes 2020; Paulussen 2018; 2021; Ní Aoláin 2022). Due to this wide criticism, this policy option is rejected by experts as a suitable method for dealing with ISIL-affiliates.

Option 3: International prosecution

Some countries, with Sweden at the forefront, have proposed prosecution in international courts as their preferred way forward (Warrell 2019). According to proponents, this could be done by the International Criminal Court (ICC), or via ad-hoc Tribunals such as the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda or Former Yugoslavia (ICTR and ICTY, respectively). However, such proposals bring with them significant difficulties of political, practical, and jurisdictional nature, which makes experts question their feasibility (Mehra and Paulussen 2019; Widagdo, Indrayanti, and Saraswati 2021). For instance, the ICC lacks both the jurisdiction and the capacity to prosecute crimes committed in Syria and Iraq, as neither country is a member of the Rome Statute – the founding treaty of the ICC (Bensouda 2015).

Furthermore, the ICC has neither the capacity to prosecute, nor the ability to detain a large number of ISIL-affiliates (Widagdo, Indrayanti, and Saraswati 2021).

International tribunals face other complications. A request for an international tribunal has to be made by the UN Security Council, but its permanent members support opposing sides in Syria and are thus unlikely to agree on the mandate and scope of such a tribunal. Moreover, past tribunals such as the ICTY and ICTR only indicted 161 and 93 individuals, respectively, far too few for meaningful change of the situation (UNICTR 2021; UNICTY 2023). Due to these difficulties, and the fact that transferring prosecution responsibilities changes nothing about detention responsibilities, experts also regard this option as unsuitable for dealing with ISIL-affiliates.

Option 4: Active repatriation

Active repatriation entails the proactive search for detained nationals and bringing them back to the country of nationality. This approach must go hand in hand with appropriate prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (PRR) efforts. Experts and international organizations (Mehra and Paulussen 2019; Widagdo, Indrayanti, and Saraswati 2021; Human Rights Watch 2022; 2023b; Guterres 2023; OHCHR 2023; Ní Aoláin 2023c; McKeever 2023; Amnesty International 2024; Saul 2024) agree that repatriation is the best policy option for countries, but few countries have committed to this approach. The advantages of repatriation are the decrease of ISIL's threat, human rights considerations, and the possibility to bring ISIL-affiliates to justice. They can be prosecuted under the rule of law and imprisoned in secure and humane conditions. However, repatriation cases remain inherently complex (Perešin and Pisoiu 2021). Systematic PRR efforts must be in place for all repatriates, which includes distinguishing between victims and perpetrators. This may prove challenging due to the lack of evidence of ISIL-affiliates' crimes and the difficulty of accessing such evidence. Moreover,

many governments face negative public sentiment toward repatriation, as well as a desire for retribution, especially for adult ISIL-affiliates.

Due to this, children are usually the first to be repatriated, but this also brings difficulties. Many children in the camps face a language barrier upon returning home and will have difficulties in keeping up with their classmates, as there is little to no education in the detention camps (International Crisis Group 2019). Furthermore, children born in the camps have neither an official nationality nor birth records or passports. Some countries, such as Belgium, have implemented mandatory DNA tests for the children (paid for by the repatriates or their families) to ensure that they are truly the children of Belgian citizens (Mehra and Paulussen 2019).

Aside from the above, governments and their populations are afraid of the danger that repatriated ISIL-affiliates pose. They often quote a study by Hegghammer (2013, 11), who shows that attacks perpetrated by returned foreign fighters are twice as likely to be successful and deadly. Other studies, however, have criticized the findings or method of Hegghammer. Malet and Hayes (2020) indicate that his findings are based on a sample of eleven deadly attacks spanning a timeframe of 30 years across the entire Western world. Leduc (2016) points out that the database of Hegghammer only runs until 2010, and therefore misses the ISIL phenomenon completely. He reruns the analysis with a larger sample and excludes three outliers (the 1993 WTC bombing, 9/11, and the 2004 Madrid Bombings) on grounds of death count or data anomalies, and finds that returning FTFs “do not present a domestic terrorist threat that is any higher than any other member of the population” (Leduc 2016, 99).

It is important to note that the above-mentioned studies do not take PRR efforts into account as no significant ones are in place in the United States. Furthermore, these cases only concern foreign fighters who voluntarily returned and not those who were actively repatriated,

which may influence the result. While no study has been devoted to the risk that repatriated ISIL-affiliates pose to their home countries, previous studies have analysed the threat of foreign fighters or terrorists after imprisonment or participation in deradicalization programmes in general. For instance, Wright (2019, 28) finds that the recidivism rate of Jihadists in the US after serving time in jail is 6.5 per cent, far below the rate for normal criminals. Malet and Hayes (2020) study returning foreign fighters and the danger that they will commit terrorist acts. They find that “foreign fighters who return to plot domestic terror attacks are few and far between” (2020, 1632), and that those who do mostly do so within the first six months. They conclude that returning ISIL-affiliates pose only a temporally threat which can largely be negated by limited jail time.

Deradicalization or disengagement from violence is the desired outcome of countries dealing with violent extremists. That said, countries across the world have taken two distinct approaches to the deradicalization of Jihadists: Values-based approaches and means-based approaches (Birt 2009). Deradicalization programmes in the Middle East employ a values-based approach by promoting a moderate form of Islam, which is compatible with universal and secular views (Birt 2009, 53; Shapoval 2021). Yemen, for example, employs a ‘theological dialogue model’, which features repeated conversations with theologians to undermine radical views and promote the region-specific interpretation of Islam (Shapoval 2021). European countries, on the other hand, employ a means-based approach, which views radicalization as a socio-political problem and highlights the personal factors (i.e. psychological, social, and emotional) that attract people to radical Islamism (Birt 2009, 53). The values-based approach and means-based approaches are not mutually exclusive and the difference lies in the relative priority given to each aspect of deradicalization.

Deradicalization programs, such as in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, have often published high success rates, but a lack of transparency makes these rates difficult to independently verify (Horgan and Braddock 2010; Horgan, Meredith, and Papatheodorou 2020). Coupled with the different environments in which the deradicalization programmes operate, it is difficult to make a satisfactory cross-comparison of efficiency across countries. Moreover, the value-based approach is criticized in general as it is difficult to assess whether participants truly changed their beliefs or merely act as if they did (Shapoval 2021, 9).

Despite the above challenges in deradicalization, some countries have successfully started to actively repatriate and deradicalize all their nationals, showing that repatriation is possible. Why only a few countries repatriate has not yet been explained by the academic literature. This thesis seeks to address this gap in academic literature by employing the QCA method, followed by interviews. The following chapter explains the process of my analysis in depth.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

To find out which factors influence countries' repatriation policies, this thesis employs the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method. QCA is a formalized mixed-methods research method drawing on set theory. It groups cases into sets of conditions and outcomes, allowing researchers to identify complex causal relationships between the conditions (independent variables) and their related outcomes (dependent variables) (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). QCA thereby offers three distinct advantages to researchers. First, it enables the researcher to assess the effect of a suite of conditions on an outcome, rather than one or two conditions in isolation (Rihoux 2009).

