JIHADIS AT THE GATE:
Policies on Returning Foreign Fighters and their Impact on International Security

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“We bless those who are in the countries of the Crusaders, in Canada, Europe, and elsewhere. What they have done to support their brothers, may Allah reward them, the supporters of the Caliphate should follow in their path, and trust in Allah, and carry out an attack that breaks their heart, and rip them apart, either with gunfire, or a stab to their bodies, or a bombing in their countries, for this is equal to a thousand operations here.”

- Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Leader of the Islamic State 2014 – 2019
Retrieved from The House Homeland Security Committee Majority Staff Report

Since the territorial and monetary decline of the Islamic State, foreign fighters from an array of countries have begun to seek repatriation by their host nations. Approximately 30,000 of the Islamic State’s foreign fighters have survived the conflict, many of whom have been detained in Syria or Iraq. Recently, the relevance of this topic has increased considerably. The U.S. withdrawal from Syria left the Kurdish forces in Northern Syria vulnerable to a Turkish invasion and exacerbated security concerns regarding the detainment centers hosting Islamic State fighters and their families. Policy makers and governments have and will continue to face challenges while reintegrating returned foreign fighters back to their host nations. Given that the Islamic State is pervasive across international borders, this is a global concern that requires efficient and appropriate responses. The question is, what policies are in place, if any, that reduce the likelihood of attacks or use of violence from returning foreign fighters? While a universal approach across state actors may not be conceivable, this paper analyzes the international response to the phenomenon in terms of prevention, de-radicalization procedures and responses from law enforcement personnel to returnees. Furthermore, this research provides actionable recommendations for future policy implementation and counterterrorism procedures in response to the threat of returning foreign fighters.

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2 The Islamic State is recognized by a variation names to include the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The author will continue to reference the organization as ISIS (interchangeable with the Islamic State), despite its self-proclaimed name change to the latter.
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Introduction

In August 2017, a Pew survey revealed that fear of an attack from ISIS, was ranked the number one fear in overall global concerns. According to the House Homeland Security Committee Majority Staff Report of 2018, between the years of 2014 and 2018 the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had developed 243 terrorism plots, in which thirty percent of those discovered plots were directed towards the United States. In 2014, ISIS declared itself a “caliphate” and occupied territory amounting to the size of the United Kingdom. In 2018, the Islamic State’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, disclosed an hour-long audio segment openly commanding his followers to continue attacking Western civilizations in their homelands, by any means possible, and to enforce the success of the Islamic State. However, the true success of the Islamic State has been accredited to its institutional efforts, organizational skills, and its highly influential propaganda.

On October 26, 2019, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a U.S. Special Forces raid in Syria. While the operation was deemed a success for the U.S. military, there may be some consequences to the victorious maneuver. Al-Baghdadi is now seen by his jihadi followers as a martyr. Some security experts and analysts have warned that the organization may conduct retaliatory strikes or activate sleeper cells to avenge al-Baghdadi’s death. Many would like to believe that with the death of its leader, ISIS will fade into nothingness. However, organizations such as the Islamic State have historically announced a new leader and remained unified under the umbrella of their cause.

Increasing the situation in Syria is the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the subsequent Turkish invasion that followed. Turkey’s negligence to regional and international security by invading Syria potentially enables an ISIS resurgence and leaves detainee and refugee camps increasingly vulnerable. The Kurdish forces, in which Turkey is targeting in their invasion, proved to be an advantageous ally of the United States against ISIS in what was labeled “Operation Inherit Resolve.” After the defeat against ISIS, the U.S.-backed Kurdish soldiers guarded thousands of ISIS fighters and their dependents (wives and children) in detainee and refugee camps. Residing in those camps are foreign fighters, who could potentially try to return home and promote ISIS ideologies and attacks if not repatriated properly. The recent evolution of the current situation in Northern Syria has caused the Kurdish forces to retreat from their posts, leaving the camps vulnerable and could result in ISIS escapees fleeing and regrouping in more remote areas that are harder to surveil. Regarding these foreign fighters, former United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) commander, Retired General Joseph Votel stated,

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“Securely detaining thousands of Daesh fighters is a matter of global security and the SDF needs the assistance of the international community… Repatriating foreign terrorists to their countries of origin for potential prosecution is the best long-term solution to prevent them from returning to the battlefield.”

The General’s statement underscores the need for an international approach to develop a successful repatriation program in order to enhance global security. While the combination of territorial losses and international responses have decreased efforts and deterred individuals from traveling to Syria to fight with the Islamic State, the factors that influenced said individuals to become radicalized may not have been eradicated. It will be imperative to analyze the phenomenon carefully in order to formulate an appropriate and applicable response.

