Foreign Fighters: Defining the Concept and Assessing the Effectiveness of Policies to Counter Them
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Presented to the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
in the context of accreditation for completion of the
Major Research Paper

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23-03-2016

Abstract

Foreign fighters who join the conflict in Iraq and Syria are increasingly seen as a growing source of insecurity. Prior to this conflict, and to the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that preceded it, the term foreign fighter was absent from the literature in security studies. The concept has quickly gained a great deal of attention from the media and decision-makers. The field of security studies has not kept pace, with only a handful of authors focusing on this topic. Estimates vary, but there are at least 20,000 foreign fighters involved in the conflict in Iraq and Syria. This significant movement of non-state violent actors presents unique challenges that warrant an in-depth study of this topic, especially as decision-makers begin enacting policies to counter the movement of foreign fighters. This major research paper seeks to bring together the relevant literature on the subject of foreign fighters as a means of conceptualizing the concept and providing recommendations to its further research and study. This paper builds on various definitions of a foreign fighter and explains the motivations of this unique non-state actor. It then uses this theoretical foundation to assess the effectiveness of current counter-foreign fighter policies and concludes that these policies are inadequate and problematic as they are likely to increase the risk of domestic terrorism and other violent acts without effectively countering the movement of foreign fighters into conflict zones. Furthermore, counter-foreign fighter policies tend to prevent or deter individuals from returning to their home states, thus keeping them from demobilizing which may create long-term impacts on global stability.

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Introduction

Today's states must compete against transnational collective identities in order to protect their space of legitimacy. The consequence of this competition is that traditional aspects of states are now being challenged by non-state actors. Loyalty to the state is a key feature of contemporary nation-states but some scholars claim that this loyalty has been eroding since the end of the Second World War and is increasingly being captured by other forms of social organization.[1] If such claims are true, then reflective study on the different non-state actors who challenge the state is critical to drawing an accurate picture of contemporary security studies.

One emergent topic in contemporary security studies that is increasingly garnering attention is the concept of foreign fighting. The term 'foreign fighter' has been popularized by the media and researchers in regards to the ongoing conflict in Syria and Iraq over the last two years.[2] The term itself only came into existence less than a decade ago in connection to the 2001-2014 War in Afghanistan and the 2003 US Invasion of Iraq.[3]. When new security concepts are first coined, there is a tendency to anchor their research within traditional fields of study. As such, the foundation for the current understanding on foreign fighters rests within broader research on Islamic radicalization and terrorism, particularly given that it was within this context that foreign fighters initially drew the most interest. However, and not insignificantly, foreign fighters have been present in 20 percent of conflicts since 1810.[4] It is therefore clear that the existence of foreign fighters is not intimately related to contemporary radical Islam and terrorism.

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1 William McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 377.
2 Cerwyn Moore, "Introductory Comments to Foreign Fighters Research: Special Mini-Series," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27 (2015): 393-394.
3 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 215-216.
4 Ibid., 43.

While foreign fighting is not a new phenomenon, the concept a foreign fighter is still being defined and bracketed within the broader field of security studies. At this time, there are only a handful of authors who actively look at foreign fighters. The two main authors are David Malet, who wrote the most comprehensive book on the subject and conducts an historical analysis of the topic through several case studies, and Thomas Hegghammer whose quantitative research, often cited in the literature, assesses the threat posed by returning foreign fighters. It is a new topic in security studies which requires further study, especially as the phenomenon is attracting a great deal of attention on the part of decision-makers. This major research paper aims to contribute to the existing, albeit small, body of research on foreign fighters by taking a theoretical approach to argue that that failure to conceptualize foreign fighters as a distinct and unique subset of non-state actor threatening state legitimacy will translate into ineffective strategic security policies to counter foreign fighting. To do so, this paper will be divided into four chapters.

Chapter one defines the concept of foreign fighter and argues that a foreign fighter is a type of non-state violent actor that should to be regarded as notionally different from other similar actors (terrorists, organized criminal organizations, rebels). The term itself was made popular in the context of radical, Al Qaeda-styled, Muslim organizations. There is thus a tendency, especially on the part of decision-makers, to associate the concept of foreign fighting with terrorism. While it may make sense legally and politically to associate the two together as the contemporary instances of foreign fighters are most often joining terrorist organizations, conflating the two concepts may create more harm in terms of addressing counter-foreign fighter policy and does not provide to give a valid representation of past instances of foreign fighting. Foreign fighters thus require a definition that treats them as ontologically separate from other kinds of violent non-state actors. This paper does so by first starting

at the state level by examining state structures and their influence on the creation of a class of dissidents among their population. Dissidents have in common the fact that through their actions they harm the legitimacy of the state. This category creates a common ground through which all violent non-state actors can be compared. This chapter then concludes by concretely defining foreign fighters by drawing from Malet's definition of foreign fighters "as noncitizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts".[5] The contribution of this paper to this definition is to include individuals who migrate to join the insurgency but do not become combatants or participate directly in combat operations. This is particularly important as insurgencies often seek to replace the old political order with what they see as legitimate. Part of this process is to demonstrate that they are capable of effectively replacing the previous political order. Thus, individuals who become part of the insurgency's state-like structures need to be included.

Chapter two investigates contemporary instances of foreign fighting in Iraq and Syria to highlight what qualities differentiates them from other instances of foreign fighters. It is especially relevant for the later discussion on the impact of counter-foreign fighter policies. It is also necessary as Malet counts 70 instances (20 percent of all conflicts) of foreign fighters being involved in conflicts since 1810. The foreign fighter in Iraq and Syria thus has unique qualities that present different challenges to decision-makers and researchers. In particular, this section highlights the connection of foreign fighters to the Al Qaeda narrative (AQN) and the modifications this narrative has taken since the end of Soviet-Afghan War to attract a new generation of foreign fighters. One of the key findings is that the contemporary foreign fighters include a great deal of veterans from the Soviet-Afghan War and other conflicts that involved Muslims (Bosnia). This particular group did not demobilize after the conflict ended unlike other instances of foreign fighters. This consideration will also be important to

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5 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 9.

analyze the impact of counter-foreign fighter policies.