Secondly, QCA employs logical minimization to disentangle the causal relationship by “looking for commonalities and differences among cases that share the same outcome” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 9). This leads to a minimization of complexity and redundancy and eventually establishes the so-called ‘most parsimonious solution’, which is a superset of the standard, complex solution and makes the interpretation of causal relationships easier (Sallan 2021).

Lastly, contrary to other set-theoretic methods, QCA also employs ‘truth tables’ which enable the analysis of causal complexity, such as the presence of necessary or sufficient conditions (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 9). A condition is necessary if, whenever the outcome is present, the condition is also present (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 57–76). This can be expressed as follows: $X \leftarrow Y$, where X is the condition and Y the outcome. This does not imply that Y causes X , but that if the outcome is present, so is the condition. Sufficiency, on the other hand, can be expressed as $X \rightarrow Y$. Put differently, whenever the condition is present, so is the outcome. Through analysing necessity and sufficiency, QCA enables a deeper understanding of the causal relationships between conditions and the outcome.

Because of its focus on causality, QCA is particularly useful for research designs involving a causes-of-effects goal, where the research question seeks to answer why particular outcomes occur (Mahoney and Goertz 2006). As this is the case in this thesis, QCA is a suitable research method. Furthermore, government policy is influenced by an array of conditions which may work together to bring about repatriation, QCA can analyse the interplay between these conditions and is therefore a good fit. Lastly, while not the primary motivation for choosing this method, the small to medium N in this study makes it a suitable subject for a QCA analysis (Schneider and Wagemann 2012).

The most used variant of QCA is fuzzy set QCA (fsQCA), which brings more nuance by classifying conditions into more than two categories, unlike crisp set QCA (csQCA), which categorizes conditions in dichotomous ways (present or absent) (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). For this thesis, QCA is primarily used for data exploration and typology building in order to narrow the scope of my in-case analysis and enhance the validity of my findings. While fsQCA can show a more nuanced picture, the outcome (active repatriation) analysed in this study is a dichotomous one, which lends itself to using csQCA. FsQCA is therefore redundant for this thesis and I employ csQCA (Rihoux 2009).

The first step in csQCA is to establish a population (or pool) of cases. I used the latest available information on countries with nationals detained in northeast Syria from July 2023 (Ní Aoláin 2023c, 3n10). The former UNSRCT identified nationals of at least 57 countries in detention centres and prisons during her visit to northeast Syria (Ní Aoláin 2023c, 3n10) (see Figure 3).

After establishing the population of countries, the cases were coded for the presence or absence of active repatriation. Active repatriation was classified based on policies and discourse rather than on the number of repatriates, as I am interested in *why* some countries *actively* want to repatriate, rather than *if* they repatriate in general. Coding based on the number of repatriates would also face difficulties, as the number of ISIL-affiliates or repatriates is often not known, and establishing cut-off points for active repatriation would be arbitrary. Lastly, by coding based on expressed commitment or policies, I avoid classifying countries which have been ordered by courts to repatriate specific people as positive cases. I thus only classified cases as positive when they committed themselves to repatriating all their citizens, even when they have not succeeded yet. This is in line with a practice used in Stenger's (2023) analysis of state narratives on ISIL-affiliates. My analysis yielded seven countries with a positive outcome for repatriation: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, North Macedonia, and Uzbekistan.

The selection of independent variables (conditions) was informed by preliminary pattern-matching, academic literature, and informal conversations with experts. Five conditions were tested in my final csQCA: Substantial Muslim population (*ISL*), high impact of terrorism (*TER*), high level of development (*DEV*), high relative military expenditure (*MIL*), and high number of ISIL-affiliates per capita (*FTF*). CsQCA subsequently requires establishing cut-off points which indicate whether conditions are scored as present (1) or absent (0). The following section deals with each condition, the motivation for including them, and their respective cut-off points. The calibrated and raw datasets are available in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

Preliminary pattern-matching showed that repatriating countries have a substantial Muslim population (*ISL*). To calibrate this condition, I used Pew Research Center (2022) data on the Muslim population by country in 2020. In my pool of cases, there is a prominent gap between 15 and 44 per cent, which I used as the cut-off point. All countries with a Muslim population of more than 44 per cent were scored as 1 for *ISL*, while those with 15 per cent or lower as 0. This practice is in line with Emmenegger (2011), as quoted in Schneider and Wagemann (2012, 34–35).

For the condition of high impact of terrorism (*TER*), the same pattern-matching analysis showed that all repatriating countries have a low impact of terrorism as measured through the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) by the Institute for Economics & Peace (2023). I set a cut-off point at 4.0, which is the threshold value between a low and medium terrorist impact. Countries with a score above 4.0 on the GTI were scored as 1 for *TER* and those below 4.0 as 0.

Informal conversations with UN personnel involved in providing technical assistance to repatriating countries hinted at the importance of countries' level of development, countries' financial resources, and state capacity due to the complexity of repatriation operations. Over

time, I merged these conditions into an overarching condition called the level of development (*DEV*) to achieve a higher order of conceptualization, which was measured through the Fragile States Index (FSI) by the Fund for Peace (2023). It combines measures of economic stability, state capacity, and human rights, among others. A cut-off point was set at 60.0, the threshold between the “stable” and “warning” categories of the FSI (The Fund for Peace 2023). The lower the FSI score, the more developed and stable a country is. Therefore, countries with a score below 60.0 were scored as 1 for *DEV*, and countries above 60.0 were scored as 0.

ISIL-affiliates per million (*FTF*) was added as a condition to account for the difficulty and extensiveness of repatriation. I measured this using Cook and Vale (2019) and triangulated the data with population numbers as reported by the World Bank (2022). Establishing a theoretically grounded cut-off point for this condition was challenging as no literature is available on what constitutes a high amount of ISIL-affiliates, criminals, or prisoners. To overcome this hurdle, I created cut-off points at the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles and reran the analyses in all configurations⁸. In line with Schneider and Wagemann’s (2012, 287–91) expectation, this did not influence the result. I therefore settled on the 50th percentile as a cut-off point and scored countries above the 50th percentile as 1 for *FTF*, and those below as 1.

The final indicator, military expenditure as a share of GDP (*MIL*) was measured through data by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database (2022). This condition was chosen due to a study by Stenger (2023), who runs an explorative statistical model with multiple variables, finding that only military expenditure is (negatively) correlated to repatriation policies. However, her analysis is not able to discover a set of conditions that lead to the outcome of repatriation. Her model measures each variable

⁸Schneider and Wagemann (2012, 26) point out that calibration scores should be plausible and transparent. This makes the range of discretion limited and only leads to a limited effect by changing calibration. Additionally, Rihoux (2009, 373) highlights that, as a rule of thumb, having less than 33 per cent of the members as a positive or negative membership score is undesirable.

independently and finds bivariate correlations rather than complex causal links. It moreover uses a linear regression analysis despite the fact that the dependent variable (repatriation) is a categorical outcome. This emphasises the relevance and applicability of a QCA method for my thesis. I added this condition to my analysis to build upon her article and account for her findings. A theoretically grounded cut-off point was again difficult to establish. NATO members have agreed on 2 per cent military expenditure as a threshold and deem a figure below 2 per cent as low, hence I settled for this number. Additionally, I ran analyses with cut-off points at the 25th and 75th percentile (2 per cent falls at the 64th percentile), which did not change the results. I therefore stuck to 2 per cent as a cut-off point for this condition, with countries above this figure being scored 1 for *MIL*, and those below as 0.