**ISIS and the Threat of Returning Foreign Fighters**

ISIS dominated the international stage in 2014 when it declared its caliphate and spread horrifying propaganda videos displaying beheadings of Western citizens at the hands of fellow Westerners and young children. Additionally, the organization announced that it would furthermore be called “The Islamic State” and would be dropping “in Iraq and Syria” as to acknowledge its intentions of global domination. The self-proclaimed caliphate was rich with support, weapons, and currency. The organization’s objectives were to depose American allies in the Middle East, disrupt world markets, inspire revolutions abroad, and launch attacks against non-believers in Europe and the United States. As of 2015 the organization had conducted more than 4,900 terrorist attacks, killed more than 33,000 people, injured 41,000 more, and kidnapped over 11,000 individuals. At one point the Islamic State controlled over 34,000 square miles of territory between Iraq and Syria.

The organization displayed highly effective tactics and strategies through its recruiting efforts. With the organization’s vast outreach, ISIS was able to influence over 40,000 individuals from around the globe to travel to Iraq and Syria to join their cause as foreign fighters for jihad. After the

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7 Idib.
declaration of the caliphate in 2014, the United Nations Council passed resolution 2178 that declared states must,

“prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping of individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the preparation, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, and the financing of their travel and of their activities.”

After five years of chaos, the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces claimed defeat over ISIS and eventually was able to declare 100% territorial defeat in Syria. Even after the defeat of ISIS, the threat the organization’s ideologies maintain are prevalent. It is important to acknowledge the difference between an operational defeat and an ideological defeat. While the organization does not currently hold substantial territorial ground, its ideologies still flourish. Detention camps throughout Syria contain over 70,000 detainees and approximately 10,000 of those detainees are foreign fighters. These camps face inhumane conditions and have resulted in the death of roughly 240 children due to famine and disease. The conditions throughout the camps only further motivate radicalization and pose as breeding grounds for extremist ideologies. While some nations have allowed small numbers of foreign fighters to return home, most European nations have refused repatriation overall. In the United States, the FBI is actively pursuing U.S. citizens in Iraq and Syria to prosecute and convict them.

Furthermore, the U.S. government has increased pressure on its European allies from which many ISIS foreign fighters originated. Many European countries have continuously refused and have even revoked the citizenship of some of their foreign fighters. However, due to a lack of evidence allowing governments to formally charge these individuals with war crimes, some nations fear retaliation and the lack of ability to prosecute their returning foreign fighters if they allow them to return. At the same time, leaving these individuals in detainee camps in Syria poses a major international security concern. With or without the backing of U.S. forces, Syrian Kurdish forces are spread thin guarding over 70,000 ISIS fighters and their families. Furthermore, with the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the Kurdish allies have been forced to retreat. In a report to the inspector general of the U.S. Central Command, it was reported that “ISIS was likely exploiting the lack of security at the camp to recruit and reestablish communications.”

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14 Idib. p. 202
15 Idib.
However, nations continue to fear the return of these individuals currently detained in Syria and Iraq over the potential outcomes from the detainment centers in the future. Returning foreign fighters pose a risk to security for multiple reasons that are listed as followed: the training they have received, their experiences from battle, capabilities, network connections and their lack of empathy towards violence and destruction. Evidence has shown that a substantial number of returnees remain active in extremist networks upon return to their host nations.\textsuperscript{18} Assessing the threats posed by returning foreign fighters will prove to be difficult and present many challenges. However, it is necessary to identify such threats in order to enhance international security for near and long-term perspectives.

Since the establishment of the self-proclaimed “caliphate” by the Islamic State in 2014, scholars have been carefully analyzing this new wave of foreign fighters. Furthermore, while the defeat of the Islamic State should be renowned, it is important to acknowledge that the threat has not been entirely subdued. Due to disillusionment from the Islamic State, such as destruction and the murdering of other Muslim groups, many foreign fighters who aligned with the organization in Iraq and Syria desire to return home. However, many governments and policy makers are reluctant to do so out of fear of endangering their national security by repatriating these foreign fighters back into their societies. The following section will discuss what previous scholars and academics have revealed regarding the latest wave of foreign fighters and their threat to international security.

Professor Peter Neumann, from King's College London and the Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, has identified that there have been four waves of terrorism throughout history. Furthermore, he categorizes the most recent wave of terrorism as the “religious wave” and correlates this wave to the globalization of the Islamic Revolution.\textsuperscript{19} This also coincides with the global connectivity and the expansion of Islamic radicalization. The spread of ISIS is often attributed to the fallout of the Arab Spring. Nesser explains the influence of the Arab Spring and the propaganda the Islamic State dispersed in response to its failures. According to Nesser, ISIS differed from its predecessors in that its recruitment tactics were far more advanced and directed towards a much broader scope of individuals. As a result, the recruitment efforts on behalf of the Islamic State resulted in the highest number of foreign fighters of any conflict in world history.\textsuperscript{20} In addition to broadening its regional approach to recruiting efforts, ISIS also historically drew more women into the organization than any previous jihadist movements.\textsuperscript{21}

Naturally, with more women being involved in the organization the influx in the number of children moving to the region or born in the region has subsequentially increased. In one particular scholarly article, “Youth De-Radicalization: A Canadian Framework” from the Journal for Deradicalization, the encourages discussion around a proactive method to the terrorist threat to the West through a preventative approach, specifically targeting the youth population. The article also critiques the

United Kingdom for its lack of community-based programs and deradicalization methods. The research conducted in this study found that deradicalization efforts are most effective when integrated with a collective community effort. The Canadian framework not only highlights the influence ISIS may have with misguided youth, but also underlines the consequential security and humanitarian issue: the children of ISIS. Furthermore, Costanza (2015) highlights long term security threat of children born to ISIS men and women and exemplifies psychological factors that may influence these children.