Chapter three creates a model of the motivations of foreign fighters that goes beyond theories of radicalization which tend be too linear and fail to explain why a large portion of individuals who radicalize never commit any form of violence. It coins the concept of 'reasonableness' which draws on rational-actor theories, social network analysis, and the concept of affordance to paint a picture of the motivations of potential foreign fighters. This section defines the interests of potential foreign fighters as socially provided by the networks in which they interact. As they consume more radical material and interact more with like-minded individuals, their sense of duty shifts toward this new identity. By explaining this shift, reasonableness provides an explanation of why Westerners, who apparently have little connection to the conflict in Iraq and Syria, travel to join the fight. It also paves the way for the discussion of counter-foreign fighter policies and their impact on the behaviour of this type of actor in the next chapter.

Chapter four assesses the impact of counter-foreign fighter policies from two angles: the impact of policies on foreign fighters' decision to go abroad and on their return. It begins by bringing a brief legislative overview of these policies in the West, which are mostly based on criminalizing the act of foreign fighting or treating it as a type of terrorism. Often, they will restrict the movement of suspected foreign fighters by revoking passports. This overview is followed by the application of the consumer-choice model on these policies to determine how it affects the behaviour of these actors. The model finds that current policies will likely result in an increased number of domestic terrorist attacks or other violent acts. At this time, there is a lack of data to test this model but there have been a few cases where it seems to be valid, especially in Canada. From the point of view of returning foreign fighters, many are prevented from combing back to their home countries due to travel restrictions or are deterred to do

so due to threats of criminal sanctions. This will likely contribute to the trend seen in past conflicts involving AQN styled organizations where foreign fighters have failed to demobilize. With the numbers of foreign fighters involved in current conflicts, this is may present a significant challenge to long-term stability in the region.

Finally, the conclusion places emphasis on the need for more data on the topic of foreign fighters. At this time, there is very little data on the movement of foreign fighters, even less so on individuals. This not only makes theory-testing difficult but also makes it difficult to assess the impact of policies on the behaviour of foreign fighters. Existing databases on foreign fighters are typically created by individual academics or institutions and are limited in their scope. There is nothing akin to the International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE) database for foreign fighters and databases on terrorism do not code for foreign fighters (except those who overlap with terrorists). There are indications that the foreign fighter phenomenon is going to become more prevalent over time, especially if the new generation of foreign fighters is kept from demobilizing. A more comprehensive database would therefore prove invaluable in dealing with this phenomenon.

Chapter One: Defining Foreign Fighters

In approaching the subject of foreign fighters, it is helpful to view them as part of a broader category of actors that affect the behaviour of states. Foreign fighters interact with other actors in a meaningful way. If they are not an isolated phenomenon[6], then it makes sense to adopt a top down approach to defining them. This will help to not only operationalize the concept but also to position it in relation to other actors. This section will thus define the concept of foreign fighters by placing them in the context of a broader category of dissenters which are found within states. Thus this section will be divided into three parts. First, a definition of the state will be established to highlight the impact of dissenters on states' behaviour. Next, the category of dissenters will be developed by drawing from multiple definitions in security studies. Finally, the concept of foreign fighters will be concretely defined and placed in relations to other categories of actors.

To begin with, understanding the underlying structures of the state can help inform its relationship with other states as well as its relationship with its own population. This later point is key for the discussion on non-state actors. The set of papers written by Collier and Hoeffler on the subject of civil war highlight the relationship between feasibility (reasonable expectation of success) and civil war.[7] Applied more broadly, it is conceivable to say that some kinds of state structure make some types of political actions (including violent ones) feasible and some others do not. State structure has two central components: Legitimacy and capability. These two components are found in almost every

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6   Lindsay L. Heger, "The Globalization of Conflict: Explaining *Foreign Fighters*," *Global Governance* 19 (2013): 631-633.

7   For their latest one, see Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 61 (2009): 1-27.

definition of a state in one form or another.[8] The first component of state structure, capabilities, refers to a state power, in the realist sense. States with a great deal of capabilities are those who equally have a great deal of resources to project against threats to their interests. The second component, legitimacy, refers to the relationship between the state and its citizens. It is best understood by splitting the latter in two groups: those who agree with the policies, politics, and ideas of their state, and those who do not. That is to say, every state has a group of citizens that recognizes its states' legitimacy and a group that does not. The proportion of individuals who fall in either group is significant as they can affect the character and behaviour of the state by either undermining or strengthening its legitimacy. Strong states are therefore those that do not have to spend a great deal of resources to impose their sovereignty on their citizens while conversely, weak states must turn much of their resources inward.[9] It is important to note that in this context 'strong' and 'weak' does not refer to state capabilities, but rather to the social structure of the state itself which includes its legitimacy, the aggregate loyalty of its population, and the unitary idea which contributes to keeping the social contract together..

Thus the relationship of the state with its citizens is based on its capabilities and legitimacy. A state with a great deal of both legitimacy and resources is likely to have fewer problems with violent non-state actors than a state with less of either. When discussing non-state actors, it is important to look at the concept of a 'shadow state' used by Reno. A shadow state refers to a form of social organization and governance that exists behind the "facade of laws and government institutions".[10] In other words, a shadow state can be understood as an abstract region of governance which escapes a state's grasp. This is used to explain why some states are not structurally functional even though they appear to have all

8   Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, "Statebuilding without Nation-building? Legitimacy, State Failure and the Limits of the Institutionalist Approach," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 3, no. 1 (march 2009): 23.
9   Barry Buzan, *People, State, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post Cold-War Era* (Boulder: Lyenne Rienner Publishers, 1991) 97-98.
10 William Reno, "Clandestine Economies, Violence and States in Africa," *Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 434.

the structural aspects of a state (an executive branch, a justice system, a bureaucracy). Reno explains that rulers in fragile states use the shadow state, a network of patronage behind the facade of state structure, while they ignore the formal structures of the state. These rulers end up behaving like other private entrepreneurs of violence[11] and thus have a stake in maintaining the *status quo* given that they benefit.

If the definition of the shadow state is expanded to include all the different power brokers in society who act in a manner which either ignores or breaks the rules of the state, then it is possible to divide the society of any given state in two broad categories. This division is more representative of the world considering violent non-state actors are present beyond poor or fragile states[12]. In any given state there are those who agree with the policies, politics, and ideas of their state and those who do not. The first group (those that agree) reinforces the legitimacy of the state through the replication of its systems of meaning. By following the laws and conventions of society, people are passively reinforcing these systems. The second group (those that do not agree) undermines the legitimacy of the state, either as a goal (terrorists) or passively by ignoring the sovereignty of the state (organized criminals).