After finalizing the calibrated dataset, I used the QCA and SetMethods packages for R by Duşa (2018) and Oana and Schneider (2018) in R Studio (R version 4.3.2). My R protocol can be found in Appendix C. As the analysis identified a large number of indicators with causal relevance, I logically minimized the truth table to establish the most parsimonious solution. For the subsequent in-case analysis, I focused on the most parsimonious solution and relied on further desk research complemented with interviews. Five experts from international organizations and NGOs who were involved in repatriations were interviewed. Each interview lasted around 30 minutes and followed a semi-structured format, with a specific focus on the role of religion and the capacities of repatriating governments. The results of the in-case analysis are described and analysed in the following chapter, which details the process of repatriation in Kazakhstan and follows with a description of how the most important conditions influence the decision to repatriate.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

The QCA truth table (visible in Table 1 and Step 3 of Appendix C) indicates that the positive cases are Kazakhstan, Albania, and Malaysia as the incl and PRI are above my chosen threshold. I logically minimized the truth table to establish the most parsimonious solution (Table 2 and Step 8 of Appendix C). The result *ISL*DEV* indicates that the causal pathway to repatriation is a combination of a substantial Muslim population (above 44 per cent) and a sufficient level of development (an FSI score below 60.0). All countries with the combination *ISL*DEV* repatriate (visible from the inclusion score, or consistency, of 1.000) demonstrating that the combination of these conditions is sufficient for the outcome of repatriation. There are no deviant cases, possibly due to the inclusion score of 1.000 in the three pathway cases. From the typical cases, I focus on Kazakhstan as my key positive case due to the availability of information, and the fact that Kazakhstan has come furthest with its repatriation efforts. As there are no deviant cases, and due to the complexity of analysing negative countries' policies and motivations, I compare a typical case (Kazakhstan) with grouped negative cases.

Table 1 – QCA Truth table with country codes. For full country names, please refer to Step 3 of Appendix C

Country	ISL	FTF	TER	DEV	MIL	OUT	n	incl	PRI
MYS	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1,000	1,000
ALB, KAZ	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	1,000	1,000
BIH, KGZ, MDV, MKD, TJK	1	1	0	0	0	0	5	0,600	0,600
AZE, LBN, MAR, SAU, TUN, UZB	1	1	0	0	1	0	6	0,167	0,167
CHN, ZAF	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,000	0,000
SRB, UKR, VNM	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0,000	0,000
AUS, CAN, PRT, ROU, ESP, CHE	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	0,000	0,000
EST, POL	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0,000	0,000
PHL	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0,000	0,000
IND	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0,000	0,000
USA	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0,000	0,000
GEO	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0,000	0,000
RUS	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0,000	0,000
AUT, BEL, DNK, FIN, NLD, NOR, SWE, TTO	0	1	0	1	0	0	8	0,000	0,000
GBR	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0,000	0,000
FRA, DEU	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	0,000	0,000
BGD, SEN, SDN	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,000	0,000
AFG, EGY, IDN	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	0,000	0,000
DZA, IRN, PAK, SOM, YEM	1	0	1	0	1	0	5	0,000	0,000
TUR	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0,000	0,000
LBY	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0,000	0,000

Table 2 - The most parsimonious solution: a substantial Muslim population (ISL) and a sufficient level of development (DEV).

PATHWAY	Consistency	PRI	Cases
ISL*DEV	1.000	1.000	Malaysia, Albania, Kazakhstan

This chapter discusses how the lack of development or the lack of a substantial Muslim population may lead to the absence of repatriation. Before that, however, the timeline of repatriation in Kazakhstan is mapped out for the reader's understanding of the repatriation process. Information mostly comes from Kazakhstan's government and is hard to verify, leading to some uncertainties and possible biases regarding the PRR (prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration) operations. I compensate for this as much as possible by verifying information with interviewees and by using secondary sources by the UN and OSCE.

Active repatriation in Kazakhstan

The first repatriation of Kazakhstani ISIL-affiliates was carried out in 2017, when the Chairman of the Kazakhstani National Security Committee (KNB) announced the repatriation of around 60 children (UNDP and UNODC 2020, 12). While this seemed to be a one-off operation at first, the following years witnessed an increased commitment, peaking in 2019, when four “Zhusan” repatriation operations were conducted (UNDP and UNODC 2020). “Zhusan” is a specific type of wormwood that only grows in Kazakhstan and is associated with home by many Kazakhstanis, showcasing the symbolic value of the process. Over the following five years, the authorities repatriated at least 655 ISIL-affiliates from the Middle East, including 37 men, 164 women, and 454 children (UNDP and UNODC 2020, 12)⁹. According to the Kazakhstani government, there are no Kazakhstani ISIL-affiliates left in the camps who can be repatriated. As Kazakhstan was among the first countries to repatriate such a large number of

⁹ Cook and Vale (2019) only reported 500-600 Kazakhstani ISIL-affiliates, lower than the number of repatriates. This can be explained by the number of children born in Syria, which may not have been accounted for in Cook and Vale's report. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (2019), citing the Kazakhstani National Security Committee, put the number of ISIL-affiliates higher at around 800 individuals, some of whom may have died.

people from Syria, it received technical, operational, and legal assistance from the EU, UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Russia, and the US. It is important to note, however, that Kazakhstani authorities initiated the operations, rather than being pressured by international organizations or other countries (Interviewee 1 2024).

The repatriation process started by Kazakhstani authorities locating nationals in Syrian camps and prisons in cooperation with the OSCE, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNICEF, and local NGOs (Atlantic Council 2021). Kazakhstani officials visited the camps, where they drafted lists of Kazakhstani ISIL-affiliates desiring to return to Kazakhstan, and arranged for their transportation (UNDP and UNODC 2020). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs served as a coordinator of these efforts but worked together with intelligence agencies and local authorities (OSCE 2021). The ISIL-affiliates were subsequently flown to Aktau, a city in far west Kazakhstan. Two interviewees provided conflicting explanations on whether the ISIL-affiliates were flown on Russian or American aircraft, but it is clear that there was logistical and operational support for the operation from other countries (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 5 2024).