Scholars and academics have identified that the foreign fighter phenomenon is a complex and dynamic international concern that must be handled with great caution and effective policy implementation. First and foremost, countries are faced with the challenge of deciphering who poses a threat to society. Of those who want to return to their host nations, who is potentially returning with the intent of further engaging in terrorist activity? Some scholars have made efforts to further explain why some individuals may be able to psychologically justify their actions. Hill (2016) explains that when political offenders partake in criminal acts, they believe they are doing so on behalf of a certain group, society, or religion and therefore exempts them from the law. This particular article provides an interesting perspective that identifies that the “security first” approach that is often utilized by nations and results in missed opportunities to influence reform and provide long term solutions.

If nations are to implement effective policies regarding the return of foreign fighters, policy makers and governments worldwide must achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the process by which it occurs. Additionally, in order to combat this aspect of the foreign fighter issue in the long-term perspective, scholars have emphasized that a thorough analysis of the radicalization process for individuals needs to be examined on a case by case basis in order to implement an effective deradicalization program. Some scholars assert that understanding the underlying causes can help to identify a counter approach that will be easier and more effective to implement. Due to the exceptionally diverse recruitment efforts of ISIS, a blanket approach will not result in sufficient rehabilitation of radicalized individuals. Furthermore, equally important is understanding the defect phase. Policy makers and governments must analyze what factors caused the individuals to defect from ISIS and to what extent they have defected.

Methodology and Limitations of the Study

Although national and international security maintain a symbiotic relationship, a boundary exists between the two that creates a grey area filled with comprehensive matters that concern both state and international governments. For the purpose of the study, the author has defined important terminology below as it is intended to be utilized throughout the paper.

- **National security**, defined by the UN Chronicle, is the ability of states to provide protections and defense of its own citizens.\(^{27}\)
- The independent variable of this study has been identified as international security, which is directly influenced by the dependent variable, foreign fighters and defined by the RAND Corporation as the military and diplomatic actions that states and international organizations enforce to encourage mutual protection and security.\(^{28}\)
- **Foreign fighters** have been defined by the United Nations as individuals who travel to state other than their own to perpetrate, plan, or participate in terrorist acts; or providing or participating in terrorist training including any sort of connection with an armed conflict.\(^{29}\)
- Lastly, according to Marriam-Webster repatriation is defined as restoring or returning “to the country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship.”\(^{30}\)

To access the problem of returning foreign fighters, this paper relies on open source documents that include scholarly articles, literature, unclassified government documents, and research databases. Through narrative, qualitative, and quantitative analysis, this study explores different factors that lead to radicalization of foreign fighters and the approach of states to returning foreign fighters after their involvement with the Islamic State. The globalization of terrorism threatens international security. While there is no exact scientific measurement for international security, one may be able to correlate the effectiveness of international security by some measure of insecurity or, in contrast, the confidence of states in international organizations to ensure the safety of all.\(^{31}\) Therefore, this study examines what policies are in place, if any, to reduce the likelihood of attacks, or use of violence, from returning foreign fighters?

Due to the high contribution France and the United Kingdom have made to the foreign fighter population (displayed in Figure 1), this research will conduct a case study analysis of both nations and their responses to returning foreign fighters of the Islamic State. Lastly, in the recommendations


section of this analysis, this study will present a visual breakdown of the evolution of a foreign fighter with further explanation on potential for intervention. Limitations to the study are as follows:

- Individuals may be reluctant to speak openly about such matters for fear of reprisal. For many individuals and their families, they may be embarrassed or fear prosecution if they speak openly about such matters. Fighters who have traveled back to their nations of origin under the radar, whether maliciously or not, may be less than willing to subject themselves to prosecution and potential incarceration. Fear of retaliation from the organization itself may also play a factor in individuals’ willingness to discuss the matter openly. This coincides with the next limitation of the study.

- Survey data may be ambiguous. As with all surveys, individuals tend to alter their actual opinion or affiliation with such groups when responding to a survey. Survey data is much more applicable in cases with lower risks and outcomes.

- Much of the foreign fighter population is deceased. As previously mentioned, the Islamic State achieved a much higher number of foreign fighters than any of its predecessors. However, many have been thought to have died with the cause. Furthermore, of those residing inside in refugee and detainment camps throughout Syria, they face further risk for survival due to disease and famine. The number of individuals that have died in the conflict causes a huge gap in analysis. Additionally, the ability to track such individuals in a war-torn country is far more complicated than host nations are willing to endure on behalf of their foreign fighter populations.

