EXTREMIST MIGRATION: A FOREIGN JIHADIST FIGHTER THREAT ASSESSMENT

Shima D. Keene

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Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College, 47 Ashburn Drive, Carlisle, PA 17013-5238.

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FOREWORD

At the end of any conflict, surviving foreign fighters are likely to disperse in numerous directions. The question is where they are likely to go and whether or how they will re-emerge as a threat to the U.S. Army and the United States, as well as Western interests more broadly. In attempting to answer that question, it is important to understand the motivations behind fighters seeking new battlefields as well as the enablers that allow extremist migration to take place. The latter includes travel options such as smuggling routes. Knowledge of these potential migration routes will enable the U.S. Army to identify possible travel destinations as well as assess the likely threat that will emerge as a result of the relocation of foreign jihadist fighters. A separate but related problem is that for every jihadist fighter killed, others are recruited. If that cycle of jihadist recruitment is to be disrupted, it is essential to understand not only motivations for becoming a foreign fighter but also how new jihadist fighters are recruited and how they migrate to the battlefields.

In this monograph, British academic and practitioner Dr. Shima Keene explores the probable movement of foreign fighters as a result of the reduction in territory controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As part of her analysis, Dr. Keene dissects the jihadist migration process, examining factors such as need, opportunity, possible methods of travel, and support mechanisms that allow jihadist migration to take place. In attempting to combat the problem, she calls for a change in mindset and approach that better exploits the capabilities available within the defense and security stakeholder community.

As an established international subject matter expert in counterterrorism, serious organized crime, and threat finance, Dr. Keene utilizes her expertise to consolidate knowledge and deliver an assessment as to how terrorism and organized criminality collaborate to enable jihadist migration. Dr. Keene further outlines the role of threat finance and illicit trade that binds the networks together. In addition to her academic research in this field, her work as civilian adviser to the Standing Joint Force Headquarters and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps Headquarters based in the United Kingdom (UK) as well as her appointment as Counter Terrorism Adviser and Serious Organised Crime Adviser with a special focus on illicit finances for Her Majesty's Government provide further insight into and validation of this important subject.

The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) believes that this monograph provides a comprehensive assessment of the key issues relating to the challenges presented by the migration of foreign jihadist fighters as well as their collective implications for the U.S. Army and security and defense stakeholders more generally. Moreover, this monograph makes a valuable contribution to the debate on how to plan and shape future U.S. military operations considering the challenges that these fighters create.

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SHIMA D. KEENE is a British academic and practitioner specializing in defense and security. She is a director of the Conflict Studies Research Centre, Oxford, a Deployable Civilian Expert for the United Kingdom (UK) Government's Stabilisation Unit specializing in security and justice. She is a former senior research fellow and advisor at the Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the UK, and special advisor to the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD).

Dr. Keene advises and works closely with a number of UK Government departments and law enforcement agencies to include the MoD, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, Department for International Development, Her Majesty's Treasury, and the National Crime Agency, as well as a number of regional law enforcement agencies. Outside the UK, she works with international organizations to include: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; the Council of Europe; as well as U.S. Government departments, military, and law enforcement agencies. Dr. Keene has 29 years of practitioner experience obtained through investment banking, defense intelligence, and academia, and is a former British Army Reservist soldier with 7 years of military service, most of which was spent with 4th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment.

Dr. Keene has published numerous internal and external government and corporate reports as well as award-winning academic journal articles and is the author of *Threat Finance: Disconnecting the Lifeline of Organized Crime and Terrorism*. She is a visiting lecturer at the BPP Law School, London, and the Centre for Development Studies, Cambridge University. Dr.

Keene holds a Ph.D. in international criminal law, an M.Phil. in defence and security studies, and graduated with honors in business studies.

SUMMARY

The potential threat from foreign jihadist fighters has become one of increasing concern as a result of recent military successes against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which have reduced the organization's territorial control. One likely outcome is that many surviving foreign fighters will migrate to other battlegrounds. Where the fighters' destination is a fragile state, it is likely that they will further destabilize the region by contributing to armed conflict. If there is already a U.S. Army presence there, the arrival of foreign fighters will adversely impact peacekeeping and state-building missions. Where there is no U.S. presence or a limited presence, U.S. Army troops may need to be deployed to the area, which may negatively impact other military missions.

Another possibility is the scenario of foreign jihadist fighters who originate from the West returning home, making countries in Europe and North America their new battlefield. Fighters not from the West may also choose to travel to those new battlefields. Both scenarios have already started to materialize in Europe. The result is a partnership between returnees and new arrivals, and the consequences are visible in recent attacks in France, Germany, Belgium, and the United Kingdom (UK). Although the United States is less vulnerable to attacks on home soil than its European allies because of geographical distance and relative isolation, U.S. interests in Europe and the Middle East remain directly under threat.

Part of tackling this challenge lies in developing a better understanding as to what the potential threat is, as well as why and how extremist migration occurs. A comprehensive assessment of not only the threat but

also its potential second- and third-order effects, coupled with the adoption of a full-spectrum approach, would enable effective mitigation measures to be adopted. Consequently, the U.S. Army must familiarize itself with all aspects of the foreign fighter problem, including motivation, recruitment methods, and migration routes, for a proactive analysis to be developed to identify future security threats. In addition, the Army should identify which measures should be taken with allies and partner agencies to disrupt not only migrating foreign jihadists fighters but also the networks that support them. Achieving effective outcomes would require new thinking as well as the development of a new approach to address the threats. This would undoubtedly require a change in culture that is more holistic in nature and that combines the front line, intelligence and analytical talent, and engineering and business personnel who have detailed knowledge of the industries involved. As challenging as it may be, the cost advantages of anticipating issues before they occur would be significant and must be embraced by the U.S. Army.

EXTREMIST MIGRATION: A FOREIGN JIHADIST FIGHTER THREAT ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, U.S. soldiers have confronted foreign fighters in theaters including Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. These seasoned combatants gain their skills in foreign jihadist conflicts and then utilize them in other battlefields. Foreign fighters have played an important role in terrorist organizations, such as the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Shabaab. The percentage of foreign fighters in ISIS's ranks has been estimated to be as high as 80 percent, although the real figure is likely to be around 50 percent.[1] The potential threat from foreign jihadist fighters has become one of increasing concern as a result of recent military successes against ISIS which have reduced the organization's territorial control. One likely outcome is that many surviving foreign fighters will migrate to other battlegrounds. Where the fighters' destination is a fragile state, it is likely that they will further destabilize the region by contributing to armed conflict. If there is already a U.S. Army presence there, the arrival of foreign fighters will adversely affect peacekeeping and state-building missions. Where there is no U.S. presence or a limited presence, the level of violence may require U.S. Army troops to be deployed to the area. The need for further U.S. military resources to be committed will stretch budgets, and may negatively affect other military missions.

Foreign jihadist fighters who originate from the West and are Western nationals may choose to return home. As a consequence, countries in Europe and North America may become the fighters' new

battlefield. Those not from the West may also choose to travel to those destinations. Both scenarios have already started to materialize in Europe. The result is a partnership between returnees and new arrivals, and the consequences are visible in recent attacks in France, Germany, Belgium, and the United Kingdom (UK). Although the United States is less vulnerable to attacks on its home soil than its European allies as a result of geographical distance and relative isolation, U.S. interests in Europe and the Middle East are directly under threat.[2]

However, some experts believe that the threat to the West, especially from returning jihadists, has been exaggerated. One argument has been that the threat is minimal, as most jihadists have been killed or captured. Although it is true that many ISIS fighters have been killed, it is difficult to know how many have survived. Perhaps more importantly, it is difficult to determine which survivors pose a genuine threat to the West. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the threat from foreign jihadist fighters to the United States and its allies remains real. The challenge for U.S. policymakers and military leaders is to understand how, and to what extent, recent military successes against ISIS could, in turn, create security challenges to U.S. interests, both at home and abroad, as well as what could be done to tackle the threat.

Part of tackling this challenge lies in developing a better understanding as to why and how extremist migration occurs. At the end of any conflict, surviving foreign fighters are likely to disperse in numerous directions. The question is where they are likely to go and whether or how they will re-emerge as a threat to the U.S. Army and the United States as well as Western interests more broadly. In attempting to answer that

question, it is important to understand the motivations behind fighters seeking new battlefields as well as the enablers that allow extremist migration to take place. The latter includes travel options such as smuggling routes. Knowledge of these potential migration routes will enable the U.S. Army to identify potential travel destinations as well as assess the likely threat that will emerge as a result of the relocation of foreign jihadist fighters. A separate but related problem is that for every jihadist fighter killed, others are recruited. If that cycle of jihadist recruitment is to be disrupted, it is essential to understand not only the motivations for becoming a foreign fighter but also how new jihadist fighters are recruited and how they migrate to the battlefields.

Whether foreign fighters are veterans or recruits, their choice of a battlefield will depend on their ability to travel to their intended destination. The ease of reaching that destination will be a key factor. One of the reasons why so many Western jihadists traveled to Syria to join ISIS was that it was easy to do. Jihadists would typically fly to Turkey, a popular holiday destination, without alerting the authorities, then drive to the Syrian border. The situation has now changed. Turkish authorities are more aware of the threat and are taking steps to address it, and various additional measures have been taken by the international community to tackle the problem of migrating foreign fighters. This increased security is forcing foreign jihadist fighters to seek alternative routes, but traveling these routes requires money as well as support networks. The support networks are particularly important in providing the necessary information for the fighter to know where to go and whom to contact to obtain documents (real or falsified) that enable them

to travel (by air, land, or sea); receive sustenance; and, ultimately, reach their destination. In many ways, this is what any migrant needs and, therefore, it should be no surprise that jihadists would utilize travel routes and networks used by migrants who are not jihadist fighters. However, before exploring the details of how and why foreign jihadist fighters migrate, a brief definition of the foreign jihadist fighter is necessary to provide clarification.