Upon arrival in Aktau, the repatriates were brought to a rehabilitation camp (Shapoval 2021). Here, they were medically and psychologically assessed, and provided with food, clothes, and medical care. Religious scholars evaluated the threat they posed to society by gauging the severity of any radical views. At least 29 men, 17 women, and 1 minor have been sentenced for participating in terrorist organizations or committing terrorist attacks and received an average sentence of five to ten years in prison (OSCE 2021). After approximately a month, those not prosecuted were transferred to centres around Kazakhstan. These centres are run by Pravo, a local NGO focussing on social work, legal assistance, and shelter for victims of sexual and domestic violence (Pravo Fund, n.d.). Due to their work on sexual and domestic

violence, Pravo has the infrastructure and expertise to work extensively with repatriates, who are mostly women and children.

In the centres, Pravo has worked together with the authorities to initiate divorce proceedings and issue passports or birth certificates to ISIL-affiliates. Children born in the camps have been given birth certificates indicating the birthplace of their parents (i.e. Kazakhstan) to avoid stigmatization (OSCE 2021, 3). They have also attended additional classes during holidays and weekends to make up for the lack of previous education (Shapoval 2021, 18). According to the government, half of the repatriated children “demonstrate excellent performance” in schools as a result (OSCE 2021, 3). Women have had the option to receive vocational training or complete their studies with a large discount or fully free of charge, with programmes ranging from sewing and cosmetology to programming (Shapoval 2021, 18; The Bulan Institute 2022, 12:00). These services have all been provided to prevent socio-economic isolation and increase the likelihood of deradicalization.

The last phase of PRR focuses on social integration and overcoming trauma and is – as far as can be told – still ongoing (The Bulan Institute 2022). To overcome trauma and facilitate deradicalization, psychologists have held over 8,000 individual and group counselling sessions with repatriates (OSCE 2021, 3). Kazakhstan’s deradicalization programmes rely heavily on religious re-education and employs theologians to instil a moderate form of Islam in the repatriates. It is important to note that Kazakhstan’s focus on religious re-education is not a requirement for other countries’ repatriation operations, as explained in Chapter 1.

According to the government, over 80 per cent of the repatriated men and more than 90 per cent of the women have given up extremist ideologies (OSCE 2021, 3). This success rate, however, is hard to independently verify and is one of the key criticisms of the values-based deradicalization approach taken by Kazakhstan (Shapoval 2021, 9). Other critiques of

Kazakhstan's PRR efforts include a lack of secular deradicalization alternatives, a shortage of trained personnel, a lack of adequate housing for repatriates, and a lack of consistency in deradicalization efforts (UNDP and UNODC 2020; Shapoval 2021).

The impact of development

Without a sufficient level of development, carrying out a process similar to the one described above is difficult. Repatriation (and subsequent PRR) efforts are costly and require inter-agency cooperation. In Kazakhstan, at least nine federal state agencies and ministries¹⁰ have collaborated with multiple NGOs, religious institutions, and regional authorities to implement the PRR programme. The process has been going on for at least five years and will continue for years to come, showcasing the complexity of the operation. This makes countries without long-term stability or government capacity unsuitable for continued PRR efforts, which in turn could lead to an increased danger for the countries.

Moreover, in countries with a limited level of development, there is virtually no information available on ISIL-affiliates. In the Maghreb and South-East Asia, for example, there are only very rough estimates of the number of ISIL-affiliates who left for Syria and no knowledge of how many ISIL-affiliates are currently detained (Renard 2019; UNDP 2020). Without this information, it is virtually impossible to develop a comprehensive repatriation policy. In Tunisia, for example, the government, civil society, and prison officials share the view that Tunisia lacks the knowledge, resources, and capacity to develop effective policies in dealing with returned or repatriated ISIL-affiliates (Renard 2019, 45).

¹⁰ The General Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Information and Social Development, Ministry of the Interior, National Security Committee (including the special forces and the anti-terrorist department), and the National Security Council (Shapoval 2021, 21–22).

Repatriation to some countries may even be incompatible with international law, as it would violate the principle of non-refoulement (Ní Aoláin 2023b). While mostly applied to refugees and asylum-seekers, refoulement can occur in any instance where there is a “transfer of control [of a person] from one [state or non-state] party to another” (Ní Aoláin 2023b, 7). Non-refoulement essentially forbids parties to transfer or expel individuals to other authorities if there are substantial grounds to believe that the person is at risk of irreparable harm or human rights violations (Ní Aoláin 2023b). Non-refoulement is found in several international human rights documents, including the 1951 Convention on Refugees, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Poon 2017). Due to its prevalence in international law, non-refoulement is considered *jus cogens*, or a peremptory norm. No party – irrespective of its adherence to specific treaties – can violate peremptory norms under international law (Allain 2001, 534–35). Non-refoulement is mostly applied to states, but the former UNSRCT argues that it also applies to actors in non-state armed conflict (i.e. the Syrian conflict) through international humanitarian law (Ní Aoláin 2023b), a view also held by the ICRC (2016).

The former UNSRCT has reported concern that ISIL-affiliates “may be returned to countries where they face a well-grounded fear of persecution, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, unfair trials, or other serious human rights violations” (Ní Aoláin 2023b, 11). As an example, she notes that Uyghur ISIL-affiliates repatriated to China would face grave human rights violations, amounting to torture, cultural and religious prosecution, and violations of reproductive rights (Human Rights Watch 2023a).

It is unlikely that countries violating the principle of non-refoulement would receive assistance from international organizations or international partners, thereby making repatriation more challenging. Lacking state capacity, or by risking violations of non-

refoulement, repatriation would be significantly more difficult due to the absence of resources and possibly even international support.

The impact of Islam

The second condition of the most parsimonious QCA solution for repatriation is a substantial share of Muslim the population. Without exception, all countries that repatriate have a Muslim population of at least 44 per cent, which may explain greater public support for repatriation in these states.

In Kazakhstan, ISIL-affiliates are discursively constructed as “our citizens” who made a mistake, leading to a moral imperative for repatriation. This is visible from a statement by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the country’s president, who expressed that “Kazakhstan always supports *its* [emphasis added] citizens, regardless of their location” (Nazarbayev 2019). A department chief of the National Security Committee (KNB) explained the necessity of repatriation by noting that it was difficult for Kazakhstanis to escape detention camps as “[the KNB has] evidence that some of *our* [emphasis added] citizens were executed for trying to escape” (Ashimov 2019). The spokesperson for Kazakhstan’s Assault Air Forces echoed these statements by stating that “our country looks after its citizens” in a Facebook post (Ashimov 2019). This is echoed by Kazakhstan’s (72 per cent Islam) “mostly positive” public opinion towards repatriation (Interviewee 1 2024). Interviewees commented on the importance of public opinion for executing repatriation policies (Interviewee 1 2024; Interviewee 2 2024).

While there are no consistent, transnational opinion polls on the repatriation of ISIL-affiliates, Kazakhstan’s positive public opinion is starkly contrasted by representative surveys from Canada (3 per cent Islam), the UK (6 per cent Islam), and France (8 per cent Islam). In Canada, 71 per cent of the respondents agreed that Canada “should not do anything” to bring back ISIL-affiliates (Connolly 2019). In the UK, 77 per cent of the respondents believe that

ISIL-affiliates should be prevented from returning or being returned (A. Hoffman and Furlan 2020, 14–15). In France, 89 per cent of adults are worried or very worried about the return of ISIL-affiliates (Odoxa 2019). Of these, 67 per cent prefer to also leave minors in the Middle East.