- Reluctance of States to repatriate their citizens results in lack of statistical data. A small number of foreign fighters have officially been repatriated by their host nations, and when nations do so they are reluctant to broadcast that information for fear of reprisal from the general public. This factor combined with the fact that States are generally denying repatriation results in a lack of statistical data. The last limitation of the study may be far more imperative than the rest.

- Exclusive accessibility and danger when associating with the Islamic State. Many journalist and scholars have been reluctant to travel to the region given the danger associated with doing so. In the past, the Islamic State has held hostage and murdered journalists or aid workers. Therefore, obtaining information from inside the organization is far more difficult when seen as an outsider.

- Limited data is available of successful repatriation cases involving Islamic State foreign fighters. While this has been an ongoing issue in the last decade, few individuals have actually been repatriated into society. Furthermore, for those who have, little data is available due to the amount of time they have been reintegrated back into society. Actual statistical data will be limited for the near future until processes and programs can be fully analyzed.
Case Study Analysis

France

On November 13, 2015, at least eight ISIS terrorists conducted multiple attacks in Paris, France that killed 130 individuals and injured 352 more. This was the third terrorist attack in France in 2015. Enabling these attacks was the critical failure of detection, monitoring, and neutralization of the returned foreign fighters that conducted the deadly attacks. Furthermore, intelligence agencies had also identified three of the terrorists as having traveled to Syria to fight with the Islamic State. However, surveillance had failed to spot them traveling throughout the country which ultimately led in the ability to conduct the attacks.33

“…the French population does not want them back. There’s a certain revenge mode for a lot of French people. They are getting what they deserve after everything we suffered.”

- Myriam Benraad, a research fellow at the Institute of Research and Study on the Arab and Muslim Worlds in France

While intelligence and surveillance failures attributed to the attack, the overlying issue is France’s response to returning foreign fighters. The November 2015 attacks in Paris were among the deadliest ISIS directed attacks and disparagingly exemplifies the need to address the foreign fighter issue. If ISIS continues to weaponize its recruits from other nations, the threat to international security will simultaneously increase. According to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, an investigation revealed that eight of the nine attackers had traveled to Syria and most of them had returned to France three months prior to the attacks. Two of which had returned in October via the refugee flow from Greece. In 2015, French citizens accounted for approximately one third all European jihadists that traveled to align with ISIS. However, this is not the first time that France has had to endure the return of jihadi fighters from abroad. Indeed, French jihadis have been involved in conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Somalia, and Iraq for over thirty years. In 2013, a study found that approximately one in nine of those previous foreign fighters returned intending to perpetrate attacks, posing a huge risk to national security. Furthermore, France’s former counterterrorist judge, Marc Trevidic, reported that 50 percent of French jihadis that returned had reengaged in terrorist networks and all major terror plots in France since 2000 were affiliated with returning foreign fighters.

Due to the large influx in jihadi fighters that France contributed to the ISIS during its evolution, the country has been more active than others in international discussions regarding the issue. The country estimates that around 500 of its citizens, including men, women, and children are currently detained in Syria. Of those, 60 are labeled as “feared jihadists”. In efforts to face the issue and enhance national security, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian (along with delegates from seven other European countries) went to Iraq to negotiate terms of an Iraqi “warehouse” for French foreign fighters returning from ISIS. While the implementation of detention and prosecution of foreign fighters in Iraq would alleviate France’s immediate national security concerns, Iraq is reluctant to accumulate any prisoners who did not partake in crimes in

Iraq. Therefore, those who solely only traveled to the Islamic State in Syria would have little to no grounds for prosecution in Iraq.

Most of the French population (89 percent) does not desire to repatriate its foreign fighters. Myriam Benraad, a research fellow at the Institute of Research and Study on the Arab and Muslim Worlds in France says that prosecuting individuals in Iraq is chastely a political move and that, “…the French population does not want them back. There’s a certain revenge mode for a lot of French people. They are getting what they deserve after everything we suffered.” However, the Iraqi justice system is commonly known for its judicial abuse. Reports of trials lasting a mere ten minutes, as well as torturous and forced confessions, are common throughout the country. Therefore, France trying its foreign fighters in Iraq could invoke humanitarian and legal concerns with regards to international law. Additionally, the typical conviction of terrorist association in Iraq is the death penalty. A United Nations representative of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights expresses great concern for French nationals facing the death penalty since the death penalty has been abolished in France. The recommendation has been made by the United Nations that the French government repatriate and convict its foreign fighters on French soil, not Iraqi.