Dissenters

The group that does not agree with a state's policies, politics or ideas is sometimes referred to as a 'spoiler.'[13] This refers to the fact that some groups benefit from the shadow state and thus seek to preserve the *status quo*, or, 'spoil' efforts to enact political change. While this term is useful to capture

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11 Ibid., 448.
12 Diane E. Davis, "Non-State Armed Actors, New Imagined Communities, and Shifting Patterns of Sovereignty and Insecurity in the Modern World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no.2 (August 2009): 221.
13 Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers State Building, and the Politics of Coping," *International Security* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2006/2007): 74-106.

the fact that some high level criminal organizations and warlords have a stake in preserving both the facade of the state and its shadow form, it misrepresents the fact that many non-state actor networks behave in a way that ignores the conventional nation-state construct. Non-state actors create their own space of sovereignty in alternative or imagined communities which disregard the presence or absence of a state around it[14]. Some non-state actors do not act against, for, or within the state, but act in spite of the state. As such, it is more useful to refer to them as dissenters. Dissenters are individuals who reduce the legitimacy of the state within the states' space of sovereignty either as a goal or as a consequence of their actions. This concept encapsulates networks of actors who either passively undermine the legitimacy of the state by ignoring its rules (organized criminals) and those who seek to change the political order (rebels, terrorists).

A new kind of terrorist?

Foreign fighters should be labeled as a type of dissenter but understood as a category distinct from terrorists. Some academics[15], governments[16][17], and international organizations[18] label foreign fighters as a type of transnational terrorist. It is instrumentally useful for states to delegitimize foreign fighters by defining them as a kind of terrorist.[19] This permits states to use special measures to address foreign fighters, such as the revocation of passports or citizenship, by associating the group with the

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14 Diane E. Davis, "Non-State Armed Actors, New Imagined Communities, and Shifting Patterns of Sovereignty and Insecurity in the Modern World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no.2 (August 2009): 226.

15 Max Manwaring, *Gangs, Pseudo-Militaries, and Other Modern Mercenaries: New Dynamics in Uncomfortable Wars* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

16 See for example Canada which closely relates foreign fighters to terrorists: Public Safety Canada, *2014 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada* last modified 16-12-2015, http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/2014-pblc-rpr-trrrst-thrt/index-eng.aspx

17 The response of most countries to foreign fighters has been to tailor their counter-terrorist legislation to encompass foreign fighters. See Somini Sengupta, "Nations Trying to Stop their Citizens From Going to Middle East to Fight for ISIS," *New York Times*, 12 September 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/world/middleeast/isis-recruits-prompt-laws-against-foreign-fighters.html

18 UN Security Council Resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014).

19 Peter Calvert, *Terrorism, Civil War, and Revolution: Revolution and International Politics* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010): 1.

greater fear of terrorism. This act of securitization by political actors is well understood in the field of security studies.[20] The association of foreign fighters to terrorists is thus a political action. The epistemological definition of foreign fighters must not be based on the legal one put forward by states as this latter is used for instrumental purposes. While it has been useful for states to conflate foreign fighters and terrorists as one group for the reasons mentioned above, it is not useful to do so when trying to think about the term critically. Furthermore, this conflation may have negative repercussions in terms of developing effective policies for countering foreign fighters, as will be discussed later in the paper.

It is also interesting to note that the association between foreign fighters and terrorists is only observable in the case of contemporary foreign fighters who go to Iraq and Syria. There are currently foreign fighters in other contemporary civil conflicts. In particular, there are reports which indicate that foreign fighters are active on both sides of the conflict in Ukraine.[21] There is likely to be other instances of foreign fighters in conflicts which are not gathering attention and thus are not being measured. The fact that foreign fighters outside of the conflict in Iraq and Syria are not being labeled as terrorists indicates that the association between foreign fighters and terrorists is unique to foreign fighters who are joining Middle Eastern conflicts.

It is theoretically possible to see some transference effect between domestic terrorists and foreign fighters[22] where some individuals will change their behaviour and adopt the two different tactics under different circumstances; however, it has not historically been true that both categories

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20 For an in-depth view of this process see Barry Buzan, *People States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era 2nd edition* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991).
21 Patrick Jackson, Ukraine war pulls in foreign fighters, BBC News, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28951324, 1 September 2014.
22 Raphaël Leduc, "Bombs at Home or Fighters Abroad: Domestic Security Policy and its Impact on the Migration of Foreign Fighters," *Vimy Paper,* Conference of Defence Associations Institute (Forthcoming).

overlap. At first glance, this seems to be a unique trend witnessed as part of the broader al Qaeda-inspired Jihadist movements since the end of the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union.[23] Recent literature on the subject of foreign fighters argues that foreign fighters should be regarded as a distinct type of non-state actor[24]. From the perspective of understanding dissenter groups, this argument makes further sense given that foreign fighters do not seek to undermine the legitimacy of the state in the same manner as terrorists. Terrorism is classically defined as the use of violence to achieve political goals.[25] Terrorism is a confrontation between two actors, typically between the state and a non-state group. By traveling to fight abroad, an individual foreign fighter does not actively seek to undermine the legitimacy of the state he is departing from. Instead, foreign fighters undermine the legitimacy of their home state by engaging in a form of personal foreign policy, thus not recognizing the sovereignty of their home state in this area. They undermine their home state in the international arena by making the state appear as a source of threat and instability to others. Foreign fighters also affect the states they transit to in a similar way if the state is seen as a key node for their travel. Turkey, for instance, is facing criticism and scrutiny as it appears to be a safe haven for foreign fighters making their way to Syria and Iraq.[26] It is thus not the act of fighting which harms the legitimacy of the states they depart from or transit through, but rather the act of traveling illicitly.

If the act of travelling illicitly harms the legitimacy of the state, then it is because foreign fighters intend to fight for an unsanctioned purpose that makes their travel illicit. Any definition of foreign fighters must therefore not only account for illicit migration, but also for illicit combating. As mentioned previously, there is a tendency to conflate contemporary foreign fighting with transnational

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23 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013).

24 Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of the Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 5 (Winter 2010/2011): 55.

