



Forum: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Issue: The Question of the Prevention of the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters

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INTRODUCTION

Until a few months ago, the term "foreign fighters" was foreign to all. The foreign fighters label came to prominence in Iraq about 10 years ago when coalition officers believed, incorrectly, that the "Sunni insurgency" in that country was being dominated by fighters from outside. Many young men returning from the "Afghan jihad" believed that they had both the ability and duty to right the wrongs of western hegemony and fight to protect Muslims. It was around this concept that some foreign fighters who had managed to get political asylum in the West began to radicalise and then mobilise young men to engage in violent action. All of this is based on the assumption that many foreign fighters will want to come back and they will wish to carry out attacks in their homelands, will have the capability to do so in terms of planning and obtaining weapons, and also that they will have the opportunity to do so.

Through resolution 2178 (2014) the United Nations Security Council expressed concern over the establishment of international terrorist networks and underscored the "particular and urgent need" to prevent the travel and support for foreign terrorist fighters associated with the Islamic State (IS).

IS has developed an effective virtual propaganda machinery. Its media arm Al Hayat has been releasing videos showing different sides of the militant group. On the one hand is its face of cold terror such as of children holding decapitated heads, on the other are more Western friendly videos to demonstrate familiarity with Western lifestyles. The vast global social media presence of IS is sustained by significant manpower. Linguistic and technical skills are clearly evident. Obviously some effort is being made not only to recruit foot soldiers, but also to enlist technically proficient and talented users of social media to sustain the machinery of recruitment. The profile of foreign fighters is diverse, and can range from ignorant novices who view joining as a rite of passage, to diehard militants looking for combat and martyrdom, while individuals that go for humanitarian reasons are often kidnapped or forced to fight. The motivations informing the decision to leave are numerous and they vary and interact in complex ways we probably do not yet fully understand. Motivations may include the prospect of adventure, a desire to impress the local community, a search for identity, feelings of revenge, the search for camaraderie, the desire to make history, and much more. This report will focus on the international recruitment of terrorist organizations. Because they are currently the largest "importers" of

foreign Jihadists, this report will view recruitment through the lens of the ISIL. The report will focus on how the recruitment into extremists groups is done, and the necessary steps to put an end to this.

KEY WORDS

Foreign fighters: A foreign fighter is an individual who leaves his or her country of origin or habitual residence to join a non-state armed group in an armed conflict abroad and who is primarily motivated by ideology or religion. They are called “foreign” because they are fighting in countries (like Syria or Iraq) which are geographically far from theirs.

ISIL: Also known as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or the Islamic State, ISIL was at first an affiliate of Al-Qaeda. It has now developed into what is considered an even more extremist group than Al-Qaeda.

Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF): Launched at a Ministerial Plenary Meeting in New York on 22 September 2011, the GCTF is an international forum of 29 countries and the European Union with an overarching mission of reducing the vulnerability of people worldwide to terrorism by preventing, fighting and prosecuting terrorist acts and countering incitement and recruitment of terrorism. The GCTF is co-chaired by Morocco and the Netherlands. One of the key goals of the Forum is to support and catalyze implementation of the United Nations (UN) Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Recruitment: it refers to the overall process of attracting, selecting and appointing suitable candidates for fight into wars or conflicts within an organization.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

With the rise of social media, terrorist groups have been able to extend their outreach due to the international accessibility many platforms provide. Social media has given these groups a new means of spreading their views and propaganda in hopes of attracting younger members. Sites like YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter provide a fast, easy, and accessible way of passing on information; they are often used as a means to connect “radicalised westerners” to members within these groups. Social Media has enabled these groups to manipulate young peoples into subtly convincing them that radicalising themselves, was their own idea. This has enabled them to easily and quickly spread their Islamic interpretations all over the globe. The use of social media has created an opening for people all over the world to connect with extremist organizations and consequently enlarge the enrollment of a new wave of people to these groups.

With a recruitment rate growing 70% in the last nine months, the power that extremist groups have in enrolling people internationally is evident. Today the issue of the “foreign fighters” is mainly related to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the “volunteers” who are currently serving under ISIS’ flag. It is no secret that the Caliphate’s units are also composed of a substantial amount of foreign people and the majority of the European foreign fighters which are fighting in Syria and Iraq are European citizens. This element should not be overlooked; it means that when these people come back to our countries, they are very difficult to spot or track by police authorities, because, basically, they look absolutely identical to the rest of the population. While all western European countries

have seen an increase in people traveling to Syria, some contribute a disproportionate percentage.

Official estimates from French authorities indicate around 1,800 individuals had left France to join the fighting as of October 2015. Another 760 fighters from the United Kingdom and 760 from Germany had gone to Syria as of November 2015, along with 470 from Belgium as of October 2015. Based on these estimates of the year 2015, almost 3,700 of the 5 total 5,000+ European Union foreign fighter contingent come from just four countries.

