

Categorizing Islamic State Supporters in Denmark: The cases of Enes Ciftci and Natascha Colding-Olsen

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News

Two Danish citizens have been recently sentenced to six years of prison each for Islamic State (IS)-related activities. Enes Ciftci's sentence at the city court was appealed, and while the High Court decreased his sentence to six years, it ruled in favour of stripping him of his Danish citizenship. Natscha Colding-Olsen has been sentenced by a city court to six years of imprisonment.

Summary

The article gives an account of the differences and similarities between these two individuals. Summarizing the courses of their lives, their possible motivations for supporting IS are discussed. The Norwegian political scientist Petter Nesser's typology of Islamist terrorists is applied to these individuals. It is concluded that Ciftci and Colding-Olsen fit into the categories of the "protégé" and the "misfit" respectively.

Key Words

Islamic State, Denmark, terrorism, Enes Ciftci, Natascha Colding-Olsen, Kundbypigen, Kundby girl

About the Author

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Analysis:

Danish courts recently sentenced two Danish citizens to six years of prison each in two separate cases: Enes Ciftci, a 24-year-old man of Kurdish extraction and Natascha Colding-Olsen, a 17-year-old ethnic Danish girl, who converted to Islam a few months before she was arrested on terrorism charges. There seems to be no evidence that these two individuals had any connection or cooperation. However, according to the prosecutors, when both were in prison they secretly had a few mail exchanges.

Being Danish citizens, having some connection with IS, and being young are the only aspects they have in common. Besides the difference in their genders, their occupations were different: Ciftci ran a pizzeria in suburban Copenhagen before he went to Syria, and Colding-Olsen was a pupil in a state school in a provincial town near Copenhagen. Ciftci comes from a traditional and close-knit family¹, while Colding-Olsen comes from an “unstable” family according to the state prosecutor and the Medical Statement presented at the court. While Ciftci was born to a Muslim family, Colding-Olsen had converted to Islam after a short relationship with a Turkish man on a vacation in Bodrum, one of the most tourist-visited towns of Turkey. Another important difference is that while Ciftci had a background in a “closed milieu” of like-minded people, as he himself puts it, Colding-Olsen radicalized in just few months after conversion to Islam. The guilty ruling confirmed that she had radicalized herself with the help of videos and texts on the Internet.²

“Abu Aya Dinimarki”

Let’s take a short look at these individuals and then see how one can categorize them as persons somewhat related to IS. In my last article for the Resource Center I introduce Ciftci and present an analysis of excerpts from his open letter to the Danish people and an accompanying interview with him.³

¹ I have visited Enes Ciftci in the top-security prison where he is incarcerated. The interview took one and a half hours, during which time I had the chance to learn about his background. All information about him in this article is based on media articles on him, public court documents and my notes during the visit. I was not allowed to use a dictaphone.

² Toft, Emma 2017: “Korrespondent: Derfor er terrrorsagen fra Kundby speciel” (Correspondent: Therefore the terror- case from Kundby is special). <http://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/korrespondent-derfor-er-terrorsagen-fra-kundby-speciel>

³ Necef, M. Ü 2017: “It is you who has gotten the wrong end of the stick?. An Islamic State Warrior speaks out to Danes”. At the time I delivered my article to the Resource Center, I had not yet acquired the whole text of Ciftci’s letter. However, I have in the meantime had Ciftci send me the whole letter.

To recapitulate let me touch on a few points: Ciftci has acknowledged joining the IS group and appeared in its registry as “Abu Aya Dinimarki.” He was arrested in 2015 after attempting to head to Syria for the second time. He is the first person in Denmark to be sentenced for having joined IS. On 24 June 2016 he was sentenced to seven years in jail for having been recruited by IS, having gone to Syria to join their ranks and finally for having donated money to the organization. In addition to imprisonment, the prosecution had also demanded he be stripped of his Danish citizenship as well as expatriation to Turkey. Since the city court did not go along with these two demands, the prosecution had appealed the court ruling.