THE FOREIGN JIHADIST FIGHTER DEFINED

Foreign fighters are defined by the United Nations (UN) as:

> individuals who leave their country of origin or habitual residence and become involved in violence as part of an insurgency or non-State armed group in an armed conflict. Foreign fighters are motivated by a range of factors, notably ideology. . . . foreign fighters, while they may or may not be nationals of a party to the conflict, do not reside in the State affected by the conflict and have travelled from abroad to join the insurgency.[3]

This monograph further defines foreign fighters as those who travel abroad to fight and later move on to another foreign battlefield, as well as those who return home to conduct attacks on their home soil. Even when returnees act alone on home soil, they should be distinguished from "lone wolves," who are defined as individuals embracing a terrorist organization's call for violence but who mainly act alone. Lone wolves tend not to have direct international connections but, instead, have typically been radicalized and motivated to carry out an attack through online sources.[4] Foreign fighters, on the other hand, have international

connections, giving them access to jihadist networks which have been built through face-to-face contact, along with credibility through their experience in combat.

Historically, foreign fighters have been distinguished from mercenaries, with the first seen as motivated by ideology or religion and the latter by money. The UN, in its Seventieth General Assembly Session, stated: "The main difference examined is that of motivation, and the related role of payment."[5] However, it also acknowledged that, in reality, this clear distinction is not so apparent. The report warned that:

> In the light of the above reporting on the range of motivations, payments and activities of foreign fighters, the assertion may be tentatively made that foreign fighters are a contemporary form of mercenarism or mercenary-related activities.[6]

Although it is not the purpose of this monograph to explore in any further detail the differences between the two, this ambiguity is worthy of note, especially in understanding motivation. The term "jihadist foreign fighter" may insinuate that a fighter's motivation is religion and, although some foreign jihadist fighters may be deeply religious, others may be less so. For the latter, more "mercenary" foreign fighters, the jihadist conflict may be viewed purely through an economic lens.[7] The potential implication is that these individuals may switch sides depending on which pays the better rate, as witnessed in Afghanistan.[8] As such, an understanding of motivation is essential in assessing risk; these motivations will be explored in more detail later.

THE THREAT POSED BY FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Foreign fighters represent a challenge to the U.S. Army for several reasons. The first challenge is their experience. U.S. Soldiers are likely to face an enemy composed of seasoned, veteran fighters with substantial "experience, skills, resources, and networks."[9] This has implications not only for present conflicts but also for future clashes in which experience and networks will be utilized to the enemy's advantage. One such advantage is that foreign fighters could be mobilized relatively quickly, depending on the geographical location of the new jihadist conflict. Criminal activities such as smuggling and trafficking (of humans and commodities) are ways in which terrorist organizations sustain themselves financially.[10] These routes and connections can be, and are, used to infiltrate and exfiltrate foreign fighters quickly and covertly. The speed with which foreign fighters could be deployed could prove to be problematic for the U.S. Army, which may require considerably more time to deploy its own troops to the same area.

A further concern is foreign fighters protracting and escalating armed conflict in fragile states, a situation that would endanger U.S. and allied troops attempting to stabilize the region. Groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda did not cause the civil wars in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, but they have exacerbated civil war-related instability in these countries, transforming local struggles based on parochial grievances into wars with a robust jihadist component.[11] Foreign fighters often bring new ideas that are capable of reframing the overall aims of an insurgency.[12] Foreign fighters are also capable of causing fragmentation by creating new splinter organizations, further

complicating the threat environment. While foreign fighters may contribute to the success of a group by offering their knowledge, experience, and labor, this is also likely to create internal tensions. Evidence of this can be seen in Somalia, where al-Shabaab—which included many foreign fighters at the grassroots level as well as in its leadership—decided to get rid of its foreign fighters due to the internal divisions their presence caused.[13] Such internal instability can be disruptive for any group, which would seem advantageous for the U.S. Army and other allies tasked with fighting the group. Although the weakening of these organizations is a desirable result for those who fight them, one challenge is that fragmentation complicates the threat environment and, in turn, the mediation efforts and negotiations aimed at ending armed conflict.[14] As conflict resolution is ultimately led by politics, the presence of foreign fighters who confuse the threat landscape should be viewed as a destabilizing factor.

The third factor to consider is the growing number of foreign fighters in the field. As previously mentioned, irrespective of how many are reported as killed, their numbers still appear to be growing. This increase may result from the tendency of foreign fighters to carry on fighting to the death and from the recruitment of new foreign fighters. Regarding veteran fighters, soldiers in the West have the luxury of retiring or moving on to other forms of employment. For most foreign jihadist fighters, this is not an option. They are often unable to return home or find alternative sources of work, and are more likely to continue to fight until they are killed. A further factor is that the number of new fighters consistently appears to outweigh the number of those who are killed, although exact numbers remain unclear.

The fourth consideration is the potential threat posed by returning foreign fighters. "In April 2015, the United Nations estimated that at least 22,000 foreign fighters (FFs) from 100 countries had joined the jihad in Syria and Iraq, including approximately 4,000 from Western Europe."[15] Other reports put the number closer to 30,000.[16]

These estimates continue to grow with the latest UN reporting suggesting that over 40,000 foreign fighters from 110 countries may have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join terrorist groups.[17] Furthermore, the UN report released in August 2018 suggests that between 20,000 and 30,000 militants remain in the desert territory on the border between Iraq and Syria.[18] This figure is five times more than what was previously understood and represents a significant threat, especially as the fighters are believed to be in a state of high readiness as they are fully trained with access to "hundreds and millions" of dollars in funds.[19] A study conducted in July 2018 by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College London further supports the higher estimates stating "41,490 people [consisting of] 32,809 men, 4,761 women and 4,640 children," had so far joined the group.[20] These figures provide a considerable contrast to previous U.S. intelligence estimates that 6,000 ISIS militants continue to operate in the region.[21]

In terms of the threat from ISIS fighters leaving the region, it was estimated that of the 5,000 European Union (EU) fighters who had traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS, 30 percent had returned home to Europe.[22] The key concern is that these individuals may carry out attacks on their homeland, posing a direct threat to U.S. citizens and interests. This topic

will be explored further in the section devoted to the threat of returning foreign fighters.

The fifth concern relates to increased brutality and implications for human rights concerns. Foreign fighters often bring in new, radical, and unlawful tactics that encourage greater violence toward civilians.[23] With limited connections to local populations, foreign fighters are likely to be more brutal, as seen repeatedly in Syria and Iraq. For example, foreign fighters in ISIS have been prominent as the most ruthless in torturing and executing their victims, acts that are often recorded for propaganda purposes.[24] The acts of foreign fighters may amount to gross human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity or genocide.[25] These concerns pose further challenges to U.S. and allied troops working in the context of peacekeeping and in-country stabilization with international partners to tackle human rights abuses in fragile states.

Irrespective of the nature of the threat, a threat assessment will need to take into consideration the size of the foreign jihadist fighter threat and its geographical location for an appropriate strategy to be developed in response to the threat. From a military perspective, the greater the concentration of foreign fighters in any one location, the greater the impact of the potential threat. However, estimating the number of foreign fighters is far from straightforward.

HOW MANY FOREIGN FIGHTERS ARE THERE?

According to the Soufan Group, there were an estimated 12,000 foreign fighters in Syria from 81 countries in 2014.[26] This figure grew to between 27,000 and 31,000 from 86 countries only 18 months later.[27] Other

sources verify this trend, both in terms of the growing numbers of fighters as well as the increase in the number of countries from which they originate. For example, according to the UN, between 22,000 and 30,000 foreign fighters from 100 countries joined ISIS in 2015, which was revised to a higher figure of over 40,000 in 2018, as previously mentioned. Of these, approximately 4,000 were believed to originate from Western Europe.[28] More recently, in April 2017, U.S. Army Lieutenant General Michael K. Nagata, director of the National Counterterrorism Center's Directorate for Strategic Operational Planning, suggested that this figure had increased to 40,000 foreign terrorist fighters across at least 120 countries.[29] The most recent figures published by the Soufan Group in June 2017 reported an even higher figure than Nagata had estimated: 53,781 individuals from 146 countries.[30] These figures clearly highlight the volume of migration of foreign fighters into Syria, especially when considering the number of them which had been killed.