The discrepancy in public opinion on repatriation between Kazakhstan and Western countries may in part be explained by the low presence of Islam in non-repatriating countries. Religion – or the absence thereof – plays a key role in an individual’s self-image and self-conceptualization (Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman 2010, 61–64). This impact can be analysed through the lens of social identity theory, which posits that people categorize themselves to belong to a social category or group (Tajfel and Turner 1979; McLeod 2023). Social groups are composed of individuals who are similar in, for instance, religion, social status, or ethnicity, and form the in-group. This in-group is compared to the out-group, which is judged more negatively (McLeod 2023). As a result of this self-categorization and comparison with others, perceived similarities and differences along the lines of religion, beliefs, and values are accentuated (Stets and Burke 2000, 225). In the case of ISIL-affiliate repatriation, a greater distance from the in-group may lead to out-group foreign fighters being judged harsher than foreign fighters who are closer to the in-group.

In- and out-groups are not binary categories. They are context-dependent and can change over time (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner et al. 1994). Even without a binary division of in- and out-groups, familiarity, similarity, and overlap with past experiences can enhance empathy between individuals (Preston and De Waal 2002). The process of judging who is worthy of one’s empathy has been called ‘selective empathy’ by Stevens et al. (2021, 1453). A person who is socially further removed will also be judged harsher for their perceived moral flaws (Fowler, Law, and Gaesser 2021). When selective empathy intensifies, it leads to a

process of othering, where the out-group is discursively constructed as inferior in contrast to a superior in-group (Brons 2015, 70). Once such othering takes institutional forms, it can produce discriminatory, racist, or culturist policies ultimately resulting in what Schinkel (2010) has called the ‘virtualization of citizenship’, and may thereby impact repatriation policies.

The virtualization of citizenship describes a process by which traditional *formal* citizenship transforms into a concept of *moral* citizenship (Schinkel 2010). *Formal* citizenship entails a set of judicially codified rights and duties as a citizen and has historically functioned as a system of in- and exclusion from states. In response to globalization and multicultural societies, however, countries have witnessed a shift towards a *moral* understanding of citizenship, which entails “an extra-legal normative concept” of a good, integrated, and participating citizen (Schinkel 2010, 268). In this way, citizenship becomes a virtuality (a possibility) for citizens rather than an actuality (a secure judicial status), and can thus lead to individuals being citizens in the formal sense but not in the moral sense. Through the virtualization of citizenship, “the role of the state has shifted from controlling the borders of the nation-state to *controlling the borders of ‘society’* [emphasis in original]” (Schinkel 2010, 278). Citizenship thereby becomes equated with integration into society and thus the citizenship of non-integrated people (i.e. ISIL-affiliates) is diminished. ISIL-affiliates are currently not integrated, and as interviewee 5 (2024) points out, arguably never were. As *moral* citizenship is discursive and not legally codified, it is a flexible construct and can be employed by political actors in a variety of cases (Schinkel 2010, 272). *Moral* citizenship can, however, also impact *formal* citizenship with legal consequences for the repatriation of ISIL-affiliates, as has been the case in Denmark and the UK.

Since 2014, the Danish citizenship law stipulates that every child born after 2014 automatically receives Danish citizenship at birth if at least one of their parents is Danish,

irrespective of where they are born (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, n.d.). In 2019, however, the Danish government passed a law that enabled citizenship stripping of ISIL-affiliates as part of a crackdown on terrorism. Moreover, they also enacted a clause stipulating that children born in Syria to Danish ISIL-affiliates would no longer receive Danish citizenship, contrary to the 2014 Citizenship Law (Ministry of Immigration and Integration 2022). The decision was defended by immigration Minister Støjberg by stating that “their parents have turned their back on Denmark, [so] there is no reason for the children to become Danish citizens” (Amiel 2019). UNICEF has voiced concern that children are thereby punished for their parents’ crimes and that the law may violate the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (Amiel 2019). Støjberg’s statement perfectly captures how the virtualization of citizenship has impacted the formal citizenship of Danish ISIL-affiliates.

Another highly publicized case is that of Shamima Begum, a UK national with Bangladeshi roots. In 2015, the 15-year-old Begum travelled to Syria with two schoolmates, where she was married to a Dutch ISIL-affiliate just ten days after arrival. Under ISIL’s rule, she gave birth to two children who both died at a young age (Rawlinson and Dodd 2019). She was interviewed by the Times from the Al-Hol camp while pregnant with her third child in early 2019. In her interview, she stated that she would “do anything required just to be able to come home and live quietly with [her unborn] child” (Loyd 2019). As a response to the media reports, the UK Home Office sent a letter to Begum’s family announcing the withdrawal of her citizenship and requesting them to bring the decision to Begum’s attention (Van Ark 2019).

Critics have called this decision politically motivated and illegal as it makes Begum *de facto*, if not *de jure* stateless (Van Ark 2019). According to the British Home Secretary, Begum can apply for Bangladeshi citizenship as her mother was Bangladeshi. This has been described as a “legal fiction” by Jonathan Sumption, a former Justice for the Supreme Court (Sumption

2023). His sentiment was confirmed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, who stated that Ms Begum had not applied for Bangladeshi citizenship when she could and is currently too old to apply (Addley and Ahmed 2019). Moreover, she grew up in the UK, was radicalized there, and has never visited Bangladesh, showing the key role the UK played in her life (Van Ark 2019). Begum's lawyers appealed against the decision at the Court of Appeals but ultimately lost the case in February 2024 (Siddique 2024). Currently, her lawyers are considering appealing to the Supreme Court. In the meantime, Ms Begum is left stateless in violation of international law and will remain detained indefinitely without a legal process (Siddique 2024). In other cases, Western politicians have not only called for the loss of citizenship for ISIL-affiliates, but also for the loss of their lives, which would be unimaginable if they had been perceived to be real citizens (BBC Radio 5 Live 2017; Chappell 2017; Elgot 2017; Pokalova 2020).

The British Foreign Development Minister – Rory Stewart – has stated that “the only way of dealing with [ISIL-affiliates] will be, in almost every case, to kill them” (BBC Radio 5 Live 2017, 19:00). This was later confirmed to be the government's position when, less than two months later, the Defense Secretary – Gavin Williamson – added that British ISIL-affiliates should be “hunted down and killed” (Elgot 2017). That this sentiment does not only exist in the UK is visible from remarks by Brett McGurk, a top US envoy in Syria who stated that “[o]ur mission is to make sure that any foreign fighter who [...] joined ISIS from a foreign country [...] will die here in Syria” (Chappell 2017). Prime ministers and government officials from other countries without a substantial Muslim population (for example Australia, France, and the Netherlands) also expressed similar positions concerning their ISIL-affiliates (Pokalova 2020, 123–26).