An appeals court in Copenhagen has on March 31 this year favoured the prosecutor’s demand and unanimously stripped Ciftci of his Danish citizenship. This means that Ciftci, who has dual Danish and Turkish citizenship, will be expelled to Turkey after serving his term. However, the Copenhagen court reduced his sentence to six years in prison. His lawyer stated that his client would appeal the ruling.

“Kundby-girl”

Natascha Colding-Olsen, known in the Danish public as the Kundby-girl, lived in the small village of Kundby 65 kilometers northwest of Copenhagen, and is a totally different category of person. She was sentenced to six years imprisonment on 19 May for planning to attack two Danish schools with home-made bombs and for assaulting an employee with a broken glass in the juvenile incarceration facility where she had been held during the trial.

The District Court judge told the court that Colding-Olsen had converted to Islam and intended to carry out attacks on her former school as well as on a Jewish school in Copenhagen, when she was 15. He said she possessed chemicals to make the explosive known as TATP. It also appeared she had online contacts with radical militants.

Colding-Olsen had tried to contact IS leaders on Twitter but was arrested after her mother and brother became suspicious that she was experimenting with chemicals in the basement of the family home. The court said the bombings were not carried out because she was arrested before she could take action, and that she had not received any orders to blow up the two schools.

Three letters were found in her cell in late April and read in court. In one, Colding-Olsen wrote that she deliberately didn't wear a headscarf "to fool the disbelievers" into thinking she had not converted to Islam. In another letter, to Enes Ciftci no less, she

wrote that she stabbed the employee in the incarceration facility because he had been a soldier in Iraq, adding "I couldn't accept this."

Prior to sentencing the prosecutor, following a recommendation of the Danish Medico-Legal Council assigned to the case, recommended that she be jailed indefinitely, an option in the Danish law if a person is found guilty of a very serious crime and judged to be a risk to society.⁴ This organ is the highest medical specialist authority within the Danish legal system. The conclusion of the Council's report is that she poses a "great risk to commit again extremely violent crime against a person" and that "she needs help for social maturing".

One day before the verdict the Danish TV-channel TV2 released a remarkable recording of Colding-Olsen talking to her former school teacher prior to her arrest. In the recording, the girl says that she is planning to bomb her former school during a prom party and claims that she spoke to an IS leader on Twitter.⁵ When the teacher asks the name of the person, she replies hesitantly: "There is somebody whose name is umm Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi or something like that".

According to a psychological investigation specifically done for the court case, Colding-Olsen is psychologically fragile, insecure and has serious identity problems.⁶ Investigations have shown that she is not insane. She is not suffering from epilepsy, ADHD or autism. But she is disturbed on a number of accounts. She has, among other problems, difficulty in keeping a sense of perspective, in becoming attached to others, and feeling closeness, reads the investigation.

The young girl, according to the psychological investigation, needed an ideology to construct an identity, and she chose to convert to Islam in October 2015 a few months before her arrest. The Mental Statement presented in the court ascertains that it is, among other things, the girl's unstable childhood with a mother with psychological problems and the lack of contact with her father, which constitute the reasons for her psychological problems. It is also noted that she was taken away from her mother and placed in care for a certain period, and that she was mobbed in different institutions.

⁴ *AFP/The Local*: "Danish teenager gets six years for school terror plot". 19 May 2017; Barrett, Michael: "Teenage Danish terror suspect: Isis was 'exciting'". 21 April 2017. *The Local*.

⁵ Lomholt, Anders & Moestrup, Jonas H. R.: Kundby-pigen på skjult optagelse: Taler om at bombe de vantro til gallafest (Kundby-girl on hidden recording: Talks about bombing the infidels at a prom party). 18 May 2017. <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/krimi/2017-05-18-kundby-pigen-paa-skjult-optagelse-taler-om-at-bombe-de-vantro-til-gallafest>

⁶ *Ritzau/Politiken* 2017: "Kundbypigen er psykisk skrøbelig og selvusikker" (The Kundby girl is psychologically vulnerable and lacks self-confidence". 16 May 2017.