In July 2017, Army General Raymond Thomas, head of U.S. Special Operations Command, announced that the United States had killed 60,000 to 70,000 ISIS militants since the commencement of the campaign against ISIS in the summer of 2014.[31] If these figures are correct, it suggests that the threat from foreign fighters has been eliminated at large. However, many have questioned the accuracy of these figures on the basis that the estimates were only marginally higher than the figures that were provided in February 2017. This estimate is significant, as it was after this time that the anti-ISIS operations were intensified through the U.S.'s "annihilation campaign."[32]

Concerns over accuracy also stem from the significant differences in estimates provided by other

sources. For example, the February figure provided by General Thomas was not much higher than the 50,000 ISIS fatality count provided by U.S. officials in December 2016.[33] However, these were twice as high as the figure cited by UK Defence Secretary Michael Fallon in the same month.[34] Furthermore, in the summer of 2016, the Pentagon claimed that ISIS had just 15,000 to 20,000 fighters remaining in Iraq and Syria. However, in 2014, an observer group estimated that the terror group had 100,000 fighters, and that the numbers most likely increased considerably between 2014 and 2016, further raising concerns regarding the accuracy of available ISIS fatality counts.[35] If the figure of 60,000 to 70,000 was correct, there is still a concern as to how many were, in fact, ISIS-affiliated, as numerous reports suggest that civilians may have been included in the estimates.[36]

There is also reporting to suggest that the ISIS leadership is killing its fighters partly as a result of internal conflict, but also as a result of concerns that deserters will provide intelligence to the United States and its allies. As a spokesperson for the U.S.-led coalition Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, Colonel Chris Garver stated: "We are seeing cases of senior Daesh leaders executing more junior Daesh leaders." He elaborated: "There are widely circulated and credible reports of these mass executions in Iraq and Syria. These reports are increasing in both frequency and scope and scale."[37]

Similar reports provided by other organizations have confirmed these observations. For example, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claims that 464 jihadist fighters were killed by ISIS between 2014 and 2016 for reasons including desertion, fleeing the front line, and infighting.[38] More recently, in November

2017, various media sources reported that ISIS had beheaded more than a dozen of its fighters in the Surkh Ab bazaar in Achin district, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, for attempting to escape or working with enemy forces.[39] Afghanistan has become an increasingly important territory for ISIS, especially for fighters fleeing Iraq and Syria in an attempt to regroup. In addition, ISIS is reportedly killing wounded fighters with potassium chloride injections that cause the heart to stop suddenly. According to Iraqi sources, ISIS killed wounded fighters because the organization was unable to deal with large numbers of casualties and afraid that their presence would have a negative psychological effect on other fighters. In May 2016, eight wounded soldiers were killed via lethal injection in Fallujah.[40]

All factors considered, it remains difficult to provide an accurate assessment of the actual number of ISIS fighters who have fought and died versus those who remain in a state of combat readiness. Regarding the most current number of ISIS foreign fighters provided by the Soufan Group in a June 2017 report, it should be noted that these figures only account for 48 of the 86 countries previously identified due to the refusal by some states to provide information.[41] In terms of the overall foreign fighter threat, the report points out that these figures only account for jihadist fighters in Syria and Iraq and do not offer estimates of the number of foreign fighters who have traveled to other destinations, such as Libya, Sudan, and Somalia, since ISIS's territorial losses in Syria and Iraq. Consequently, the global figure for jihadist fighters involved in other theaters of conflict will inevitably be much higher. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of foreign fighters in the field accurately, what is clear

is that the number of migrating foreign fighters is increasing, as is the number of countries from which those fighters originate.

WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

In terms of the origins of foreign fighters, this monograph will focus on foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, partly as this is the battlefield where foreign jihadist fighters have been most active recently and the one for which there is the most available open source data. Regarding the geographical regions that foreign fighters originate from, figure 1 shows that the largest group of foreign fighters is from the Middle East, followed by North Africa, Western Europe, and the former Soviet Union.
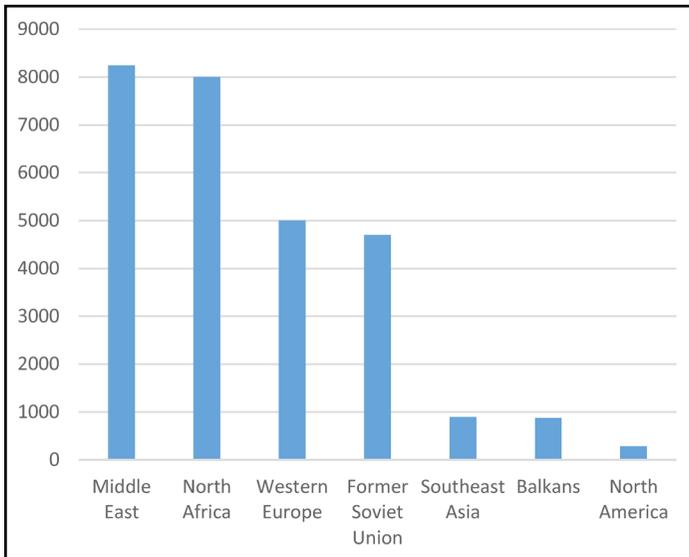
Source: Shima D. Keene.

Figure 1. Iraq and Syria's ISIS Foreign Fighter Numbers (origination by region)[42]

The significance of this data is that many may choose to return to their country of origin, posing a threat to that country's security. The top three geographical regions have been identified as the Middle East, North Africa, and Western Europe. Figure 2 depicts the number of foreign jihadist fighters in Iraq and Syria from each country, juxtaposing the total number of fighters and the number of returnees. The countries are listed in descending order, beginning with Denmark, which had 62 returnees out of 125 fighters, or 50 percent. Denmark is followed by the UK, with 350 out of 760 returning home to the UK, or 46 percent. It should be noted that the countries with the highest ratios of returning foreign fighters are European.
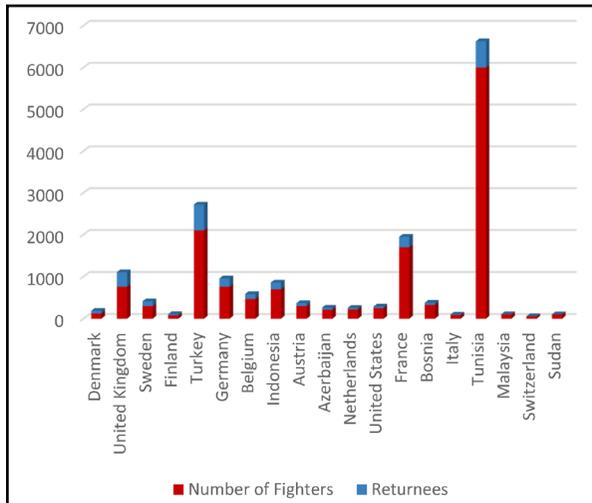
Source: Shima D. Keene.

Figure 2. Iraq and Syria's ISIS Foreign Fighter and Returnee Numbers (origination by country)[43]

The threat from returning foreign fighters is further analyzed in the section, "Returning Foreign Fighters," which will discuss the significance of these figures and the threat to homeland security. Irrespective of the origin of the jihadist fighter, more and more foreign fighters are being recruited. This increase of foreign fighters can be can be understood by examining the motivation of those choosing to **remain** foreign fighters as well as those choosing to **become** foreign fighters in the first place.

MOTIVATION

The motivation to either become a foreign fighter or continue to travel to different battlefields to carry on fighting varies from fighter to fighter. Fighters' motivations are also likely to evolve and change over time. In his presentation on the psychology of those who become insurgents, Dr. Steven Metz of the U.S. Army War College argues that motivation differs depending on the individual's level of need at the time.[44] Based on Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, Dr. Metz identifies two broad categories of need—higher order motivation and lower, or primal, order motivation. In the latter scenario, individuals are likely to join insurgencies as a result of social obligation or the need to survive, whereas those at the higher levels of human need will be motivated by fulfillment, empowerment, and enrichment.[45]

Some may not have initially intended to become fighters. For example, there have been instances where individuals have traveled to a conflict zone with humanitarian motives and been subsequently radicalized and recruited by a local, nonstate armed group.[46] Others may be migrants traveling from countries such

as Nigeria in pursuit of a better life in Europe who become entangled with terrorist organizations en route. Notwithstanding unique circumstances, several factors that motivate individuals to become and remain jihadist fighters have been identified.

The first, but not necessarily most important, is financial. In some cases, financial incentives have been a key motivating factor for foreign jihadist fighters, blurring the distinction between foreign fighters and mercenaries. According to the UN Working Group set up to respond to the challenges posed by the foreign terrorist fighter threat, financial gains played a key role in the recruitment of foreign fighters in some regions.[47] For example, in Libya, ISIS offers new foreign fighter recruits a starting salary of $2,500 per month on the understanding that should they be killed, the money will continue to be paid to their families.[48] Such financial incentives have been reported as being particularly attractive to Sudanese recruits, who often lack alternative employment options. In addition, all travel costs, including the price of being smuggled into Libya from Sudan—which in 2016 was $1,000 per fighter—would be covered by ISIS.[49] Similar findings were reached by the UN Security Council's al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, which reported that the payment of salaries by ISIS might be an incentive for some fighters.[50] The UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee also reported that some foreign fighters are paid to travel and that they and their families are financially supported after moving abroad.[51]

In some cases, the fighters may not be driven by financial incentives per se but by economic necessity. Fighters who may have become known as jihadists or terrorists to the authorities in the countries from which they originate may find it difficult to return home

to seek employment without risking imprisonment. They may find it equally difficult to find work in other countries for the same reason. Consequently, becoming a paid fighter may be the only option for economic survival. The situation may be amplified if the fighter has a family back home that needs to be supported. At the same time, some UN member states have reported that financial or material incentives played a minimal role in some cases and that many foreign fighters have independently funded their travel and expenses while abroad.[52] In these situations, several other motivational factors have been identified.