25 Kshitij Prabha, "Defining Terrorism," *Strategic Analysis* 24, no. 1 (2000): 125-135.

26 Michael Noonan, Phyl Khalil, "North American Foreign Fighters," *Journal for Deradicalization* (Winter 2014/15): 70.

terrorism in the academic[27] and legal field[28]. However, terrorism refers to a very particular form of political violence. While there is a tendency to see contemporary terrorism as transnational and global in scope,[29] not all foreign fighters who travel engage in explicit acts of terrorism. Current databases on terrorism, such as the International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE) database, do not track foreign fighters and do not count each instance of foreign fighting to as an act of terrorism. For example, a summary look at ITERATE indicates that 14 terrorist incidents occurred in Syria in 2014. Out of those 14 incidents, 11 were initiated from Syria itself, two from Lebanon, and one from Israel[30]. This falls considerably short of the 25,000 foreign fighters who are estimated by the US government[31] to have joined the conflict in Iraq and Syria. That there is no overlap between foreign fighter estimates by the US and one academic database on terrorism does not demonstrate that the concepts of foreign fighters and terrorists are not the same. However, it does indicate that there must be caution in equating the two. So while it would not be surprising if some foreign fighters became terrorists, these two types of actors should be treated as distinct categories since conflating the two risks misidentifying the concept of foreign fighters and appropriate policies to counter their movement..

David Malet insists that a more appropriate term to refer to foreign fighters is 'transnational insurgents'[32] given that it highlights the dual nature of illicit migrants and illicit combatants. For reasons of clarity, 'foreign fighters' is the preferred term used in this paper as this is the more popular

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27 For example, see John R. Schindler, *Unholy Terror: Bosnia, Al-Qa'ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad* (St Paul: Zenith Press 2007).
28 The Gevena Academy when studying the legal framework surrounding foreign fighters relies extensively on the counter terrorism legal framework. See Geneva Academy, *Foreign Fighters under International Law* (Academy Briefing no. 7, October 2014).
29 Charles W. Kegley, *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls* (Upper Saddle River, Prentice Hall 2003).
30 ITERATE (iterate_common_file_y_2014; accessed January 20, 2016), https://ciser.cornell.edu/ASPs/search_athena.asp?IDTITLE=2340
31 US House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee Task Force, *Final Report of the Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel*, (September 2015): 12.
32 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013) 9.

one. Malet provides a strong starting point in defining foreign fighters, "as noncitizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts."[33] Hegghammer attributes four characteristics to foreign fighters as agents:

1- Who have joined an insurgency;

2- Lack citizenship or co-ethnicity with the conflicting factions;

3- Are not official agents of a state; and

4- Do not receive payment.[34]

Both of these definitions narrow the subject. Crucially, they exclude private security companies (PSC) and mercenaries since these groups receive a salary in exchange for their services. There have been some reports that foreign fighters do receive a salary for their work which therefore challenge Hegghammer's definition.[35] The important distinction for Hegghammer, however, is that income is not the primary motivation behind the decision to become a foreign fighter, particularly for foreign fighters leaving the West since they have greater opportunities to earn higher revenue at home.[36] Both definitions leave some room for the possibility that foreign fighters may not actually take on the role of combatant. An individual who joins an insurgency may not necessarily become a combatant.

Thus, a complete definition of foreign fighter should include the variety of actors who migrate

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33 Ibid.
34 Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of the Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad*," International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/11): 53-94.
35 Jessica Hartogs, "ISIS cuts fighters' salaries due to 'exceptional circumstances'," CNBC, http://www.cnbc.com/2016/01/20/isis-cuts-fighters-salaries-due-to-exceptional-circumstances.html, 20 January 2016.
36 Estimates for the monthly salary of foreign fighters vary. If reports on the recent cuts on their salary are to be believed, then foreign fighters probably earn around 200 to 300 USD per month. See Carla E. Humud, Roberg Pirog, and Liana Rosen, "Islamic State Financing and U.S. Policy Approaches," *Congressional Research Service* (April 2015): 13. Jürgen Todenhöfer who travelled in the IS controlled areas claims in his book that it was closer to 50 USD but it is not possible to verify his figures. See Jürgen Todenhöfer, *Inside IS – Tage im 'Islamischen Staat* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2015).

and commit themselves as a member of the insurgency in any capacity or role. For example, women who travel to Syria and Iraq to become brides for local fighters contribute greatly to the legitimacy of the Islamic State (IS) and their recruitment efforts. Some gender studies scholars claim that these women are no different than men who travel to fight[37] by highlighting the fact that gender roles and expectations are different in conflict situations. The problem with the inclusion of non-combatants within the definition of foreign fighters is that it creates large zones of overlap between different categories of non-state actors. For example, at which point does a foreign aid worker become a foreign fighter if he is involved in helping communities who are under the control of a challenger to the state authority? Alternatively, does a foreign doctor who treats combatants, as well as non-combatants, become a foreign fighter? At the same time, foreign aid organizations have been used in the past as a front to channel foreign fighters into Afghanistan during the invasion of the country by the Soviet Union, including some that were backed by states opposing the Soviet Union.[38]

Creating a distinction between who should and should not be considered a foreign fighter is difficult in part because there are no large datasets that currently exist on foreign fighters. There is thus no descriptive statistic available on the sex or age of fighters who travel abroad, much less what they do once they arrive at their destination. Estimates[39] are published by various organizations on the total number of foreign fighters but those do not allow us to draw a picture of who the individual fighters are

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37 Maya Eichler (Canadian Research Chair in Social Innovation and Community Engagement, feminist and security scholar) in the context of a presentation one Gender in Private Security for the Centre for International Policy Studies (4 February 2016).

38 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013) 162-163.

39 Mostly, this consists of national intelligence agencies of various countries who publish their respective numbers. Those are then aggregated by various think-tanks such as the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR) who add their own research to those numbers. For the methodology behind one such aggregate estimate, see Peter R. Neumann, "Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000: Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s," ICSR, King's College Department of War Studies (January 2015) http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/ last accessed 13-01-2016.

and what they do once they arrive to a conflict zone, a problem which is compounded by different organizations using different operational definitions and means to obtain their data. The addition of non-combatants as a type of foreign fighter will most likely remain an open debate as the concept continues to be researched and defined. This issue can partially be solved by sub-dividing foreign fighters into different types with distinctions such as 'combatant', 'non-combatant', 'short-term', 'long-term', as so on, though it is worth noting that such distinctions are probably only useful to support large-N research designs.