This position is not limited to the level of discourse. In some cases, concrete actions have also been taken to ensure that ISIL-affiliates would die. François Hollande, for example, has personally given orders for multiple targeted killings of French ISIL-fighters (Pokalova 2020, 125). In the UK, the Special Forces have reportedly been given a ‘kill list’ of 200 British ISIL-affiliates, with a senior defence source declaring that “the hunt is on” (Kentish 2016). Critics have called these actions illegal, labelling them as extrajudicial executions. The ICRC has commented that “[e]xceptional crimes do not justify exceptions to the law” in response to these narratives (Foulkes 2017; Pokalova 2020). Others, including the family members of ISIL’s victims, criticized the killings as it gives ISIL-affiliates a martyr’s death, which can be abused by future extremists (Mendick 2018; Pokalova 2020).

The UK has also deviated from a decades-long policy on the death penalty for ISIL-affiliates. Under normal practice, if a foreign country with the death penalty tries a British citizen, the UK ensures that the death penalty will not be used on its subject (Human Rights Watch 2018). In 2018, however, two British ISIL-affiliates were arrested and tried in the US and could be sentenced to death. The UK agreed to provide criminal evidence for the cases without demanding assurances that the suspects would not be executed, contrary to its standard practice (The Supreme Court 2020b). To underline the exceptionality of ISIL-affiliates, the Home Secretary added that “this case does not reflect a change in our policy [on] death penalty cases generally, nor the UK Government’s stance on the global abolition of the death penalty” (Honeycombe-Foster 2020)¹¹. In 2020, the course of action was ruled illegal by a unanimous vote in the UK’s Supreme Court as a breach of Part 3 of the Data Protection Act (The Supreme Court 2020b)¹².

¹¹ In 2022, the two men were ultimately sentenced to life imprisonment (US Department of Justice 2022).

¹² Data processing by law enforcement must be lawful and fair, which was ruled to not be the case when no assurances for abstaining of the Death Penalty were obtained. Moreover, transfer to a third-party was deemed

The examples above demonstrate how countries have virtualized the citizenship of ISIL-affiliates, enabling themselves to halt repatriation efforts. They have also taken exceptional measures such as revoking citizenship or calling for the death of their nationals. My QCA results suggest that the absence of Islam in non-repatriating countries facilitates the virtualization of citizenship, consistent with a growing body of literature on Islamophobia in counterterrorism policies (see for example [Abbas and Awan 2015](#); [Aked 2017](#); [Cury 2021](#); [Bakali and Hafez 2022](#); [Tufail and Poynting 2023](#)). If a larger part of the population (and indeed the government) is Muslim, othering ISIL-affiliates becomes more challenging and is thus not employed. In that case, and assuming the country has resources, there is no viable alternative to repatriation.

Limitations

The limitations of this thesis either stem from the limited availability of information or are derived from the analysis and interpretation of my QCA. Firstly, information on repatriation policies is inconsistent and patchy, making cross-country analysis challenging. Moreover, the policies are not clear-cut as most countries employ multiple tactics or even execute another policy than they publicly admit¹³. Furthermore, policies regarding ISIL-affiliates are volatile and change regularly, further complicating the analysis.

My QCA protocol and subsequent analysis may also have flaws. Although the conditions of my QCA protocol have been chosen based on previous literature, conversations with experts, and pattern-matching, other conditions may have been overlooked. While the role of institutional development and capacity is more intuitive, further research is required to

illegal as there was no adequacy decision, no appropriate safeguards for the subjects, and no special circumstances that could override the previous necessities (*Data Protection Act 2018*; The Supreme Court 2020a).

¹³ For example, the Swedish Foreign Minister recently stated that Sweden will not assist its citizens detained in the camps in Syria (The Local Sweden 2024). However, one interviewee pointed out that Sweden has continuously repatriated women and children from Al-Hol, and reportedly only a handful remain in northeast Syria (Interviewee 2 2024).

collect evidence on the interplay between religion – and possibly Islamophobia – and the reluctance to repatriate in countries without a substantial Muslim population.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has set out to answer why repatriation policies on ISIL-affiliates differ across countries. While experts and international organizations agree that repatriation is the best policy option, only a few countries follow this approach. I employed the csQCA method to discover which conditions drive repatriation policies, and subsequently compared Kazakhstan as a positive case with grouped negative cases. My results suggest that developed countries (below 60.0 on the Fragile States Index) with a substantial Muslim population (above 44 per cent) actively repatriate their ISIL-affiliates. Furthermore, both conditions have to apply, as countries missing one of the two conditions do not repatriate. If they miss a sufficient level of development, they cannot repatriate due to resource and stability constraints. If countries lack a substantial Muslim population, they are less willing to repatriate. I have argued that this can be analysed through the lens of social identity theory, othering, and the virtualization of citizenship.

These findings are in line with Stenger's (2023) analysis of repatriation policies and expand upon her bivariate statistical analysis by employing the QCA method, thereby enhancing the understanding of causal conditions enabling repatriation. Additionally, I contribute to academic knowledge on the role of religious (dis)similarity and development in counterterrorism policies. I also provide insights to UN officials working on the aftermath of future foreign fighting by identifying the crucial role of religious or ideological similarity for repatriation. Further research may provide answers on how to overcome religious dissimilarity in order to speed up repatriation. While this might come too late for many ISIL-affiliates, the international community can learn from ISIL's case for future instances of foreign fighting.

Coming back to the present, the current situation shows the urgent need for repatriation. Holding off on repatriation only serves to exacerbate and prolong the consequences of foreign

fighting in ISIL's brief rise to power. In contrast, repatriation enables countries to confine ISIL to the past, rather than the future, and promotes human rights, peace, and stability.

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APPENDIX A: CALIBRATED DATASET

Table 3 - Calibrated dataset which was used for the QCA

Country	REPATRIATES	ISL	FTF	TER	DEV	MIL
Afghanistan	0	1	0	1	0	0
Albania	1	1	1	0	1	0
Algeria	0	1	0	1	0	1
Australia	0	0	0	0	1	0
Austria	0	0	1	0	1	0
Azerbaijan	0	1	1	0	0	1
Bangladesh	0	1	0	0	0	0
Belgium	0	0	1	0	1	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	1	1	0	0	0
Canada	0	0	0	0	1	0
China	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denmark	0	0	1	0	1	0
Egypt	0	1	0	1	0	0
Estonia	0	0	0	0	1	1
Finland	0	0	1	0	1	0
France	0	0	1	1	1	0
Georgia	0	0	1	0	0	0
Germany	0	0	1	1	1	0
India	0	0	0	1	0	1
Indonesia	0	1	0	1	0	0
Iran	0	1	0	1	0	1
Kazakhstan	1	1	1	0	1	0
Kyrgyzstan	1	1	1	0	0	0
Lebanon	0	1	1	0	0	1
Libya	0	1	1	1	0	1
Malaysia	1	1	0	0	1	0
Maldives	0	1	1	0	0	0
Morocco	0	1	1	0	0	1
Netherlands	0	0	1	0	1	0
North Macedonia	1	1	1	0	0	0
Norway	0	0	1	0	1	0
Pakistan	0	1	0	1	0	1
Philippines	0	0	0	1	0	0
Poland	0	0	0	0	1	1
Portugal	0	0	0	0	1	0
Romania	0	0	0	0	1	0
Russia	0	0	1	0	0	1
Saudi Arabia	0	1	1	0	0	1
Senegal	0	1	0	0	0	0
Serbia	0	0	0	0	0	1
Somalia	0	1	0	1	0	1
South Africa	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	0	0	0	0	1	0
Sudan	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sweden	0	0	1	0	1	0
Switzerland	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tajikistan	0	1	1	0	0	0
Trinidad	0	0	1	0	1	0
Tunisia	0	1	1	0	0	1
Türkiye	0	1	1	1	0	0
Ukraine	0	0	0	0	0	1
United Kingdom	0	0	1	0	1	1
United States	0	0	0	1	1	1
Uzbekistan	1	1	1	0	0	1
Viet Nam	0	0	0	0	0	1
Yemen	0	1	0	1	0	1