The first is the search for identity, which can be particularly problematic for children of immigrants to the West who have struggled to integrate into their host countries.[53] These children typically become caught between two cultures, failing to join either. As a consequence, the desire to belong to a group and gain peer acceptance becomes increasingly important. Without this, their sense of alienation becomes a vulnerability that can be exploited by extremist and terrorist organizations. Joining a terrorist organization offers them not only a sense of identity but also the ability to satisfy their need for greater meaning in life, delivered through ideology and the manipulation of religion.[54]

Boredom has also been cited as a factor behind becoming a foreign fighter.[55] Here, the relatively new concept of the "five-star jihad" experience comes into play. With the increased use of social media as a recruitment tool, terrorist organizations such as ISIS have been able to capture a greater audience of new foreign fighter recruits who are motivated by a sense of adventure but are not necessarily willing to endure the discomforts of a war zone. These are typically newly radicalized jihadists, likely exposed to warfare

through virtual means, such as computer games. In comparison to the relatively harsh environment that is the war zone of Afghanistan or Somalia, many foreign fighters from developed countries have been offered villas with pools, complete with video game systems, in Syria. This five-star jihad experience has been particularly appealing to bored young men and women who may face personal problems back home. These individuals are typically inexperienced, but wish to pursue a new adventure in the name of a cause.

Other factors that motivate individuals to become foreign fighters include "kinship, nationalism or patriotism; and humanitarian reasons, namely to protect the local population."[56] It should be further noted that motivational factors might combine to persuade an individual to become a jihadist fighter. Humanitarian factors are particularly interesting as they can motivate foreign fighters yet are open to abuse in a number of ways.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment of foreign fighters can take place in a physical environment as well as a virtual or online environment. With respect to the latter, the Internet and social media play an increasingly important role in the recruitment of foreign fighters, with the humanitarian narrative often prominently deployed. For example, the enemy may be portrayed as brutal and the cause of the suffering of the local population, necessitating the defensive mobilization of foreign fighters to protect the local population on humanitarian grounds "while celebrating the heroism of fighters protecting the locals."[57] It is for this reason that the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee has

repeatedly warned against counterterrorism measures that do not fully respect human rights and the rule of law, as they have the unintended consequence of reinforcing narratives that radicalize individuals and fuel foreign fighter mobilization.[58] Such humanitarian narratives may be supported by other narratives also disseminated via the Internet and social media. These include local grievances, which may also be exploited, as well as messages condemning and shaming those who are unwilling to travel to the battlefield.[59] It should also be noted that groups such as ISIS have been able to target different audiences and adjust their narratives for marketing purposes. For example, gender-specific narratives are used to recruit men and women, promising to build a utopian society for fighters and their families.[60]

Although the Internet and social media are important and capable of reaching a wide audience, irrespective of geographical distance and physical borders, direct social contact remains important as a method of recruitment. Virtual forums such as chat rooms often play a crucial role in the first step toward an individual's radicalization. If the potential recruit takes the bait, the next step for the recruiter is to arrange a face-to-face meeting. Active foreign fighters are instrumental in the recruitment of prospective foreign fighters.[61] Physical interaction is undoubtedly more powerful than virtual interaction alone in enabling the individual to take the next step and commit to the cause.[62] Clinton Watts, a Managing Director for Innovative Analytics and Training, reminds us of the old saying: "The best recruiter of a Marine is a former Marine." Therefore, it follows that: "The best recruiter of a foreign fighter is a former foreign fighter."[63]

The importance of direct person-to-person contact partly explains the success of recruitment hotbeds, which have emerged throughout the globe. These recruitment hotbeds range from relatively small regions, such as the Lisleby district of Fredrikstad, Norway, to well-established incubators and radiators of extremist behavior, such as Bizerte and Ben Gardane in Tunisia; Derna in Libya; the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia; and, the Molenbeek district of Brussels, Belgium. All of these locations have one thing in common—the personal nature of recruitment where the whole community is often engaged, resulting in a domino effect in recruitment and mobilization. Joining organizations such as ISIS can often be an emotional response, with the involvement of a family member or a close acquaintance playing a key role, as these individuals generate the necessary momentum from ideological indoctrination to action.[64]

Direct personal intervention is instrumental when family members and friends join terrorist organizations, but it can work equally well when recruiting vulnerable strangers. Refugee camps are often targeted by terrorist recruiters. One example is in Kenya, where Somali refugees were targeted by opposing forces in the civil war. There is limited information as to how successful this method of recruitment is in reality, though radicalization and recruitment by terrorist groups become more likely when refugee camps are in direct contact with fighters in an ongoing conflict. "The temptation to join the fight rather than wait in despair is real for many young men, especially when refugees cannot obtain education or employment and are isolated in camps for years."[65]

Incidents in which refugees were successfully recruited before carrying out terrorist attacks support

this theory. One example is the terrorist attack on Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall on September 21, 2013, which killed 67 people and injured 175 more, and was committed by four terrorists, one of whom was a refugee from the Kakuma camp. Press reports also claimed that another suspect in the same attack made a phone call to an individual in Dadaab, Kenya's largest Somali refugee camp.[66] Other reports also suggested that militants from al-Shabaab (as well as some who oppose al-Shabaab) were recruited in refugee camps, to include Dadaab, sometimes under false pretenses, whereby promises were made to gullible young men that were soon forgotten and not honored.[67]

Another method of recruitment is coercion, whereby non-jihadist migrants are abducted and forced to become terrorist fighters. This recruitment method typically occurs when the terrorist organization is short on personnel. Libya is a case in point: ISIS had limited personnel, and its ability to recruit locally was complicated by the multitude of enemies it had made. Consequently, ISIS's Libyan affiliate began abducting economic migrants from Sudan, Eritrea, and West Africa en route through the Sahara to Europe.[68] One example of this is the case of a Nigerian man kidnapped with a group of Sudanese and Ghanaian migrants in Benghazi and brought to a desert camp by ISIS fighters, who made the migrants recite verses from the Quran. Those who could not recite verses and admitted to being Christian were beheaded. Those who were able to recite verses were sent to a training camp; after several weeks of military instruction, they were considered to be combat-ready and forced to fight for ISIS.[69]

However, in many cases, recruitment is about the remobilization of jihadist fighters and the activation

of dormant jihadist networks. In comparison to the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, foreign jihadist fighter networks in the 21st century are established with the additional benefits of globalization. These give jihadist organizations a global reach and allow them to build on past efforts as well as tap into local grassroots movements and organizations that have already been established. Examples include al-Muhajirun in the UK, Sharia4Belgium in Belgium, Forsane Alizza in France, Millatu Ibrahim in Germany, and the Ansar al-Sharia network in Libya and Tunisia.[70] When attempting to counter jihadist migration, one must understand the totality of existing human migration routes that are currently being used or are likely to be used, including by refugees. Obtaining intelligence of current and potential routes is highly relevant as a result of the increasing number of refugees in the world, a trend that is set to continue as a result of pull and push factors such as climate change, political instability, and insecurity. These changing landscapes, both political and environmental, will allow some jihadists to disguise themselves as refugees to take advantage of the chaos. All of these factors have direct and significant implications for the U.S. Army in terms of assessing enemy capability and intentions, both at home and abroad. As such, a brief examination of the subject of migration more generally is useful in order to help the U.S. Army determine the routes that may be utilized by foreign jihadist fighters.

HUMAN MIGRATION CRISIS—IMPLICATIONS

The term "migration" in the context of the inflow (immigration) or outflow (emigration) of people from one location to another is predominantly driven by

the pursuit of a better way of life. This monograph is concerned with migrants attempting to escape their countries for reasons related to security, including conflict, persecution, or a natural disaster. Many of these migrants have become refugees as a result of internal displacement. "There are currently 22.5 million refugees in the world . . . [of whom] G20 Members [Group of Twenty] host 6 million."[71] This figure has increased "from 2.4 million in 2010 . . . driven by the major inflows to Turkey that occurred in the context of the Syrian conflict."[72] However, that still leaves 16.5 million displaced individuals who may be in refugee camps and unable to travel due to financial problems, injury, health concerns, or because they do not want to be separated from family members who are unable to travel. Others may be planning to migrate by either legal means or illegal means. The costs of migration can be expensive and unaffordable. As such, many opt for a "multi-stop approach," working along the way to pay for their travel, which may involve travel through other fragile states before reaching their ultimate destination. These individuals are vulnerable and often fall victim to criminality or forced recruitment into terrorist organizations to become foreign jihadist fighters.

The movement of people from fragile and conflict-ridden regions is not unidirectional. Nonprofit organizations enter conflict zones from which people are trying to escape in order to provide humanitarian assistance. This inward flow also applies to individuals lured into participating in armed conflicts as foreign fighters. However, irrespective of whether the travel is from or to conflict zones, the travel routes for human migration (both legal and illegal) continue to multiply. Many factors have contributed to what some refer to as the age of human migration. These include

a boom in youth demographics, accompanied by unemployment; inadequate or unsuitable education; bleak employment prospects (as a consequence); and climate change, the latter potentially exacerbating a wide range of current stressors.