For theoretical purposes, and particularly for the purpose of this paper, the net on defining a foreign fighter will be cast wide in order to paint a complete picture of the foreign fighter phenomenon. Thus this paper will use Malet's definition of a foreign fighter "as noncitizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts,"[40] with the addition that this includes actors who move to the conflict zone in order to support the insurgency or its members without taking part in combat operations. This addition is particularly relevant for further discussions on recruitment of foreign fighters and the relation of foreign fighters network to state legitimacy.

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40 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 9.

Chapter Two: The Contemporary Foreign Fighter

As mentioned in the introduction, the term 'foreign fighter' is novel. There is a tendency to view newly discovered concepts as exceptional and radically different from the past. Thus as the concept of foreign fighter is becoming a prominent concern for the field of security, there is a discourse starting to form around the fact that the trend of the past few years in Syria and Iraq is a radical departure of past instances of foreign fighters. This discourse fails to underline that the total number of foreign fighters who have left the West to fight in Iraq and Syria is a whole order of magnitude smaller than the number of Western volunteers for the Spanish Civil war in the 1930s. The difference between an estimated 4,000 Western foreign fighters in Syria/Iraq[41] and 40,000 for just the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War[42] is immense, especially since the total population in the West is significantly higher today than it was in the 1930s. In terms of absolute numbers, the foreign fighter phenomenon is not that exceptional for the West. Treating it as such deprives researchers of the ability to conduct historical comparisons. This section will be dedicated to highlighting the unique aspects of the foreign fighters who join the conflict in Iraq and Syria. This will be helpful in the later discussions on the policy options to manage the flow of foreign fighters.

Malet identifies 70 conflicts since 1810 where there have been foreign fighters involved. The phenomenon is thus not new, even though the term is. Malet goes further and finds that over time, the proportion of conflicts with foreign fighters involved is growing. He differentiates four types of foreign

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Peter R. Neumann, "Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000: Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s," ICSR, King's College Department of War Studies (January 2015) http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/ last accessed 13-01-2016.
42 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 93.

fighters which Table 1 illustrates:[43]

Table 1 Malet's Typology of Foreign Fighters[44]

	Ethnic Conflict	Nonethnic Conflict
Coethnics	Type 1 *Diasporas* (Join with nationalist rebels to advance common nationalist goals)	Type 3 *Encroachers* (Join with secessionist rebels in adjacent state to expand political control to neighbouring territory)
Non-Coethnics	Type 2 *Liberationists* (Defend anticolonial rebels to advance shared ideological goals)	Type 4 *True believers* (Join with ideological rebels to preserve institutions of shared transnational identity)

The use of these categories is made clear when trying to understand the goals and identity of foreign fighters. The typology works well when dealing with the case studies used by Malet.[45] However, applying it to the contemporary foreign fighter in Iraq and Syria is a more difficult process.

Categorizing the foreign fighters who join the Islamic State (IS)[46] is no simple task. Malet's variables are binary. This means that foreign fighters must either be coethnic or not. The conflict needs

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43 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 40-57.
44 Table drawn from ibid., 43.
45 Ibid., 43.
46 It is important to note a caveat. While IS recruits the majority of foreign fighters, reports are indicating that foreign fighters are also joining other groups, such as Kurdish minorities. For example, see the 1st New Allied Expeditionary Force, a NGO which is actively recruiting North American veterans to fight for Kurdish militias http://www.1naef.com/veterans-needed/ accessed 14-02-2016. In particular, notice the unpaid aspect which is a key feature of foreign fighters. A more detailed analysis of all foreign fighter trends in Syria and Iraq should account for these different recruitment efforts by different organizations.

to be ethnic or not and thus defining the conflict as either of these values courts oversimplification. There are not two parties but a multitude of parties. IS fights against the Syrian state as much as other groups where divides are religious, political ,and ethnic. The Afghanistan conflicts in the 1980s had similar complexities. Malet defined it as a type 2 *Liberationists* conflict but does not provide much in way of justification for doing so. He does blur the ethnic line by stating that foreign fighters had "some connection, although they do not share ties of ethnicity," and that what made the conflict an ethnic one was the framing by Jihadists that the Afghans were an ethnic group under threat.[47] These loose allowances on his typology indicate that the framing of the conflict is more important than what the objective reality is. It is this framing which is meaningful for the foreign fighters. The framing of IS largely rests on the Al Qaeda narrative which frames the conflict as one of Islam under attack by secular, mostly Western or Western-backed forces[48]. This would indicate a non-ideological frame, especially as the narrative calls for all Muslims to join the fight, regardless of where they are from. This is an evolution from the frame used in Afghanistan, where defending the Afghan people was the primary frame used by recruiters. Similarly, while the majority of foreign fighters who join IS are non-Western, the transnational scope of their recruitment effort would indicate that the intent is not to recruit *encroachers* to annex a slice of historical territory, but to create a new entity which is seen as legitimate under their ideology. Foreign fighters who join IS would thus be Type 4 *True Believers*. This evolution from Type 2 to Type 4 for what is essentially the same core of foreign fighters in terms of organizational scope indicates an evolution in framing which is likely a consequence of the power Al Qaeda acquired as a result of the Afghan war. The organization became transnational and thus its framing, and the one of its offshoots, is likely to adopt a transnational scope. From this point of view, the IS enterprise seems to be similar to early communism which sought to create a transnational

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47 Ibid., 158.
48 Phil Gursky, *The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-Inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West* (Roman and Littlefield 2015).

workers party. Malet's typology is thus useful in understanding the evolution in the narrative of radical Islam to recruit foreign fighters as it became a truly transnational movement.

One of the interesting findings on current contemporary foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria is that many of them appear to be veteran foreign fighters who never demobilized following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan[49][50], a conflict in which the impact of their contribution was nearly meaningless to the overall conclusion of the war[51]. This is probably the most unique aspect of contemporary foreign fighters and supports the thesis of the impact of globalization on organizations. Instead of demobilizing, these fighters migrated across different conflict zones and used the networks they created during the Afghanistan conflict to strengthen their organizations. Al Qaeda in particular was successful in tapping into these transnational networks[52]. Foreign fighters who join IS are thus both a short and long term threat to global stability.