APPENDIX B: RAW DATASET

Table 4- Raw Dataset for the indicators in the QCA. Green cells indicate a score above the cut-off point (1 or positive).

Country	REPATRIATES	ISL	FTF	TER	DEV	MIL
Afghanistan	0	100%	2,4	8.822	105.9	1.83%
Albania	1	82%	54,0	0	56.7	1.58%
Algeria	0	98%	4,1	4.083	72.2	4.78%
Australia	0	3%	8,2	1.83	22.7	1.90%
Austria	0	6%	28,1	2.677	25.4	0.77%
Azerbaijan	0	97%	88,7	0	73.1	4.55%
Bangladesh	0	91%	0,2	3.827	84.5	1.13%
Belgium	0	8%	42,6	2.763	31.9	1.18%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	47%	99,9	0	73	0.81%
Canada	0	3%	2,4	3.275	20.1	1.24%
China	0	2%	0,7	0	66.9	1.60%
Denmark	0	5%	24,6	0.158	18.1	1.42%
Egypt	0	95%	5,4	6.632	83.6	1.06%
Estonia	0	1%	0,7	0	37.7	2.09%
Finland	0	1%	22,0	0	15.1	1.72%
France	0	8%	28,1	4.419	30.9	1.94%
Georgia	0	12%	32,3	0	71.8	1.43%
Germany	0	7%	11,5	4.242	23.6	1.39%
India	0	15%	0,1	7.175	75.3	2.43%
Indonesia	0	87%	2,9	5.502	66.6	0.70%
Iran	0	100%	0,2	5.688	84.1	2.59%
Kazakhstan	1	72%	30,6	0	59.5	0.51%
Kyrgyzstan	1	89%	123,7	0	77.1	1.48%
Lebanon	0	61%	163,9	3.4	91.3	3.37%
Libya	0	97%	88,1	4.73	94.3	ND
Malaysia	1	66%	3,7	1.357	56.4	0.96%
Maldives	0	98%	381,8	ND	64.5	ND
Morocco	0	99%	45,4	0.757	70.1	3.90%
Netherlands	0	7%	16,9	2.12	22.1	1.58%
North Macedonia	1	44%	75,3	0	62.6	1.61%
Norway	0	5%	18,3	3.514	15.6	1.64%
Pakistan	0	97%	0,4	8.16	89.7	2.63%
Philippines	0	6%	0,9	6.328	80.5	1.00%
Poland	0	1%	0,8	0	42.2	2.39%
Portugal	0	1%	1,4	0	27.5	1.35%
Romania	0	1%	0,1	0.682	50.8	1.73%
Russia	0	11%	31,2	3.799	72.6	4.06%
Saudi Arabia	0	93%	89,1	2.387	67.5	7.42%
Senegal	0	97%	0,1	1.108	72.1	1.57%
Serbia	0	5%	8,9	0	67.8	2.28%
Somalia	0	100%	4,0	8.463	110.5	ND
South Africa	0	2%	7,5	0.826	72	0.74%
Spain	0	3%	4,4	2.712	44.4	1.47%
Sudan	0	91%	2,2	0	107.1	0.92%
Sweden	0	7%	29,7	2.307	20.9	1.31%
Switzerland	0	6%	8,0	2.205	18.9	0.76%
Tajikistan	0	96%	150,9	3.438	75	1.02%
Trinidad	0	6%	81,6	0	52.4	0.72%
Tunisia	0	99%	323,7	3.989	68.2	2.48%
Turkiye	0	98%	35,3	5.6	78.1	1.23%
Ukraine	0	2%	0,0	1.535	68.6	3.23%
United Kingdom	0	6%	12,7	3.84	40.6	2.23%
United States	0	1%	0,8	4.799	46.6	3.45%
Uzbekistan	1	97%	56,1	1.731	69.6	3.56%
Viet Nam	0	1%	0,0	0.227	60.9	2.28%
Yemen	0	99%	3,3	5.616	111.7	ND

APPENDIX C: FULL QCA PROTOCOL IN R

16/05/2024, 17:35

QCA protocol for Thesis

QCA protocol for Thesis

Jeroen van der Veen

2024-05-16

Step 1

Loading the required packages for QCA

```
library("QCA")
```

```
## Loading required package: admisc
```

```
##  
## To cite package QCA in publications, please use:  
## Dusa, Adrian (2019) QCA with R. A Comprehensive Resource.  
## Springer International Publishing.  
##  
## To run the graphical user interface, use: runGUI()
```

```
library("readxl")  
library("SetMethods")
```

```
## Loading required package: ggplot2
```

```
## Loading required package: ggrepel
```

```
## Loading required package: stargazer
```

```
##  
## Please cite as:
```

```
## Hlavac, Marek (2022). stargazer: Well-Formatted Regression and Summary Statistics Tables.
```

```
## R package version 5.2.3. https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=stargazer
```

```
##
##
## To cite package SetMethods in publications use:
##
## Oana, Ioana-Elena and Carsten Q. Schneider. 2018. SetMethods: An Add-on R P
package for
## Advanced QCA. The R Journal 10(1): 507-33. https://journal.r-project.org/ar
chive/2018/RJ-2018-031/index.html
##
##
```

Step 2

Importing data into R

- For the raw QCA table, please refer to the next appendix

```
# Imports Excel file.
QCA_table <- read_excel("/Users/jeroen/Library/Mobile Documents/com~apple~CloudD
ocs/Central European University/Thesis/Final_R_table.xlsx")
QCA_table <- as.data.frame(QCA_table)
# Makes country column as row names
rownames(QCA_table) <- QCA_table$Country
# Removes "Country" column from data frame
QCA_table$Country <- NULL
# Now, "Country" will be the row names in data frame
```

Step 3

Constructing truth table

- **incl.cut** (*Sufficiency inclusion score*) refers to the threshold which serves as the inclusion criteria for each set. It is set at 0.8 in line with Oana and Schneider (2021)
- **pri.cut** (*proportional reduction in inconsistency*) refers to the threshold at which condition X only occurs due to outcome Y, and not ~Y. The threshold is set at 0.51 in line with Oana and Schneider (2021)

The condition keys are as follows:

- **ISL**: Substantial Muslim population
- **FTF**: High number of ISIL-affiliates per capita
- **TER**: High impact of terrorism
- **DEV**: High level of development
- **MIL**: High relative military expenditure

Looking at the truth table, we observe the following:

- Rows 19 (Malaysia) and 27 (Albania, Kazakhstan) have OUT=1 and thus are pathways leading to repatriation.
- Rows 19 and 27 have an inclusion and PRI=1.000, meaning they have a unique coverage.
- All other rows do not meet the criterion of incl.cut=0.8, and are therefore considered as negative cases.