A case in point is North Africa, where recent studies have shown that climate change will have a detrimental effect on the causes and drivers of instability and prosperity in the region, which, in turn, will result in further increases in human migration in years to come. To elaborate, climatically, North Africa is hot and dry. However, climate change is set to raise temperatures even further, with an increase in the number of heatwave days and a further reduction in precipitation predicted by the end of the 21st century. Any average temperature increase will be problematic in a region where water scarcity is already an issue.[73] North African economies are still largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture or livestock. Furthermore, the rapidly growing population is heavily concentrated in areas where water is accessible and the land is most viable for agriculture. Consequently, the majority of people in the region are clustered in the Mediterranean coastal area, putting an enormous strain on available resources and urban infrastructure.

These strains have already been exacerbated by a boom in youth demographics. These individuals, unable to sustain themselves, with little reason to expect the situation at home to improve, and their prospects worsened still by climate change, will undoubtedly seek to migrate to countries where they feel they may have a future. Access to the Mediterranean makes available the migration routes into Europe. Individuals will wish to either become migrants or become involved in assisting migrants

and, as a result, could see human trafficking and other forms of smuggling as key to their economic survival. Consequently, human migration is set to continue to increase, and the full extent of its security implications must be better understood by the U.S. Army, as well as policymakers more broadly.

Implications surrounding the increasing migration of foreign fighters in recent years represent some of the resulting concerns but have clear and immediate security implications. The nexus of migrants and foreign jihadist fighters is especially important, particularly when the latter impersonate migrants, a phenomenon which will be explored later in this monograph.

JIHADIST MIGRATION ROUTES

Nominally, jihadist migration routes can be divided into three categories—first, established and conventional travel routes; second, smuggling routes; and third, refugee migration routes. In reality, the three tend to converge, and this is particularly true concerning refugee routes and smuggling routes in the context of fragile states. These routes are typically controlled by groups such as local militias, terrorist organizations, and organized crime groups. All three are typically involved in criminal activities involving the movement of goods and people. In many cases, state corruption further complicates the situation to the extent that it becomes difficult to differentiate between official and unofficial routes as well as what is considered licit or illicit. Despite these challenges, the categorization is still useful, as migration routes may involve travel through either fragile states or developed countries.

Conventional travel routes are those which any traveler wishing to move from destination A to destination B would use. For example, to reach Syria, one would first travel to Turkey, typically by air, and then travel by land to the Turkish-Syrian border before entering Syria. Air travel to Turkey is cheap and straightforward, as it is a popular vacation destination for individuals from Europe and the former Soviet Union and it is difficult to verify whether a traveler's real destination is, in fact, Turkey, as opposed to Syria. Travel to Turkey in itself will not automatically alert the authorities unless the traveler is known to them, in which case that individual may choose to use methods of travel that pass through more lenient border controls.

The second option is smuggling routes. Smuggling routes are used by terrorist groups such as ISIS to smuggle a variety of goods, from the illicit, such as hashish, to fuel, as part of a business model that sustains the group financially. According to Franco Roberti, Italy's national anti-mafia and antiterrorism czar, there is evidence to suggest that Italian organized crime and terrorist organizations, including ISIS, have been working together to smuggle hashish from North Africa into Europe.[74] The route for smuggling hashish runs from Casablanca and Morocco through Algeria and Tunisia and on to Tobruk in eastern Libya. ISIS controls the trafficking route that runs through Libya; it also controls the coast along the Gulf of Sirte, including an area that is currently ISIS's strongest base outside of Syria and Iraq. Although the exact amount is unknown, it is believed that hashish smuggling generates considerable profits for ISIS.[75]

Human trafficking and fuel smuggling are also reported as related to the financing of international

terrorism. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb is believed to be a key actor in the illegal sale of oil and fuel in southern Libya, especially around the cities of Awbari, Sabha, and Murzuq, which serve as some of the smuggling hotspots in the country. In addition, profits from broader smuggling activities, conducted in parallel with arms trafficking, finance other jihadist groups, such as al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.[76] Smuggling networks are also useful because they enable jihadist groups to move fighters as well as weapons from one location to another. In addition, smuggling hotspots often serve as recruitment hubs when more foreign fighters may be required. The violence that is associated with such activity further destabilizes the region and creates additional push factors for those considering migrating to destinations such as Europe. Smuggling routes are particularly prevalent in fragile states in which rule of law is weak, and the state is corrupt and is unable or unwilling to help its people.[77] Individuals wishing to escape repression, corruption, and violence become the customers or victims of jihadists and criminals, enabling such groups to take even deeper root.

The third related option is for jihadist fighters to travel and mix in among refugees and economic migrants. As smuggling routes are often also used to smuggle migrants, it is easy for ISIS fighters to take advantage of the existing migrant crisis in the Mediterranean by boarding boats leaving North Africa for Europe. One route for doing so involves reaching Spain by land through the small Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which sit on the northern shores of Morocco's Mediterranean coast and form the EU's only land borders with Africa. Thousands of migrants have entered Spain through this route; migrants are

housed in temporary shelters upon arrival and later relocated to the Spanish mainland, from which many depart to other parts of Europe.[78]

However, the majority of migrants leaving North Africa for Europe use the Central Mediterranean crossing, departing from Libya. This route is particularly relevant to foreign fighters as large areas of Libya are under ISIS control. In some cases, migrants are dispatched in wooden fishing vessels or inflatable dinghies destined for Italy or Malta.[79] In other cases, migrants are smuggled with items such as fuel. Fuel smuggling has become a major problem in Libya in recent years since fuel is heavily subsidized there, and can be bought in-country for approximately 15 percent of its global price.

Consequently, this has become a particularly attractive commodity for organized crime groups and terrorist organizations that run the smuggling networks. Imported fuel that is cheaper on the domestic market is commonly smuggled by ship from western Libya to Malta, Italy, and Turkey, and by land to Tunisia.[80] Fuel smuggling is concentrated around the western towns of Zawiya and Zuwara and across Libya's western land border with Tunisia. Both the Zawiya branch of Libya's Petroleum Facilities Guard and the local coast guard have been accused of involvement in fuel smuggling in parallel with smuggling of migrants from Libya to Italy, highlighting the problem of corruption, which is ubiquitous in the region.[81]

In addition, new migration routes to Europe continue to open up. These include the Black Sea for refugees trying to reach Europe, which could prove even more dangerous than the existing Mediterranean crossings.[82] There have been numerous reports of incidents in which fishing boats with migrants on board

have been intercepted by the Romanian Coast Guard and border police. One example was on August 12, 2017, when a fishing boat carrying 120 migrants was intercepted and handed over to the Turkish Coast Guard. The following night, on August 13, 97 Iraqi and Iranian migrants were intercepted in the Black Sea. Another party of 69 Iraqi migrants "were arrested trying to reach the Romanian Black Sea coast, having set off from Turkey in a motorized yacht piloted by Bulgarian and Cypriot smugglers."[83] A week later, on August 20, the Romanian Coast Guard intercepted another boat "carrying 70 Iraqis and Syrians, including 23 children, in the Black Sea in Romania's southeastern Constanta region."[84]

According to the International Organization for Migration, approximately 130,000 migrants arrived in Europe by land and sea during the first 8 months of 2017. Of these, an unknown number are jihadists, either returning to their home countries or arriving in Europe for the first time. The number is unknown because reliable assessments are unavailable in the public domain. These numbers have remained uncharted partly because the information is difficult to obtain, in addition to the subjective criteria that determine who should be considered a jihadist. Jihadists are hard to identify as such among the vast flow of migrants and, equally, non-jihadist migrants who may have their suspicions are unlikely to reveal the identity of jihadists for fear over their security.

However, more importantly, migration is politically and socially a highly sensitive topic in Europe. The result is that any organization that chooses to highlight the scale of the problem will inevitably be accused of being anti-Muslim; anti-migration; and, in general, inflammatory, and immediately discredited

as a result. The volatility of the migration topic creates two results. First, where information is published openly that broadly coincides with classified assessments, it tends to appear in sources that are unconcerned for their reputation and may already be considered to be of low credibility. Second, the volatility of the migration topic contributes to the tendency to suppress information that is factually correct but deemed politically unacceptable.[85] This is a dangerous trend as it encourages policies to be made using partial or incorrect information.

Although statistical evidence on the numbers of jihadists arriving disguised as migrants has not been made available, UK "Intelligence agencies have identified 23,000 [individuals as] jihadist extremists . . . [who were] potential terrorist attackers" in Britain.[86] Other estimates are higher. The EU's counterterrorism coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, has highlighted that there are 25,000 known jihadists in the UK, with over 50,000 across the whole of Europe.[87] These figures not only indicate the scale of the problem overall but also show the receptive environment for returning or newly arriving fighters. However, as long as evidence-based assessments of the scale of the concealed jihadist migration problem remain classified, policymaking will be severely hampered, as there will be limited public support for necessary countermeasures. There is an urgent need not only for further cooperation in collecting and sharing information but also for public dissemination so that European policy communities and security agencies may be able to develop and deliver appropriate responses.