Part of the Broader Al Qaeda Narrative

The Al Qaeda narrative (AQN) is a worldview meant to appeal to as many people as possible. As most ideologies do, it explains what is wrong with the world and how to fix it, mostly by using an "us versus them" frame, with an overall aim being a redistribution of power.[53] The ideas of the narrative can best be described as "(a) The West hates Islam and Muslims, (b) The West is in a state of perpetual war with Islam and Muslims, and (c) True Muslims have a divine mandate to fight in violent

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49 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 184-185.
50 CSIS (2016): 15.
51 Olivier Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War* (Adelphi Papers 1991), in Malet (2013).
52 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 194.
53 James Forest, "Exploring Root Causes of Terrorism: An Introduction," in *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes*, vol. III, ed. James Forest (Westport, Praeger Security International, 2006): 4.

jihad,"[54]. The justifications for the ideology are obviously rooted in the evolution of a particular strain of theological and political thought which preceded Al Qaeda.[55] This section will not cover such in details. Instead, it will summarize the AQN and its significance in understanding the underlying mechanisms that influence the behaviour of foreign fighters who join IS. Individuals do not have to be Al Qaeda affiliates to support the narrative nor do they necessarily become terrorists. They show their support by backing or participating in the activities of organizations that seek to further the narrative.

The concept of dissenters used earlier is particularly useful when trying to categorize the foreign fighters who join IS as it helps to link them back to the broader Al Qaeda narrative (AQN). Individuals who accept the al Qaeda narrative and choose to further it do so in a multitude of ways. The most obvious and memorable is probably transnational large-scale terrorism as seen on 9/11, the 2004 Madrid bombing, or 7/7 in London. Foreign fighters are now also starting to attract a great deal of attention, most likely as a consequence of Westerners actively broadcasting their migration on social media and coupled with the fact that they joined an organization (IS) that is increasingly being seen as a global threat. These two types of actors should be considered as the spear-point of the AQN supporters. An even larger amount of people are involved in the AQN as what can be termed 'moral supporters' people who join the dialogue and help to spread, modify, replicate, and most importantly legitimize its existence. They do so actively by consuming and propagating the communication material of organizations that have embraced the AQN and thus provide such organizations with legitimacy through sheer mass in the free market of ideas even though these individuals will never become actively involved in the actual act of fighting. These moral supporters use their networks as

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54 Phil Gurski, *The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-Inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).
55 Ibid.

"virtual analogues for the Islamic utopia to which they aspire in the real world".[56]

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56 Gilbert Ramsay, "Cyber-jihad: Ideology, affordance and latent motivations," in *Terrorism and Affordance*, ed. Max Taylor and PM Currie (New York: Continuum Internatinoal Publishing Group, 2012): 57.

Chapter 3: Explaining the motivations of foreign fighters

The first half of this paper was dedicated to placing the concept of foreign fighters in a theoretical context within the field of security studies. The second half will use this understanding to explain the motivation of foreign fighters in migrating to fight in Syria and Iraq. When approaching the subject of violent non-state actors, there is a tendency to portray them as strategic individual actors who understand the goals of their ideology and thus can take the initiative to advance them in specific ways. Many so-called radicalized actors often lack a robust understanding of their ideology, much less its organizational goals.[57] Radicalization in itself is often treated as a linear process where an individual moves through different states: good citizen, consumer of radical material, radicalized individual, and then violent actor. This simple explanation fails to take into consideration several important factors, such as why the majority of radicalized individuals never resort to violence or why some tactics are preferred over others. This section will focus on developing the concept of reasonableness[58] to explain the process of decision-making which dissenters use when choosing a tactic to achieve their ends. It will be argued that reasonableness better encapsulates the depth of the motivations behind the choice of dissenters to become violent actors by including their environment, social network, and resources into their decision-making process.

Reasonableness accounts for the gaps in radicalization theory. This discussion will be useful in the next section where the decision-making process defined in this section will be applied to explain the theoretical impact of policies which seek to counter foreign fighters. Reasonableness rests on two main

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Gilbert Ramsay, "Cyber-jihad: Ideology, affordance and latent motivations," in *Terrorism and Affordance*, ed. Max Taylor and PM Currie (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012): 50-51.

58 Credit for this term should be given to Michael Williams, conversation to the author, December 07, 2015.

factors. First, actors are constrained in their options by their environment. Second, their interests are given to them by their relationship with other actors within their environment.

To begin with, the environment of individuals means that only a certain number of options are available at a given time. This environment-behaviour relationship is called affordance. This relationship exists regardless of the actor's capacity to perceive it.[59] For example, the realm of options of chess players is limited by the rules of the game which stipulate how difference pieces can move, regardless of the player's knowledge of those moves. Affordance partially explains why there are a lot more moral supporters of the AQN on the internet than actual Jihadi terrorists or foreign fighters. The internet creates a space to consume and share information but makes direct, personal, and physical action in support of a cause more difficult. Actors, whose relationship with the AQN are exclusively online, for example lone actors, will be much more constrained in the ways they can support the narrative. It does not mean that some will not become terrorists or foreign fighters, but it does indicate that most will never become one.

Secondly, the environment of a given actor is not limited to any given physical or technological plane. Actors belong to an ecosystem which includes their environment as well as the other individuals with whom an actor interacts. The position of an individual within this ecosystem is a reflection of its relationship with others. Social network analysis (SNA) depicts actors as, "embedded in webs of connections," which can be explored and analyzed[60]. The role of an individual is reinforced by this web of connections. Thus, the more one interacts with a given group of people, the more one will identify as one of those people. This means that preferences of individuals are not determined solely by personal

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59 Max Taylor and PM Currie (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012).
60 John Scott, "Trend Report Social Network Analysis," *Sociology* 22, no. 1 (February 1988): 112.

interest but by group dynamics and social structures. Thus personal choice is actually determined by the social institutions to which an actor belongs to.[61] These prefabricated perspectives are sometimes called 'frames' and skilled entrepreneurs can create them to influence the behaviour of other actors[62].