The United Kingdom

On May 22, 2017, 22 individuals, to include children, were killed and 59 were injured in a suicide bombing at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England. The suspect was 22-year-old Salman Abedi. Abedi was known to have been born in the United Kingdom to Libyan refugees. The 22-year-old traveled to Syria to become a foreign fighter before returning to the United Kingdom to carry out the attack.
"The explosive devices were detonated in the shameless concert arena, resulting in 30 Crusaders being killed and 70 others being wounded. And what comes next will be more severe on the worshipers of the Cross and their allies, by Allah’s permission. And all praises due to Allah, Lord of the creation"

- The Islamic State in its claim of the Manchester Bombing

The United Kingdom has contributed approximately 850 citizens to the Islamic States foreign fighter population. The United Kingdom is one of the European countries who has continuously stated that it will not repatriate citizens who left for the Islamic State and have even gone as far as revoking citizenship of its foreign fighters. Furthermore, it has established an agreement with Turkey that deportations will not occur without prior consent. In 2017, 104 British individuals had their citizenship revoked, compared to 14 in 2016. Under Section 40 (2) of the British Nationality Act 1981, the Home Secretary is allowed to “deprive a person of citizenship status if he or she is satisfied that this deprivation is conducive to the public good” and as long as the revocation does not leave the individual stateless.

However, in the case of Shamima Begum, a young woman who traveled to the Islamic State in 2015 at the age of 15, the revocation has been greatly disputed. In 2015, after Begum had left the United Kingdom with three friends, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner announced that if the three young women desired to return, they would not be prosecuted as terrorist. Although, in 2019 when Begum requested re-entry, the United Kingdom revoked her citizenship and declared that because her mother was also a citizen of Bangladesh, Begum was also a dual citizen. Bangladesh rightfully rejects this claim as Begum has never been to Bangladesh. The nation states that since she was born in the United Kingdom, and furthermore, radicalized in the United Kingdom she is not Bangladesh’s problem. For the time being, Begum is de facto stateless. This continues to raise...

47 Idib.
questions, not only in the case of Begum, but as well as the legal obligations of States to their citizens and their individual rights regardless of their actions.

The United Kingdom has had many approaches to the foreign fighter phenomenon, some of which have been heavily criticized, such as the Prevent program. The program was created with good intentions; however, it became apparent that the program was flawed and was even potentially counter-productive. Prevent was established in 2003 in response to fears concerning domestic terrorism. In 2015, the program was extended to schools, universities, and health care organizations which required doctors, teachers and other professionals to identify individuals that were at risk of being radicalized. Some concerns regarding the program have criticized its actions as discriminating towards Muslim groups and overall counterproductive. Interviews conducted with two females who felt targeted under the Prevent program revealed how the program could have pushed them in the opposite direction of what was intended by the mean in which it was implemented.

“I’ve never felt not British. And this [Prevent experience] made me feel very, very, like they tried to make me feel like an outsider. We live here. I am born and bred here, not from anywhere else.”

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“It could have gone the opposite way if I wasn’t thinking straight, if I were the type who was being brainwashed. The way they went about it, [Prevent] could have made me do exactly what they told me not to do. I associate with Prevent negatively, it is not helpful at all.”

When wrongfully targeted, programs such as Prevent can make particular demographics in society question their belonging. Given that alienation is a high contributing factor to radicalization, such programs should be analyzed and implemented carefully as to not be counterproductive.

In recent years, the United Kingdom has been redeveloping its approach to the phenomenon. Instead of revoking citizenship, it is proposing the idea of allowing temporary exclusion that would invalidate the foreign fighter’s passport but allowing a one-time permit to return home with the conditions that the individual must cooperate with law enforcement and actively participate in deradicalization programs.

Causal Analysis

In order to fully understand this era of foreign fighters, it is critical to understand the root of the problem. In the case of foreign fighters of ISIS, the overlying cause of the problem is radicalization.

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49 Idib.
50 Idib.
Analyzing influencing factors that lead individuals to become foreign fighters is pertinent to policy formulation and implementation. Furthermore, we must seek to understand the conditions in which these individuals defected from the organization and if they still maintain the group’s ideology upon return. Given that France and the United Kingdom have higher rates of contribution, it should be analyzed accordingly as to what factors correlated to this higher contribution. It is important to recognize that policies and programs enforced by government and law enforcement could be contributing to radicalization.

Factors contributing to radicalization can be broadly categorized as micro-level and macro-level factors. Micro-level determinants would be deprivation, adventure, political grievance and a sense of belonging or significance. Macro-level determinants would be globalization and modernization or the outcome of a particular foreign policy. Even though radicalization is generally classified as an individual process, group dynamics are also likely to contribute to radicalization as a result of macro-level factors.52

Radicalization is often associated with a matter of degree in which it is measured by the deviation of motivational balance. In other words, what is an individual willing to do to feel harmoniously satisfied towards their motive? Furthermore, an individual may neglect societal and family norms if engaging in such behavior enhances their objective. This is the underlying cause to radicalization in which terrorist organizations strive from to recruit individuals. Some scholars have attributed the radicalization process to three pillars: need, narrative, and network. The need lies within a deep-rooted desire for meaning and relevance that is often displayed within terrorist ideologies based off constructs of behavior such as honor, revenge, religion and loyalty. In response to these factors, societal norms would suggest one go into constructive and nonviolent profession. This is why the narrative is so critical to the radicalization process and furthermore to the understanding of the individual radicalization.