- The recruitment within the Americas has been mostly reliant on social media, particularly in the initial phases of the process. Potential recruits initially connect with Islamic State sympathizers or members via social media, with subsequent follow up by online peer-to-peer interaction. There are no significant patterns of locally based recruitment in the Americas—nor recruitment hot spots—as seen in Europe and the former Soviet republics. The latest estimate of 2016 of 20,000 foreign fighters from 90 countries is up from an earlier estimate of 19,000 fighters. The number of Americans who have gone or tried to go to Syria and Iraq is up from 50 a year ago and 100 by the fall of 2014.

The Islamic State has seen success beyond the dreams of other terrorist groups that now appear conventional and even old-fashioned, such as al-Qaeda. It has energized tens of thousands of people to join it, and inspired many more to support it.

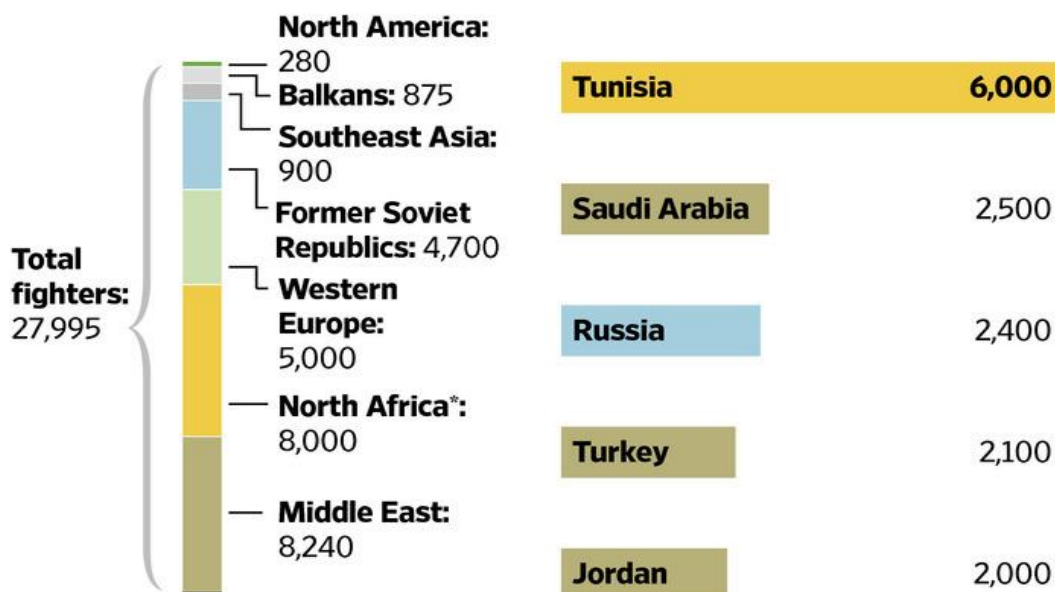
- Estimated number of fighters per capita in 2015

Jihadist Origins

Foreign fighters in Islamic State’s ranks in Syria and Iraq

The regions they come from...

...and the top 5 nationalities



*North Africa includes Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara, and Mauritania

Source: The Soufan Group

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

- Another problem is that thousands of assault rifles such as AK-47s, mortar shells, rocket launchers, anti-tank weapons and heavy machine guns are being routed through a new arms pipeline from the Balkans to the Arabian peninsula and countries bordering Syria to arm these fighters. Arms bought by the Saudis, Turks, Jordanians and the UAE for Syria are routed through two secret command hubs – called military operation centres – in Jordan and Turkey. The weapons are then transported by road to the Syrian border or airdropped by military planes. An export license issued to a Slovakian company in January 2015 granted it the right to transport thousands of rocket-propelled grenade launchers, heavy machine guns and almost a million bullets worth €32m. The materiel was, again, produced across eastern Europe. In March 2016, the Netherlands became the first EU country to stop arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

STATES INVOLVED

Russia: In October 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly stated that 5,000 to 7,000 fighters from Russia and the former Soviet republics had traveled to Syria to join the Islamic State. Based on these figures, the number of foreign fighters from the former Soviet Union has increased considerably since June 2014. Official estimates from the Russian Federation alone suggest that 2,400 Russians had joined the Islamic State by September 2015; compared to over 800 by June 2014. The majority of fighters come from the North Caucasus, with a smaller but still significant number from Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The Maghreb and North Africa: The great majority of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria are from Arab countries, with both the Middle East and the Maghreb supplying large numbers. As of October 2015, an estimated 6,000 fighters had traveled to Syria from Tunisia. For some countries, such as Libya and Tunisia, the phenomenon of foreign fighter is even more apparent. In Libya, the eastern coastal region is known as a hotbed for recruitment. In Tunisia, the city of Ben Gardane has provided the largest number of foreign fighters.