JIHADISTS IN DISGUISE

In attempting to disrupt the movement of foreign jihadist fighters, it is important for officials to understand the fighters' likely method of travel as well as their travel origins and destinations. However, this becomes challenging for the authorities if jihadists are in disguise. For those familiar with the concept of money laundering, dirty money (money made from the proceeds of crime) is best hidden with clean money (money made from legitimate means). The same applies to jihadists. In Iraq and Afghanistan, jihadists have sometimes disguised themselves as women dressed in burqas; at other times, they have hidden under the burqas worn by women to cross checkpoints.[88] It should therefore not be surprising that migrating jihadists are disguising themselves as humanitarian workers and refugees, as verified by numerous sources. For example, according to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, jihadists are exploiting the migration crisis to enter Europe and plot attacks across the continent. The Paris attacks in November 2015 are a case in point. Two of the terrorists involved in the attacks had used fraudulent Syrian documents to enter Europe through Leros in Greece, claiming to be refugees.[89] Another example is in Germany, where more than 400 migrants who entered the country as asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016 are currently under investigation for their association with Middle Eastern jihadist groups.[90]

According to Germany's Federal Criminal Police (Bundeskriminalamt), false declarations of nationality are widespread among nationals who are unlikely to obtain asylum in the EU, are liable to be returned to their country of origin or transit, or simply wish to speed up their journey. Most refugees have falsified

documents or no identification documents at all. In fact, migrants often destroy identification documents to make it more difficult for European authorities to deport them.[91] As such, processing refugees can be challenging, a task further complicated by the sheer number of refugees who need to be processed. For example, an estimated 170,060 people illegally crossed the Central Mediterranean route in 2014, 153,946 in 2015, and more than 181,000 in 2016.[92] The situation is not helped by the fact that no penalties exist for making false declarations. It is therefore unsurprising that terrorists will also take advantage of this situation.

It is also necessary to bear in mind not only the jihadist foreign fighters who are already in transit but also those who are likely to be migrating in the future, posing a threat to a number of geographical regions. For example, according to BBC sources, there were approximately 800 foreign fighters from 50 countries being held in custody in Syria during 2018. Outside of the prisons, at least 700 women and 1,500 children are believed to be held at camps for displaced people.[93] Other estimates in the same year believe that there are 900 male fighters, 600 women and in excess of 1200 children from 44 countries.[94] The concern relating to the large number of male foreign fighters who are currently in captivity is that as U.S. troops withdraw from Syria, the Kurds will be unable to continue to guard their prisoners. This situation is exacerbated by the ongoing tension between neighboring Turkey and the Syrian Government. Ankara has expressed its intention to invade the region to seek out Kurdish terrorists who pose a threat to Turkey and, in response, the Syrian Government has vowed to reassert its authority over the territory. This instability is likely to result in further deterioration of the security environment, which,

in turn, may create an opportunity for the prisoners to escape. There has also been reporting from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights that Kurdish forces are considering releasing the detainees, although there is a lack of clarity as to who would be released and what would qualify a detainee to be released. Irrespective of whether the prisoners are released intentionally or whether they escape, the primary concern is that a withdrawal of U.S. troops would create a security vacuum that could be exploited by terrorists and criminals alike, and cause further instability in the region.

WHERE NEXT? EMERGING BATTLEFIELDS

A key question that is relevant to the U.S. Army is where foreign jihadist fighters will go next. Although ISIS's power and reach have been rolled back militarily in Iraq and Syria, there are reports that fighters are re-emerging simultaneously in parts of Asia, the Sahel, and North and East Africa.[95] Even within Syria and Iraq, the threat from foreign jihadist fighters is far from having been eradicated. UN reporting from August 2018 suggested that between 20,000 and 30,000 militants remain, mainly in the desert territory on the border between Iraq and Syria, and are well-funded and battle-ready.[96] Overall, many experts believe that the global jihadist movement continues to pose a significant threat to Western interests. According to The Soufan Group:

> The global jihadist movement is alive and well, even after the so-called Islamic State's territorial caliphate has collapsed. . . . [The Islamic State] franchises and affiliates continue to expand, including in Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Egypt and elsewhere.[97]

At the end of any conflict, foreign fighters are likely to disperse in numerous directions, but it is critical to understand the most likely destinations in order that the U.S. Army can plan its future commitments and mitigate risk accordingly. According to Dr. Colin Clarke and Amarnath Amarasingam from the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism based in The Hague, there are three categories of foreign fighters, and the direction of one's deployment can be predicted depending on one's organizational affiliation.

In the case of ISIS, the first category consists of the "hard-core fighters," referring to the foreign fighters within the inner circle of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his top commanders. This group is likely to remain in Iraq and Syria, with the aim of resting, rearming, and recuperating.[98] The second group of fighters is the "independents," described as consisting of mercenaries unable to return to their home countries. These stateless jihadists travel in search of their next battlefield with the intention of protecting, sustaining, and expanding the boundaries of the so-called caliphate. They are typically the militant descendants of the original mujahideen or transnational jihadists who once filled the ranks of al-Qaeda and fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, and in Chechnya as well as the Balkans.[99] These jihadist veterans are likely to be welcomed by ISIS affiliates and other jihadists in emerging battlefields such as Yemen, Libya, West Africa, and Burkina Faso.[100] The third and final group of foreign fighters is "the returnees" who return to their countries of origin. The potential threat posed by this group of jihadists has been a subject of serious concern and much debate by Western counterterrorism specialists. Warnings have come from experts

such as Shiraz Maher, deputy director of the ICSR at King's College London: "Europe has to keep its guard up. . . . The threat will likely become more acute in the coming months and years as the pressures on Islamic State intensify."[101]

Although the main threat from jihadists in the West primarily concerns Europe and not the United States, American lives and assets are directly affected, partly through their presence in European countries as well as the U.S.'s membership in international alliances, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). One of NATO's founding principles is that of collective self-defense, embodied in the fifth clause of the 1949 Washington Treaty, which states: "an armed attack against one or more of them [NATO members] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all."[102]

The Treaty intends for member states to assist the victims of such an attack "forthwith."[103] Since the only occasion on which Article 5 has been invoked was in response to a terrorist incident—the 9/11 attacks in the United States—a precedent has been set for NATO responding collectively to actions by nonstate actors, a principle which could also be applied on European territory. U.S. President Donald Trump's public support for NATO has been inconsistent, bringing into question the extent of the U.S. commitment to a collective self-defense. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the Western alliance, particularly the U.S.–UK "special relationship," was fundamental in facing down the threat of communism. If ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their supporters are to be strategically defeated, the alliance must persist.

As previously mentioned, it is also important to remember that security threats in Europe directly

affect U.S. interests in that they put U.S. lives at risk. For example, Americans make around 2.5 million trips per year to Britain alone.[104] In addition, an estimated 187,000 Americans, approximately the size of the population of Salt Lake City, Utah, live in the UK. Approximately 100,000 more live in France.[105] Furthermore, housed throughout Europe, American companies and military bases offer potential terrorist targets. For example, al-Qaeda's Nizar Trabelsi was convicted in September 2003 for planning a suicide attack against a NATO base housing U.S. soldiers in Brussels. Americans have also been killed by European ISIS terrorists. Examples include James Foley and Steven Sotloff, American hostages captured in Syria and beheaded in August 2014 by Mohammed Emwazi; an American college student killed in Paris in November 2015; four Americans killed in the Brussels attack of March 2016; and, another three Americans killed in the Nice attack of July 2016. In a shared security environment, jihadist terrorism in Europe, including the threat posed by returning foreign jihadist fighters, will continue to pose a direct threat to U.S. interests and to the safety of U.S. citizens abroad.

RETURNING FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Although many jihadist fighters have been killed, as previously discussed, many of those who survive go on to either join other jihadist conflicts or return home. These include fighters who have managed to escape and those who have been deployed by ISIS with instructions to carry out terrorist attacks in other areas. Upon returning home, some may form the basis of sleeper cells likely to become involved in terrorist plots at some point in the future.[106] As the territory controlled by ISIS has diminished, there have been

increased calls by ISIS leadership to conduct attacks in the West.[107]

In terms of future threats, a report published in February 2018 by Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre in the UK provides an unsettling outlook for Europe for the next 5 to 10 years:

> European countries will face an elevated terrorism threat posed by radicalized convicts, returned foreign fighters and other returnees who have direct ties to the legacy of the Islamic State.[108]

The report also suggests that the growing number of Islamist convicts is likely to exacerbate the risk of radicalization in prisons and notes that many of those imprisoned for providing support to groups such as ISIS will likely be released between 2019 and 2023, increasing the likelihood of terrorist attacks during that time unless measures are taken to counter the threat.