Analyzing why one possesses the ideologies they do is important to understanding the process of radicalization. Do they feel the need to act in a particular way out of reaction towards a specific event or cause, such as discrimination or retaliation to Western governments? If so, are the individuals’ manifestations positively correlated with their reaction and cultural values? If not, individuals may support violent extremism to gain significance and meaning behind their cause. Lastly, researchers have emphasized the influence that social networks have on the radicalization process. Through these networks, individuals are acquainted with like-minded narratives that enhance their personal motives and ideologies. These networks allow for the justification of violent ideologies and provide a sense of belonging. Furthermore, those susceptible to charismatic recruiters will find themselves increasingly vulnerable when a combination of all three pillars exist.53

Figure 2. The Evolution of a Foreign Fighter. This figure displays the five phases of becoming a foreign fighter and the potential for the evolution to develop into a cycle if no intervention occurs. Created by the author using information from Road Warriors written by Daniel Byman, 2019.

The figure above displays the evolution of a foreign fighter as discussed by Byman (2019). The evolution phase provides many opportunities for intervention and prevention. Step two and three allow for preventative measures, and while some may argue all is lost at step four, step five also affords opportunity for action if policies are accurately implemented. As previously discussed, there is no single profile for those who are vulnerable to be radicalized. However, there are warning signs and when combined with other factors identifying such signs may present themselves and be easily recognizable. It is important to avoid targeting a community as a whole as to avoid further motivations for radicalization. Utilizing resources, such as social media and international intelligence programs to share information could enhance monitoring and solidify counter-terrorism efforts.

Policy Implications

Until 2017, the efforts of policy makers regarding foreign fighters was focused on preventing individuals from traveling to the conflict region. However, in 2017, the focus shifted to address those who successfully left and wished to return. Governments have displayed various responses consisting of hard and soft approaches in regards to returning foreign fighters, though hard approaches remain popular amongst governments and the general public. Hard approaches include,
but are not limited to, administrative measures, citizenship revocation, entry bans, prosecution and imprisonment. Prosecution can be difficult due to lack of evidence; therefore, it is a common defense mechanism of nations to revoke citizenship of those wishing to return. Soft approaches are policies that fall under countering violent extremism and include rehabilitation and deradicalization programs. These approaches can be useful in recognizing that individuals are radicalized in various ways and applying the correct de-radicalization approach in response. Furthermore, these approaches are also beneficial those who are considered victims of the organization, such as children.57

Countries revoke citizenships for two reasons: to protect and prevent.58 While it is understandable that governments and the general public would prefer to not repatriate returning foreign fighters, denying entry or revoking citizenship poses a long-term security threat. There are only 400 Syrian Kurdish guards employed at the detention camp, al-Hol, in Syria which holds over 68,000 individuals. Increasing vulnerability of these detention centers, is the conflict between Syria and Turkey.59 If guards are forced to evacuate the area, the potential for individuals to escape are exceedingly likely. Furthermore, in a technological era, physical restrictions may not prohibit attacks nor deter one from returning illegally. Denying re-entry potentially pushes the perpetrator farther into hiding or conducting illegal movements, which could be dangerous in itself due to lack of monitoring and control.60

The revocation of citizenship is typically justified by aggregated terrorism combined with potential and immediate risks to societies. This is a direct reflection of “passing the buck” and States responsibility to international security.61 Without policies in place to either prosecute or repatriate these individuals, they become a burden to another government or society who may not have the resources or capabilities to address the severity of the issue. This also creates further implications for international security as it provides an opportunity for ISIS to resurface. When hosted together in large numbers, radicals fuel motivations and become overwhelming for the diminutive number of guards and infrastructure available for detention. Furthermore, rejection by one’s host nation may promote contributing factors, such as polarization and the need for belonging, that may have led the individual towards radicalization. This action could enhance extremists’ motivations for terrorist

attacks on the homeland or elsewhere. As this is an international issue, international solidarity will be required to have long term effectiveness and success towards countering this phenomenon.62

Concerning the extradition of foreign fighters to Iraq, the execution of foreign fighters outside of nations of their own has been heavily critiqued among defense lawyers and human rights activists and additionally contradicts international law customs. However, proving nations involvement in extraditing individuals can be very complicated. Nation’s obligations to human rights generally fall within their own jurisdiction. To ensure state sovereignty, crimes that have been committed abroad are generally prosecuted where the crime has been committed and within that States legal system. That being said, States do maintain the right to intervene in situations where human rights violations have or will occur. In a particular case involving French citizens, seven French men were said to have been arrested by the Syrian Democratic Forces. After France refused their return, the men were then transferred to Iraq. France has denied the use of this kind of extradition. However, if states are involved in such activities it potentially betrays national and international legal obligations. This is particularly true in the case of France, considering it is privy to the European Convention of Human rights and its 6th Protocol Concerning the Abolition of Death Penalty. Article 5 of the European Protocol mandates that the extradition of individuals to a nation where the death penalty is expected to be used violates human rights to life. This imposition is not merely limited to a formal extradition. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 19.2, states that extradition (formal or informal), “to a State where there is a serious risk that he or she would be subjected to the death penalty, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Therefore, any state belonging to the European Union at the time of extradition, would constitutionally violate obligations ratified in its international treaties.63