Density is a particular useful concept drawn from SNA. It measures the 'tightness' of connections around an actor. It represents how interconnected a given network is. Larger networks (nation-state) are going to be less dense around one individual due to the simple fact that there are too many actors for a significant relationship to exist amongst them. A family unit is very dense as every individual in the network has a significant relationship to others in it. Each network has a role associated to it (father, co-worker, citizen) which is reinforced upon the individual by this network. Density allows us to create a hierarchy of the importance of different networks for an individual. By extension, it allows us to know which roles are more important for an individual. Thus, it can explain why some individuals with apparently little connections to a distant conflict would travel to fight there. This is because their role within this network has become their hegemonic social identity. Radicalization is mainly concerned with this process of identity creation and replacement.

By far the most useful characteristic of SNA is that it tells us how individuals see their interests as, "determined by social structures that established roles for members with attendant obligations to the group,"[63] thus explaining why some individuals will eagerly adopt behaviours that provide them no direct benefit such as becoming a suicide terrorist.[64] It also explains why some economic factors such as poverty, lack of education, or unemployment do not predict the likelihood of violent action while

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61 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 20.
62 Neil Fligstein, "Social Skill and the Theory of Fields," University of California (Berkeley, 2001).
63 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 20.
64 Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win* (New York: Random House, 2005).

social factors such as close friends who are radicalized (self-reinforcing, dense group), charismatic leaders (skilled social entrepreneurs) or family seem to be better indicators.[65] Thus group identity facilitates recruitment by creating a pool of recruits from which well-connected entrepreneurs can draw.[66]

Reasonableness thus encompasses the full ecosystem in which actors interact. It accounts for the qualities of the environment and its inherent limitations. With the use of SNA, we can understand that interactions between actors should be seen as single transaction that allow us to better understand their relationships.[67] These transactions reinforce a given role for an actor. As an actor increases his interactions within a given network it is likely that the identity reflected to him by this group will become more important than alternative identities. This translates into an alignment of personal interest with the interests of the group. Thus a reasonable individual's field of action is limited by three considerations: his environment allows certain types of actions, his identity confers to him a frame from which he can analyze possible actions, and his interests are defined by his social networks.

Understanding the motivations of foreign fighters when they migrate should thus be about understanding the ecosystem of foreign fighters prior to them joining a conflict abroad. To do so, it is useful to look at microstructures. The main idea behind them is that "fields of practice that link up and stretch across all time zones (or have the potential to do so), need not imply further expansions of social institutional complexity".[68] This is an important distinction when trying to understand the ecosystem of contemporary foreign fighters. Organizations like IS are complex but not in the same way

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65 Phil Gurski, *The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-Inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

66 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 20.

67 For more on social interaction as transactions see Charles Tilly, *Identities Boudnaries & Social Ties* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005): 13-23.

68 Ibid., 214.

as traditional states. While modern state systems are complex, it is mainly a mechanical complexity. The better word might be that they are sophisticated. Thus, state institutions can be taken apart and studied in granular details. The complexity of a global network is akin to a biological complexity in which everything is related but not necessarily in obvious ways. They are thus much more flexible and malleable. Here it is useful to go back to the concept of the shadow state. IS creates the appearance of formal state structures but it is very likely that it is a facade which hides personal networks between the different leaders of the organization.

By their very nature, social networks are constantly replicated and modified through social transactions. They are an evolving entity that cannot be deconstructed in the same way as the state. Thus the AQN has taken many forms, most of which are now beyond the scope or control of Al Qaeda itself which has attempted to claim the narrative. For example, it is now possible for IS to claim that it has advanced the strategic narrative of AQN further than Al Qaeda itself has.[69] Microstructures help to link these different forms of the AQN together. They go beyond network connections[70] and make it possible to establish the global character of the narrative. It is clear that the Islamic State is actively seeking to recruit foreign fighters. However, it would not be helpful to see this effort as the same top-down process as conventional military recruitment by states. Foreign fighters do not draw their information on the conflict from official channels but from "unaffiliated but broadly sympathetic individuals".[71] There is thus unlikely to be a chain which links a radicalized individual's network directly to the Islamic State. When intelligence agencies such as the Canadian Armed Forces

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69 Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon and Related Security Trends in the Middle East: Highlights from the workshop* (January 2016): 20.
70 Karin Knorr Cetina, "Complex Global Microstructures: The New Terrorist Societies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2005): 215.
71 Joseph A. Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter R Neumann, "#Greendbirds: Measuring the Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks," ICSR (2014): http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Infleunce-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf ,accessed 05 January 2016.

intelligence community makes use of graphs[72] which claim to show the structural anatomy of IS, they are committing the fallacy of trying to assign state structure to a process that does not have one. Recruitment is not a pipeline. Individuals who join IS do so through social transactions that expose them to the narrative and change their identity. Individuals choose to become foreign fighters. This choice is framed by the identity they have created for themselves through their connection to the AQN. The strength of the narrative is that it can attach itself so well to the creation of identity by creating an 'us versus them' dichotomy which is an integral part of identity creation itself.[73]

To conclude this section, it is important to note two things. First, reasonableness makes it possible to conduct meaningful analysis of the characteristics of the creation of social identity that leads individuals to seek to further the AQN. Secondly, it also helps us conceptualize 'stray dogs'[74]. There is a certain ambiguity to the fact that some terrorists or foreign fighters have apparently chosen to act without any outside help or advice which gives the impression that they are isolated actors. Microstructures help us understand how they connect to the broader narrative in informal ways. This would seem to better represent the reality that even individuals who are popularly referred to as 'lone wolves' do not self-radicalize while at the same time pointing to the fact that there are no formal structures behind their radicalization. These informal processes of identity creation which shape the reasonable individual does not deprive thinkers and researchers of the tools to analyze behaviour. It makes those tools more relevant by placing emphasis on the relation between personal choice and social identity.

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72 4th Intelligence Company, "Présentation sur les menaces: L'État Islamique (ÉI) et la radicalization," (Gatineau, Canada: 1500R November 2015), power point presentation, 29 slides.