European states: French, German and British citizens constitute the majority of the European foreign fighters that joined the ranks of Islamic State. France is the primary country of origin for the people who left to fight for the Islamic State terrorist group in the Middle East, as more than 900 in 2015 its citizens traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the extremists. Eastern European countries which did not experience large immigration inflows in the past and which host small Muslim populations contributed relatively few foreign fighters to Islamic State.

Asia- Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia: in 2015 approximately 300 people have left from the Asian nations of the Philippines and Malaysia to go fight along the forces of ISIL. While 200 originating from Malaysia, and 100 originating from the Research Report Philippines, Indonesia has also provided a substantial number of jihadist recruits. With a government report from the Indonesian government officially stating 60 recruits having left the country, it was later revealed in an unofficial report that around 200 Indonesians left to fight.

UN EFFORTS

The United Nations has addressed the problem, with the UN adopting a binding resolution in 2014 (mentioned below) specifically addressing the issue of foreign fighters. The EU is actively engaged in international initiatives to counter the threat. In September 2014, the UN Security Council (UNSC) specifically addressed the problem by adopting binding Resolution 2178 (2014), which calls on UN members to make it a criminal offense to travel or attempt to travel abroad for terrorist purposes, or in order to provide or receive terrorist training.

The UN is a close partner of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF). The Forum adopted the first international good practices on foreign fighters, which inspired UNSC Resolution 2178. A GCTF Working Group – co-chaired by Morocco and The Netherlands – follows up on the implementation of those good practices, as well as coordinating initiatives addressing the foreign fighters phenomenon.

26 March 2015- As their number hit an alarming record, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched a new global initiative aimed at bolstering countries' criminal justice responses to the 'Foreign Terrorist Fighters' (FTF) phenomenon. The UNODC initiative will thus assist Member States in criminalizing areas such as terrorist recruitment, incitement to terrorism, terrorism financing, and terrorist training.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Threats against the international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, 24 September 2014 (S/RES/2178)
- Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, 28 September 2001 (S/RES/1377)
- Measures to eliminate international terrorism, 9 December 1994 (A/RES/49/60)

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

A solution would be finding a way to disrupt contact between people and terrorist organizations. As it has been previously explained, with the use of social media it has become increasingly easier for people to get in contact with extremist groups and vice versa. By finding a way to disrupt the communication, the terrorist groups lose one of the major medias to recruit followers.

It is also necessary to discredit or prove false the ideologies of extremists groups. In doing so you are proving to people that the beliefs in the case of ISIL or Al-Qaeda for example are interpretations of Islam.

The UNSC has made a Resolution (RES 2178, January 21, 2015) on the topic of Foreign Terrorist Fighters. The Protocol criminalizes of certain conducts such as: receiving training for terrorism, traveling abroad for the purpose of terrorism, funding traveling abroad for the purpose of terrorism, organizing, or otherwise facilitating, traveling abroad for the purpose of terrorism.

You should also study recent national legislation on the topic. For example, on 30 June

2015, new anti-terrorism legislation entered into force in Germany. The new law makes it a crime to travel outside the country with the intent to receive terrorist training, adds a new section on terrorism financing to the Criminal Code, and creates national identity card and passport restrictions on foreign fighters.

France Prime Minister Manuel Valls recently announced the establishment of specialized teams to counter the jihadist rhetoric on the Internet and analyze the evolution of propaganda speech to better combat it. They have also strengthened the capacity of their security services to dismantle terrorist networks and It is also essential to create support mechanisms for people returning from conflict zones. A structure will soon be created in France to this end to help those who wish to regain a place in society, as long as they are not being prosecuted for their actions.

The Albanian legislature, for example, is reportedly considering amendments to its national Penal Code aimed at criminalizing fighting in Syria or in other similar conflicts. According to the proposal, those Albanian citizens who participate in a military conflict abroad while not being a citizen or resident of the country where the conflict is taking place, and not being a member of a regular military force of this country, will be sentenced to more than ten years of imprisonment

USEFUL LINKS

<http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-foreign-fighter-recruitment-social-media-undeterred-new-security-crackdowns-1831764>

<http://www.newstatesman.com/world/middle-east/2015/12/meeting-foreign-fighters-how-does-islamic-state-recruit-thousands>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/what-makes-people-join-isis-expert-says-foreign-fighters-are-almost-never-recruited-at-mosque-a6748251.html>

<https://www.thegctf.org/Working-Groups/Foreign-Terrorist-Fighters>

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/index.html>

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2015/March/unodc-launches-new-global-initiative-to-boost-criminal-justice-responses-to-foreign-terrorist-fighters.html>