Women and children also pose significant challenges in nations responses to foreign fighters. Historically women and children had been largely ignored in counter-terrorism policy evolutions. However, in the last several decades the number of women participating in terrorist acts has risen significantly. Women are generally seen as victims in counter-terrorism practice. As a result, an entire demographic is ignored which sequentially produces security risks and reduces acknowledgement to the complexity of the issue.64 ISIS had recruited the largest number of women in jihadi history. The organization not only featured women in its international propaganda, but utilized them as actual recruiters for Western women. Typically, extremists’ groups will delegate women to fill noncombative roles and utilize them as a reproductive means for the organization.65 Women in the organization were encouraged to marry soon after arrival and were expected to have children just as quickly. This is correlated with the organization’s attempt to keep the women busy and deter them from wanting to return to their nations of origin. The group participates in archaic rituals such as

62 Idib.
marrying off young girls as young as the age of nine. Furthermore, women who are part of the all-female brigade, Al-Khansaa, conducted patrols (sometimes violently) in ISIS controlled territory on behalf of the Islamic State. The purpose of these patrols was to enforce the rules and regulations of the Islamic State. When analyzing female returnees, it will be important to determine their role within the organization and the degree of commitment. The most central role of women within the organization has been child rearing and marital servitude. Some woman had in fact been coerced or tricked by their husbands into traveling to the Islamic State. Still, many traveled to the region for the same reasons as the men, which are feelings of isolation, the need for belonging, and revenge against repressive regimes or discriminating governments.

**Recommendations**

Nations must uphold their obligations to international security and repatriate their citizens. To not repatriate returning foreign fighters only provides immediate short-term security to that particular nation. If individuals at risk in these detentions’ camps are allowed to escape, they may regroup and create and ISIS resurgence. Or, escapees may return to their host nations undetected and engage in terrorist activities within their homeland. The ideal goal is successful rehabilitation. Nations are encouraged to further engage with organizations whose purpose and objectives align with the defeat of ISIS and enhance international security such as the United Nations, the Global Coalition, and INTERPOL. In September of 2014, three months after the caliphate was declared, the United States announced the implementation the “Global Coalition” to defeat the Islamic State. The organization was created to combat the global challenge of international instability caused by the Islamic State through five different means, which were to provide military support to partners, impede the flow of foreign fighters, stop the organization’s financing and funding, address humanitarian concerns throughout the region, and expose the true nature of the group. While military support is obvious in its nature to defeat such an organization based of terror and chaos, humanitarian assistance is also an important factor to creating regional stability. In June 2019, a joint statement delivered by the Global Coalition acknowledged that the fight against ISIS did not end with its demise of territorial gains and stated verbatim:

“We must maintain the appropriate level of military engagement in the Core to support the Iraqi government and our local partners in Syria in their ongoing

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68 Ibid.

69 INTERPOL is the International Criminal Police Organization made up of 194 member countries that enables nations to share and access data through a secured network, as well as hosts working groups and conferences to share experiences and ideas. https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/What-is-INTERPOL

efforts against Daesh/ISIS' clandestine cells. Taking into account the uncertain security situation on the ground, it is particularly important that Coalition military forces remain in the Levant to provide the necessary support to our partners on the ground.”

Furthermore, the statement also emphasizes the importance of preventing foreign fighters from further engaging in terrorist acts. The coalition recommends increasing reliance on INTERPOL for the information sharing while maintaining a presence in Syria to deflect any chance of an ISIS resurgence. The Coalition has made great strides in its efforts against the flow of departing foreign fighters. In the partnership of 81 countries and organizations, over 69 countries have endorsed laws to prosecute and convict foreign fighters traveling to an outside territory to join a terrorist organization. Additionally, more than 60 countries and the United Nations have contributed over 25,000 foreign fighter profiles to INTERPOL, 26 countries share financial information with the United States that could assist in prosecutions, and at least 31 countries have enhanced security measures concerning travelers.

In November 2019, shortly after the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo addressed the small ministerial group meeting of the Global Coalition. He advised and reiterated that the United States, as well as its allies, must maintain a presence in Syria and Iraq, and to be vigilant to where the extremist group may have its sights directed for its next territorial advance. Furthermore, the coalition should continue efforts, such as training security forces in various regions to ensure ISIS does not relocate to Afghanistan, Jordan or Tunisia. Counterterrorism efforts built through this coalition will be ultimately more successful by implementing proactive measures against an ISIS resurgence.