The situation is also likely to continue to worsen. Although there is evidence suggesting that it has become harder for individuals to leave territory controlled by the Islamic State, there are also reports that the number of individuals returning to their home countries from fighting in Syria and Iraq is increasing.[109] The average rate of return to Western countries is estimated to be approximately 30 percent, presenting a significant challenge to security and law enforcement agencies that must assess the threat that these returnees pose.[110] However, some have warned against exaggerating the threat. As Charles Lister, a former visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Center, argues:

> While genuine, the potential threat posed by returning FFs [foreign fighters] should not be overly exaggerated . . . . no more than 11 percent of FFs will pose a terrorist threat upon their return home.[111]

Lister's argument is that not all foreign fighters should be regarded as posing a threat. Some returning fighters may have become disillusioned and may actively wish to counter the threat from terrorist groups such as ISIS based on their own experiences. These individuals could be useful to the counterterrorism community by disrupting terrorist networks from within and preventing the radicalization and recruitment of foreign jihadist fighters. However, returning foreign fighters are also likely to suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as behavioral unpredictability and emotional instability.[112] As such, some experts believe that it may be more prudent to provide these fighters with psychological care and support as opposed to prison time, which is likely to expose them to further radicalization.[113]

In attempting to assess the potential danger returnees could pose, the reason why they decide to return home is worth considering. Some may decide for personal reasons, while others may return disillusioned with the groups that they traveled to join. In the case of the latter, the individual may have grown disillusioned with the group and its leadership, but not with jihad as a whole.[114] The individual may retain hostile intentions, thereby posing various security threats, including the planning and coordination of terrorist plots; supporting and resuscitating dormant, domestic, extremist networks; and carrying out lone wolf-type attacks.[115] Some individuals may return home with hostile intentions under the command and control of what remains of ISIS in the Middle East. These individuals, who are well-positioned to attempt

attacks, are possibly the most deadly. A case in point is the aforementioned Paris attacks of November 2015 that were conducted by foreign fighters who trained in Syria and were later dispatched to France to carry out the attacks.[116]

Notwithstanding Lister's suggestion that relatively few returning fighters may pose a real threat to national security, the threat posed by those who are likely to commit acts of terrorism or promote terrorism in their home countries should not be underestimated. According to the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment's Petter Nesser, who carried out an analysis of 75 ISIS plots in the West, at least a third of ISIS-linked plots against the West involved a foreign fighter, and half of these cases involved returnees.[117] Although the threat posed by returning foreign fighters will vary from individual to individual, the percentage of foreign fighters who return to their countries of origin thus remains a significant indicator of the fighters' potential threat.

Figure 3 indicates the percentage of foreign fighter returnees by country. However, these percentages do not appear to correlate to the number of attacks carried out in the countries in question directly. For example, France, which has suffered the most attacks, ranks 13th, after the United States, which highlights that the threat of jihadist attacks cannot be determined by a single factor. Even if the percentage of returnees is relatively small, the damage caused by a relative few can be catastrophic. As such, a more holistic approach to assessing the threat is necessary. This can be achieved by understanding the flow of events.
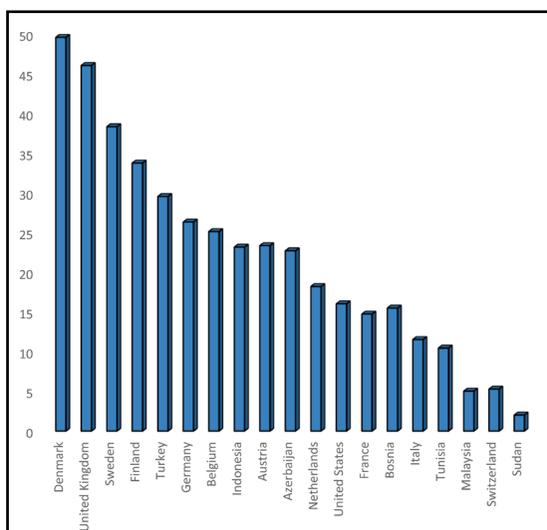
Source: Shima D. Keene.

Figure 3. Percentage of Foreign Fighter Returnees[118]

UNDERSTANDING THE FLOW OF EVENTS

The process of recruiting foreign fighters as well as how they travel from one theater to another can be summarized as follows (see figure 4).
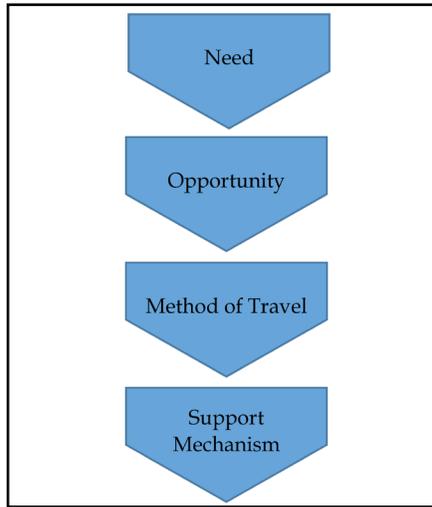
Source: Shima D. Keene.

Figure 4. Jihadist Migration Process

Need

"Need" refers to the reason why an individual may become a foreign fighter or a foreign fighter's reason for traveling to another battlefield. This factor, which kick-starts the process of jihadist migration, applies to both voluntary and forced situations. In the case of voluntary situations, examples include the need for excitement resulting from boredom; the need for a purpose coupled with the desire to do good by fighting for one's coreligionists; and a lack of employment opportunities, resulting in the need to earn money. Diminishing battlefields in the existing location also lead to the need to travel to another geographical region (battlefield) for employment. In cases of individuals who are forced to become foreign jihadist

fighters, their need to migrate to escape violence and seek a better form of life is exploited.

Opportunity

"Opportunity" refers to a situation which satisfies the individual's needs and makes it possible for him or her to achieve what he or she wants to do—namely, to travel to a new battlefield. In a voluntary case, pull factors that incentivize the individual, such as money, excitement, and other factors previously discussed under the section "Motivation," are offered to the individual. This can occur either through direct, physical, or personal contact, or through the Internet. Opportunity also refers to the physical environment that allows jihadists to travel with ease. This is particularly relevant in relation to fragile states that lack governance and suffer from high levels of corruption, where payment of a fee ensures safe passage. Poor governance or total lack thereof also results in the inability to enforce laws, if indeed adequate laws exist in the first place to tackle criminality that harbors terrorists and organized criminals alike. However, opportunities for foreign jihadist fighters to travel through and across borders undetected exists equally in developed countries.

Method of Travel

Travel can take the form of air, land, sea, or a combination of the above, depending on the geographical origin and destination. These travel routes can be further divided into conventional travel routes, trade routes, or smuggling routes, which were discussed under the section "Jihadist Migration Routes." It should be further noted that in many fragile states,

smuggling may have become a way of life, making the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate trade nebulous or nonexistent. In countries suffering from poor governance, the protection economy takes over, making the differentiation between licit and illicit trade difficult to determine. The key, however, in relation to enabling jihadist migration depends partly on who controls those routes.

Support Mechanisms

Support mechanisms are needed to enable the foreign jihadist fighter to travel from one destination to another. Depending on the origin and destination, as well as the route that is taken, relevant information is likely required to know how to use the correct documentation to bypass authorities and enter the country, and whom to contact after entering the country. Having the right connections, including corrupt officials, is essential to navigating through and around criminality. This cannot be done without support from a wider network, from origin to final destination.

Each stage of the jihadist migration process involves enablers that allow jihadists to proceed onto the next step. Understanding these enablers helps to assess the nature of the threat and identify opportunities for disruption.

UNDERSTANDING THE ENABLERS

The identification of key enablers will allow the U.S. Army not only to understand how foreign jihadist fighters migrate but also to predict where they are likely to travel. This, in turn, will enable better predictive analysis to be conducted to assess future threats as well as identify opportunities for disruption.

Disrupting jihadist migration in partnership with civilian authorities such as law enforcement and border control personnel will also allow the threat from foreign jihadist fighters to be better controlled. This knowledge has the potential to transform defense operations and military readiness. The following are some of the key enablers of jihadist migration.

The Internet

The Internet, including social media, enables radicalization as well as the recruitment of foreign fighters.[119] While most commonly associated with lone wolves, the Internet has been used to radicalize individuals who have then traveled to Syria to fight for ISIS.[120] The Internet is also used as a method of communication which can be used to disseminate propaganda and information of use to the foreign fighter. The humanitarian cause has been a key part of the narrative for groups such as ISIS requesting the support of foreign fighters through the Internet. Their messages typically involve statements characterizing the enemy as brutal toward civilians and even women, children, and the dead. Amid such brutality, foreign fighters are seen as liberators who fight to protect the vulnerable.[121]

According to Europol, the European police office, there are at least 30,000 active jihadist websites. The problem currently is that EU legislation does not require Internet service providers to collect and preserve the metadata of customers, including information on jihadists' locations, due to privacy concerns. This hinders the ability of the police to identify and deter jihadists. However, the problem has been recognized, and measures are being taken to address this

issue. A 2-day meeting of Group of Seven (G7) countries and tech companies, including Google, Facebook, and Twitter, in October 2017 led to an agreement to work together to block the dissemination of Islamist extremist content over the Internet. This is a promising step, although it is too early to assess its effectiveness. It remains unclear to what extent this will affect the threat posed by migrating foreign fighters.[122]

Poor Governance and Corruption

Poor governance and a general lack of state control allow criminal groups and terrorist organizations to operate with impunity.[123] These organizations are often involved in a range of illicit practices, such as trafficking and smuggling, that can be used to transport foreign jihadist fighters. Libya is a case in point: corruption is ubiquitous, especially along key borders; this, in turn, facilitates smuggling. When government officials and law enforcement personnel are willing to take bribes, and may even rely on bribery, these further increase risk appetite in favor of illicit activities, including the illegal crossing of foreign jihadist fighters. Poor governance infrastructures also make it difficult to detect, disrupt, or successfully prosecute those who are involved in activities such as bribery, extortion, false accounting, and embezzlement, as well as more general forms of crime, including terrorism. This is relevant to jihadist migration because these are the factors that enable jihadist support networks to flourish.