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QCA protocol for Thesis

```
TT = truthTable(data = QCA_table,
                outcome = "REPATRIATES",
                conditions = c("ISL", "FTF", "TER", "DEV", "MIL"),
                incl.cut = 0.8,
                pri.cut = 0.51,
                n.cut = 1,
                sort.by = "incl",
                show.cases = TRUE)
# Show truth table TT
TT
```

```

##
## OUT: output value
## n: number of cases in configuration
## incl: sufficiency inclusion score
## PRI: proportional reduction in inconsistency
##
## ISL FTF TER DEV MIL OUT n incl PRI
## 19 1 0 0 1 0 1 1 1.000 1.000
## 27 1 1 0 1 0 1 2 1.000 1.000
## 25 1 1 0 0 0 0 5 0.600 0.600
## 26 1 1 0 0 1 0 6 0.167 0.167
## 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 0.000 0.000
## 2 0 0 0 0 1 0 3 0.000 0.000
## 3 0 0 0 1 0 0 6 0.000 0.000
## 4 0 0 0 1 1 0 2 0.000 0.000
## 5 0 0 1 0 0 0 1 0.000 0.000
## 6 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0.000 0.000
## 8 0 0 1 1 1 0 1 0.000 0.000
## 9 0 1 0 0 0 0 1 0.000 0.000
## 10 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0.000 0.000
## 11 0 1 0 1 0 0 8 0.000 0.000
## 12 0 1 0 1 1 0 1 0.000 0.000
## 15 0 1 1 1 0 0 2 0.000 0.000
## 17 1 0 0 0 0 0 3 0.000 0.000
## 21 1 0 1 0 0 0 3 0.000 0.000
## 22 1 0 1 0 1 0 5 0.000 0.000
## 29 1 1 1 0 0 0 1 0.000 0.000
## 30 1 1 1 0 1 0 1 0.000 0.000
## cases
## 19 Malaysia
## 27 Albania,Kazakhstan
## 25 Bosnia and Herzegovina,Kyrgyzstan,Maldives,North Macedonia,Tajikistan
## 26 Azerbaijan,Lebanon,Morocco,Saudi Arabia,Tunisia,Uzbekistan
## 1 China,South Africa
## 2 Serbia,Ukraine,Viet Nam
## 3 Australia,Canada,Portugal,Romania,Spain,Switzerland
## 4 Estonia,Poland
## 5 Philippines
## 6 India
## 8 United States
## 9 Georgia
## 10 Russia
## 11 Austria,Belgium,Denmark,Finland,Netherlands,Norway,Sweden,Trinidad
## 12 United Kingdom
## 15 France,Germany
## 17 Bangladesh,Senegal,Sudan
## 21 Afghanistan,Egypt,Indonesia
## 22 Algeria,Iran,Pakistan,Somalia,Yemen
## 29 Türkiye
## 30 Libya

```

Step 4

Logically minimizing the truth table

- This step minimizes the truth table and gives a conservative (or complex) solution with which the least important relevant conditions can be excluded. This is the case for the **FTF** (High number of ISIL-affiliates per capita).
- The conservative solution (ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL) shows that a developed country with a substantial Muslim population, low terrorist impact, and low military expenditure is most likely to repatriate.

```
# Minimize the table's outputs
TT_min = minimize(input=TT,
                  details=TRUE)
TT_min
```

```
##
## M1: ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL -> REPATRIATES
##
##           inclS  PRI  covS  covU  cases
## -----
## 1 ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL 1.000 1.000 0.429  -  Malaysia; Albania,Kazakhsta
n
## -----
##
##           M1 1.000 1.000 0.429
```

Step 5

Adding an intermediate solution

- Here, I add my expected direction of each condition for the outcome to find out if there is an unexpected result, which is not the case.

```
sol_yi <- minimize(TT,
                  details = TRUE,
                  include = "?",
                  dir.exp = c(1, 0, 0, 1, 0))
sol_yi
```

```
##
## From C1P1:
##
## M1: ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL -> REPATRIATES
##
##           inclS  PRI  covS  covU  cases
## -----
## 1 ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL 1.000 1.000 0.429  -  Malaysia; Albania,Kazakhsta
n
## -----
##
##           M1 1.000 1.000 0.429
```

Step 6

Finding typical cases

- This step gives typical or pathway cases, which can be analysed in further detail.
- The three positive cases all have unique coverage as shown by UniqCov=TRUE and are thus all equally typical cases.
- From the three typical cases (Malaysia, Albania, Kazakhstan), Kazakhstan is farthest with its repatriation efforts and has most information available, which is why it will be the main focus of my in-case analysis.

```
typ_c <- smmr(results = sol_yi,
              outcome = "REPATRIATES",
              match = FALSE,
              cases = 1,
              max_pairs = 10,
              term = 1)

typ_c
```

```
## Typical Cases :
## -----
##      Case          Term TermMemb Outcome UniqCov Best MostTyp
## 1  Albania ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL      1      1   TRUE    0    TRUE
## 2 Kazakhstan ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL      1      1   TRUE    0    TRUE
## 3  Malaysia ISL*~TER*DEV*~MIL      1      1   TRUE    0    TRUE
```

Step 7

Finding possible deviant cases

- There are no deviant cases in my population (possibly due to the incl.score of 1.000 in the typical cases). Therefore, I do not analyse pathway cases versus deviant cases, but analyse pathway cases versus (grouped) negative cases.

```
dcon <- smmr(results = sol_yi,
              outcome = "REPATRIATES",
              match = FALSE,
              cases = 3)

dcon
```

```
## Deviant Consistency Cases :
## -----
## [1] Cases      Term      TermMemb Outcome Best      MostDCONS
## <0 rows> (or 0-length row.names)
```

Step 8

Identifying the most parsimonious solution

- This simplifies the complex solution of the previous steps and returns the most crucial conditions which cannot be left out of the solution.
- We obtain from the most parsimonious solution that a country **must** have a substantial Muslim population and a sufficient level of development to repatriate.
- Due to its importance, my in-case analysis focuses on these two conditions.

```
sol_np <- minimize(TT,
                    details = TRUE,
                    include = "?")
sol_np
```

```
##
## M1: ISL*DEV -> REPATRIATES
##
##      inclS  PRI  covS  covU  cases
## -----
## 1 ISL*DEV  1.000  1.000  0.429  -  Malaysia; Albania,Kazakhstan
## -----
##      M1  1.000  1.000  0.429
```