Many of those who have traveled to the Islamic State are disillusioned and disappointed in the group’s morals and values. Those who have successfully returned and have benefited from deradicalization programs may also serve as a counternarrative, particularly to the vulnerable youth. Placing these figures in schools and religious venues to influence and dissuade others could be an applicable and cost-efficient measure. Ultimately, successful measures correlates to trust in the government. Given that friends, family members, and associates will most likely be the ones able to

72 Idib.
76 Idib. p. 253
77 Idib. p. 254
initially identify the radicalization indicators, they must have faith in the government to respond appropriately and taken preventative action. Governments must be mindful of their measures in order to not further motivate radical groups and alienate specific sects of the community.

If intervention is implemented in the evolution of a foreign fighter as suggest in Figure 2, government actions involved in step three can be somewhat complicated and potentially dangerous. If an individual is beyond help at phase one and two, governments may attempt to disrupt ones plans to travel abroad if suspected of being affiliated with a terrorist organization. While intercepting individuals before they leave their nation to align with ISIS may over all reduce the number of foreign fighters, it could potentially create frustration and further motivate individuals if not monitored and enrolled in an effective deradicalization program.\textsuperscript{78} It is advised to continue monitoring travel of suspected individuals as well as implement a deradicalization pathway created and based upon a risk assessment of that individual.

Once abroad, the influence that nation states have on individuals is very limited.\textsuperscript{79} This is specifically crucial in regions like Syria where chaos is prevalent throughout the country, making it hard to track and prosecute individuals. Many of those individuals who had traveled to the Islamic State did not survive the conflict. However, those that have may desire to return home especially now that ISIS has little territorial influence in the region. If all intervention attempts have failed to this point, this is the most opportune moment to enhance long term international security. If countries can effectively repatriate their citizens and ensure rehabilitation, national and international security will be enhanced. By analyzing each individual factor for radicalization, an effective and specific deradicalization program can be implemented. For example, if in an individual was vulnerable to radicalization because he or she desired a sense of belonging and struggled with identity association, implementing a community approach (given the individual was not convicted of international or humanitarian crimes) and ensuring that individual feels welcome in his or her own society may enhance rehabilitation efforts. This will be a hard sell to the general public. Many individuals throughout societies do not want to be affiliated with the likes of those who have willingly associated with the Islamic State. This is understandable, however, will further alienate individuals who were already vulnerable to radicalization efforts in the past. Maintaining confidentially, outside of government, law enforcement, intelligence agencies and potentially employers, will be required for the success of this approach.

If the individual did commit international crimes or crimes against humanity an alternate and more punitive approach will be necessary. Imprisonment may be required, however, as stated previously incarceration provides opportunity for further radicalization. When imprisonment is necessary, states should incorporate non-extremist religious leaders, families, and organizations to monitor and

\textsuperscript{78} Idib. 255
\textsuperscript{79} Idib. p. 259
assist in the individuals deradicalization process and help him or her further integrate into society after incarceration.\textsuperscript{80}

Lastly, children in the region are being born in conflict zones and often left with no parents or citizenship. These children cannot be held accountable for actions beyond their control and should be treated as victims of terrorism. States must combine joint efforts to determine citizenship and safeguard against stigmatic treatment to further counter radicalization possibilities in the future.\textsuperscript{81} This approach should be applicable to any individual under the age of 18. This does not, however, exclude legal prosecution of those who have traveled willingly on their own accord.\textsuperscript{82}

**Conclusion**

It is evident that returning foreign fighters will be a challenging task for policy makers in the developing occurrence. It is important to acknowledge that hard approaches alone will not address the issue in its entirety, but will require criminal justice measures along with prevention and rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{83} What governments have failed to realize is that jihadism is a movement and is not devout to one particular organization. Defining real success will require structural and ideological changes in approaches to counter-terrorism efforts. It is important to identify that organizations, such as ISIS, have festered from previous social, political, and religious factors.\textsuperscript{84} Furthermore, while it is apparent that foreign fighters have potential to threaten international security, this threat can be reduced by effective policies and proper implementation of such policies. However, it is likely that domestic terrorism may be more of a risk than repatriating returning foreign fighters from ISIS. This can be explained due to the fact that upon return, many foreign fighters are mentally and physically exhausted, disillusioned, disappointed, and sometimes regretful. Therefore, they do not pose as much as a risk of those who attempted to travel to the Islamic State and were disrupted, or those who never received the chance to contribute to the organization. Those individuals who have not fulfilled their dreams of fighting for the Islamic State may very well decide to turn their motivations to the homeland as a target. Further research is required to establish a connection between foreign fighters and domestic terrorists. However, this does not entirely rule out foreign fighters as a threat on their own accord. It will be important for States to heavily monitor and repatriate its citizens carefully to avoid them from further influencing potential jihadis and the vulnerable youth, or worse conducting an attack themselves.

\textsuperscript{80} Idib. p. 264
\textsuperscript{82} Idib.\textsuperscript{83}