Petter Nesser's typology

When one runs across two persons with very different backgrounds, who have been sentenced to long imprisonment for allegiance to IS in one way or another, one may tend to agree with people who say "there is no single terrorist profile". However, the Norwegian political scientist Thomas Hegghammer thinks this is at best a trope and at worst a lazy excuse for not doing statistical work. He concedes that there obviously is no single profile, but insists that populations can still be described. He states: "Not all terrorists are the same, but for any given variable, there is a median terrorist".⁷

However, there will always be variations among individuals no matter how you categorize people, warns Hegghammer, and recommends applying his colleague Petter Nesser's typology of jihadists in Europe (p. 12-18).⁸ The typology distinguishes between "the entrepreneur", "the protégé", "the misfit" and "the drifter". According to Nesser, each type radicalizes and joins cells differently and plays different roles. This typology can help us to understand the various reasons behind why people with different backgrounds and intentions are attracted to violent jihad.

According to Nesser the entrepreneurs and the protégés are the central figures in jihadist milieus. They pursue ideological and political motives and recruit, socialize and manipulate others to join them. The misfits and drifters become militants for a host of reasons other than politics and ideology. Their radicalization pathways are characterized by, among others, more personal problems, deprivation and a lack of options, identity crises, adventure and youthful rebellion. They typically become terrorists because they encounter and befriend "entrepreneurs", but they may take the initiative to interact with extremists on some level.

The entrepreneurs have a strong sense of justice. They proactively connect with extremist networks and militant groups in conflict zones. They are generally older and more educated than their accomplices and embrace jihadi thought gradually through an intellectual process. Thinking that they cannot have much influence by non-violent means, they become attracted to the violence-oriented approach of the jihadis.

The protégés are always junior and inferior. They have a close bond to the entrepreneurs resulting from a longtime relationship. They are devout idealists with a strong sense of justice. They join jihadi groups via a combination of loyalty to the entrepreneur and

⁷ Hegghammer, Thomas 2016: "Revisiting the poverty-terrorism link in European jihadism". Keynote Speech, Society for Terrorism Research annual conference, 8 November 2016.

⁸ Nesser, Petter 2016: *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*. London: Hurst&Company.

intellectual justifications of the use of violence. They are often young and quite easily manipulated by senior figures they look up to.

Nesser's third category, misfits, involves individuals who do not perform well socially and tend to have a troubled background. For misfits, personal misfortune plays a much bigger role than other groups, and they are far less ideologically informed and committed than the others. They also tend to display more personal vulnerability. Misfits become militants, among other reasons, as a means to cope with personal problems. In some cases the motivation is to cleanse themselves of past sins in criminal activities. Nesser stresses that it would be a mistake to see the misfits' motivations reflecting the violent jihadi movement as a whole.

Nesser's last type, the drifter, has less specific reasons for becoming involved with extremism. Their motives are primarily related to fulfilling social commitments and obtaining social rewards. They often become involved in jihadism primarily by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or being socially connected to the wrong people.

Heterogeneous group with a variety of intentions

Keeping in mind Nesser's warning that "some of the terrorists defy categorization" (p. 13) and that his four types are "ideal types", we can now try to categorize Ciftci and Colding-Olsen. Ciftci can suitably be described as a protégé. Based on my one and a half hours conversation with him, his open letter to the Danish people, and the interview he had with the TV2 journalist, I had the clear impression that he has strong beliefs and a deep-felt sense of justice, but does not (yet) have the intellectual capacity to be categorized as an entrepreneur. Ciftci was not involved in any crime and was not sentenced previously, and he did not lack economic means to climb up the social ladder. He owned a successful pizzeria, and his family has some property in Turkey.

Turning to Colding-Olsen, one can place her fittingly among misfits. After reading a large amount of literature written and said about her in the court as well as in the media, one gets the impression of a troubled teen-age girl who attempted to solve her personal problems by tapping into jihadist ideology. Her secretly recorded conversation with her former teacher seems to portray a young person in crisis more than a devoted ideologist.

These two very different persons as well as the categories they apparently belong to show that IS supporters are not a homogenous group, but are attracted to its ideology for a wide variety of reasons. They have different motivations and intentions which have to be taken into account when we study them.