Networks

Terrorist networks, both physical and online, are fundamental in radicalizing and operationalizing

foreign fighters. These networks link foreign fighters with jihadist networks and provide information about potential targets as well as advice on how to execute attacks.[124] Support networks for foreign fighters can be divided into two broad categories. The first relates to moral support. According to the ICSR database, which tracks radicalized individuals, a group called "the disseminators" provides support through the provision of information and moral support. By providing encouragement and justification, the support inspires individuals to undergo radicalization and mobilize.[125] The second category concerns in-country networks facilitating the migration of foreign fighters. For example, there are reports that foreign fighters leaving Syria travel to Libya, either as an end destination or as a stopping point for traveling through to Europe or to other battlefields in Africa. This is facilitated by jihadist networks, which include organized crime groups and local militias.

Inadequate Counter Threat Finance Measures

Although money is not always the main incentive for foreign fighters, it can nevertheless be a key driver. In terms of networks that facilitate the travel of foreign jihadist fighters, money transfers are essential, either as part of a business or as bribery payments. The human migration business can be extremely profitable, not only in terms of providing access to various modes of travel but also in terms of producing necessary documentation, such as false passports and visas, as well as travel advice. Individuals and groups involved in transporting foreign fighters are also typically involved in all types of illicit trade which are highly risky but highly profitable. To counter this problem, measures must be put in place to detect and

confiscate funds and assets derived from illicit trade as well as develop the ability to prosecute the individuals responsible for the crimes. This applies to laundered money as well as corrupt payments made directly into bank accounts overseas in financial centers such as Dubai. Threat finance measures are also invaluable for obtaining financial intelligence, which can in turn help identify terrorist and criminal networks. These illicit networks can then be exploited for the purpose of disrupting jihadist migration.

Vulnerability of Nongovernmental Organizations and Refugee Camps

Cases in which individuals (workers and refugees) in refugee camps are targeted by terrorist organizations such as ISIS and al-Shabaab for the purpose of foreign jihadist fighter recruitment have been discussed above. Foreign fighters can disguise themselves as refugees to gain passage, as elaborated upon earlier. There are also reports of individuals traveling to battlefields such as Syria for humanitarian reasons and becoming foreign fighters in situ.[126] In other cases, foreign fighters, especially British nationals, have entered Syria under the guise of aid or humanitarian workers.[127] This blurs the distinction between legitimate aid agencies and groups facilitating the transfer of foreign fighters.[128] The vulnerability of many nongovernmental organizations is worsened by the fact that their main focus is on the delivery of aid as opposed to their own security.[129]

A further complication is that in some cases, former ISIS members were abducted and forced to join the group. In these circumstances, it may well be that since they never willingly joined ISIS, they are merely victims who need to be rescued and do not

pose a threat. However, in some cases, they may have been forced to join ISIS, but once part of the group may have become radicalized. This situation is not unique to individuals who have been abducted by terrorist organizations. Stockholm syndrome is a condition where a hostage is brainwashed and develops empathy with his or her captors. Although the condition is traditionally better associated with female victims developing a connection with her male captors, it could apply more universally. Irrespective of whether they were forced to join the organization—even where individuals have claimed that they no longer, or never did share the radical ideology held by their captors—it is very difficult to make an accurate assessment as to whether they are genuine in their remorse or future intentions.[130]

Then there is the very difficult matter of the children who were born into this situation through no fault of their own. Should they be treated as innocent victims, or an emerging threat, especially in relation to those who are close to adulthood? Tens of thousands of children have served and are serving as soldiers in armed conflicts around the world. Boys and girls as young as 8 years old take a direct part in combat, as well as participate in suicide missions or intelligence gathering, or act as messengers or lookouts.[131] These children are victims, but nevertheless they are lethal, and once captured, their healing process is slow due to the physical and psychological trauma that they have been subjected to from a young age. According to *The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidance on Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups* from 2007:

> A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes. [132]

In other words, if a child reaches the age of 18 in captivity, he or she is no longer a child soldier by definition. Is it right that they should be treated the same as an individual who joined the group intentionally as an adult foreign fighter? Although there is no single answer or solution to these issues and assessments must be carried out on a case-by-case basis, there is a natural tension between the humanitarian perspectives adopted by international nongovernmental organizations and concerns from a security threat perspective adopted by security institutions which should be appreciated.

CONCLUSIONS

The jihadist battlefield typically refers to theaters of conflict such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Some foreign jihadist fighters have become continual migrants, moving from one conflict to the other—for example, from Afghanistan to Bosnia, then on to Chechnya, and further to Syria. Nevertheless, the battlefield can also be in developed, industrialized countries where jihadists are encouraged to carry out attacks against the West. These attacks can be carried out by foreign jihadist fighters originating from conflict zones and traveling to the West. Alternately, these attacks can be carried out by foreign jihadist fighters originating from the West, returning home after being radicalized at home or online, and traveling to conflict zones to

obtain training and combat experience. In other cases, refugees have become targets of recruitment.

Recent U.S.-led military successes against ISIS will result in surviving foreign jihadist fighters attempting to disperse. Their loss of territory and resources will also increase jihadists' desire to perpetrate acts of terrorism abroad as a form of revenge. Some foreign jihadist fighters may travel to ISIS-governed provinces, while others may head to fragile states. Once established locally, these individuals may attempt to maintain the status quo by carrying out high-profile attacks, kidnappings, and ambushes. These actions would perpetuate insecurity in the region, while the deep penetration of smuggling activities into local economies through bribes, gainful employment, and access to black-market goods and weapons would ensure that the smugglers came to control trade throughout the region. Others may attempt to return to their homes in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Although the threat from returnees is limited on U.S. soil, U.S. interests in other regions of the world are directly affected.

Countering different types of threats from different groups of foreign jihadist fighters will require a range of strategies. The fighters who remain in Iraq and Syria must be dealt with by Iraqi Security Forces and the rest of the coalition battling ISIS. In response to jihadists traveling to fragile states, continued efforts to build the capacity of host-nation forces to strengthen the rule of law and promote good governance and a host of other medium- to long-term objectives are essential. In terms of foreign jihadist fighters returning to the West, the United States should ensure it is part of the international effort to identify and detain these fighters, with an eye to either prosecuting or rehabilitating,

depending on individual circumstances. The U.S. Army should familiarize itself with all aspects of the foreign fighter problem, including motivation, recruitment methods, and migration routes, in order for a proactive analysis to be developed. To be effective, this analysis should identify future security threats as well as appropriate measures taken in concert with allies and partner agencies to disrupt not only migrating foreign jihadist fighters but also the networks that support them.

These efforts would require new thinking and the development of a new approach to address the threats. As such, the following recommendations should be considered by commanders and policymakers in order to begin to address the key issues. This would require a change in culture—i.e., a move from descriptive to predictive analysis and a shift in mindset for the armed forces. The cost advantages of anticipating issues before they materialize can be significant. This would require a holistic change effort that combined the front line, intelligence and analytical talent, and engineering and business personnel who have detailed knowledge of the industries involved. The following recommendations should be adopted by senior U.S. Army decision makers and other U.S. Government officials considering policy responses to the problem of extremist migration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Understand the Network

- Enhance intelligence assessments by widening the scope of network analysis to include organized crime groups and government

officials who are enabling foreign jihadist fighter migration.

- Assessments should take into account the key motivations for collaboration as well as how it occurs. Critically, emphasis must be placed on illicit logistical supply chains, including smuggling and trafficking routes, and how these routes can be disrupted for the purpose of the prevention of the movement of foreign fighters.

Recommendation 2: Prevent Recruitment

- Be aware of the humanitarian narrative in enemy information operations and seek ways to address and counter these messages for the prevention of foreign fighter recruitment.
- Recognize that not all foreign fighters are the same and should not be treated as such. This is particularly relevant in relation to returnees. Be mindful that some foreign fighters could potentially be useful in preventing future attacks.

Recommendation 3: Tackle Corruption

- Enhance understanding as to how corruption enables partnerships to form among organized crime groups, irregular groups, and state officials in fragile states, which in turn enables jihadist migration to occur.
- Collaborate with allies and partner agencies to identify the ways in which corruption can be tackled.
- Consider how financial intelligence can be used to identify corruption as well as a means to disrupt corrupt individuals and networks.

Recommendation 4: Address Knowledge Gaps

- Identify and address existing knowledge gaps in relation to emerging battlefields in Africa and the Middle East.
- Encourage military intelligence personnel to consider how and where the threat of migrating foreign fighters will reappear as a result of ISIS's loss of territory in Syria and Iraq.

Recommendation 5: Provide Training and Education

- Develop training and educational programs that enable personnel to develop a deeper understanding of the potential threat posed by foreign jihadist fighters as well as its relevance to future U.S. Army operations.

Recommendation 6: Adopt an Integrated Approach

- Reach out to non-military partners where appropriate to ensure that the widest possible intelligence assessment is established from both counterterrorism and counter-crime perspectives in tackling the problem of foreign jihadist fighters.
- Engage in dialogue with a view to developing a collaborative approach to tackling the problem of foreign jihadist fighters.

Recommendation 7: Predictive Analysis

- Improve the ability of the U.S. Army to anticipate future jihadist conflicts through predictive analysis.

- Consider how tackling any one component of the threat foreign jihadist fighters pose may have unintended consequences as well as how these can best be mitigated.

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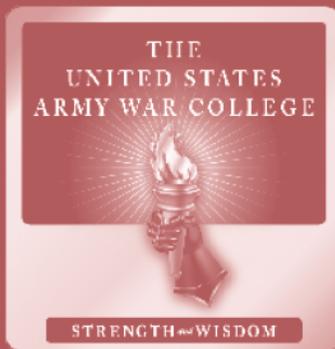
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