73 Charles Tilly, *Identities Boundaries & Social Ties* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers): 8.

74 The use of this term replaces 'lone wolf,' as suggested by Gurksi as it removes the romantic notion of the term. See Phil Gurski, *The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-Inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

Chapter 4: Assessing the Counter-foreign fighter policies

The majority of this paper has focused on conceptualizing the phenomenon of foreign fighters. This is necessary for any novel phenomenon. It has shown that as a discrete term, it is different from other kinds of political violence. The recent, and growing, trend of Islamist foreign fighters has attracted a lot of attention on the part of decision-makers. Their failure to demobilize at the end of the conflicts in which they are involved, a trend which has seen them involved in Bosnia and Chechnya and now the civil wars in Iraq and Syria shows that they are a threat to global security. Furthermore, their numbers are steadily growing. Estimates vary, but there are well over 20 000 foreign fighters now involved in the conflict in Syria and Iraq.[75] Decision-makers have begun introducing policies to affect this flow of foreign fighters. As there is still not databases on foreign fighters, it is as of yet not possible to conduct large-*N* analysis of the impact of those policies. However, the field of terrorism has begun to introduce models to explain the impact of counter-terrorist policies on those actors. As those models focus on Islamist terrorists, they present a useful starting point to assess the impact of policies on the flow of foreign fighters who join IS until large datasets are produced. This section will thus be dedicated to assessing the likely consequences of public policy employed in the West to counter the movement of foreign fighters (counter-foreign fighter policies). This section will be divided in three parts. First, a broad overview of current counter-foreign fighter policies will be conducted. Second, the consumer-choice model will be used to demonstrate the *transference* effect of those policies. Finally, as some foreign fighters are now returning, there is a concerning policy gap concerning their return which will be studied.

Counter-foreign fighter policies in the West

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75 Peter Neumann, "Foreign Fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s," January 26, 2015, http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/

To begin with, it is important to understand the frame from which foreign fighters who go fight for IS are understood. Foreign fighters who join the conflict in Syria and Iraq follow a narrative that is similar to Islamic domestic terrorists. Both are influenced by the Al-Qaeda narrative in their actions and as such act in order to support the narrative. The difference lies in the fact that instead of trying to change the politics of their home states through the use of terrorism, foreign fighters choose to migrate to what they see as a more legitimate entity – in this case,IS – in order to help in its permanent establishment. Either way, the individual manages to get what they want; in other words, a social infrastructure which matches their ideals.

From this frame, the response of most government has been to treat foreign fighters as a type of terrorist (chapter 1 discusses this in detail). They have tailored their counter-terrorism policies to the perceived rise of foreign fighters. Russia, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Tunisia, and the United States have all tailored current legislation to either criminalize the migration of foreign fighters to join ISIL, block their movement, or both.[76][77] For example, Canada's effort in stopping the movement of foreign fighters (which it terms "Extremist Travellers") has been limited to the *Combating Terrorism Act,* which came into effect in July 2013, as well as revoking the passports of suspected travellers.[78] In the United Kingdom, there has been a push to add British foreign fighters to the UN Al Qaeda sanctions regime which would freeze their assets and stop them from traveling[79] and treats them in a

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76 Somini Sengupta, "Nations Trying to Stop their Citizens From Going to Middle East to Fight for ISIS," *New York Times*, 12 September 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/world/middleeast/isis-recruits-prompt-laws-against-foreign-fighters.html

77 For a comprehensive review of counter-foreign fighter policies see: Charles Lister, "Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or Reintegration?" (Washington: Brookings Institution 2015).

78 Public Safety Canada, *2014 Public Report On The Terrorist Threat to Canada* (Public Safety Canada, 2014), http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/2014-pblc-rpr-trrrst-thrt/index-eng.aspx

79 United Nations Security Council, Sanctions List Material: ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions list, https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list accessed 22-02-2016.

way that is similar to Al Qaeda terrorists[80]. Similarly, the European Union (EU) as a whole has focused on border controls and criminalization of foreign fighters. It is also notable that the EU has even combined foreign fighters and terrorists as one type of actor: 'foreign terrorist fighters'.[81] These examples suggest that the policy response to foreign fighters has been twofold. First, they treat foreign fighting as a kind of terrorism and thus have criminalized it in a way very similar to how terrorism has been criminalized. Secondly, most policy has focused on stopping their migration. The intent is thus to deter their movement (threat of punishment) and stop it if they still decide to go through with it.

These policies have either been rushed to meet what is perceived as a threat or rest heavily on previous legislation or executive powers. This would indicate that these policies are stop-gap measures designed to ease the worry of the population and give the appearance that policy-makers are combating the threat. There currently is very little empirical knowledge to support these policies and as such their effectiveness is difficult to measure. In concrete terms, the number of cases in any single country is too small to know if the success (or failure) of policies aimed at combating the movement of foreign fighters can be ascribed to the policies themselves or to chance. For this reason, it is more useful to contrast the movement of foreign fighters across several countries with the goal of finding common variables that impact their recruitment. Unfortunately, the data on foreign fighters is very limited. As such, it is necessary to turn to a theoretical model and see if its predictions are reflected in reality.

The reasons for joining a terrorist or criminal organization are quite diverse, which makes it

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80 Prime Minister's Office, UN Sanctions for British Foreign fighters who join ISIL in Syria, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/un-sanctions-for-british-foreign-fighters-who-join-isil-in-syria, published 29-09-2015.
81 Council of the European Union, Response to foreign terrorists fighters and recent terrorist attacks in Europe, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/foreign-fighters/ last modified 01-03-2016.

particularly difficult to use any set of factors for predictive purposes.[82] Part of this difficulty stems from the fact that conventional analysis using radicalization usually assumes individuals transform directly from good citizens into terrorists after they are radicalized. The use of reasonableness makes it possible to go beyond this linear process of radicalization and analyze the decision-making process of actors.

The term dissenters brings to the fore the fact that there are many types of actors who contribute to undermining the legitimacy of the state. There is overlap between these categories but also some transfer. This is especially true in cases where the tacit goals of those actors is to undermine the state, the realm of political violence. Thus dissidents choose different tactics to achieve their goals. As underlined by the last chapter, they act as reasonable actors in doing so. Their interests are often reflected by their role in the network that are meaningful to them as well as the options offered to them by the environment.

The difficulties in trying to understand how dissidents choose a tactic were already encountered in the field of criminology, which tried to explain the fluctuations in the rate of certain type of crimes without a similar fluctuation in their assumed causal factors. This led the field to introduce the concept of Opportunity Theory, which found that crime rates could be affected by change in three main factors:

1. The motivation of offenders;
2. Availability of targets; and
3. Absence of credible deterrence.[83]

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82 Gurski, *The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-Inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

83 Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson, "Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach," *American Sociological Review* 44 (August 1979): pp. 588-608.

Opportunity theory thus encompassed the concept of reasonableness developed in the last section. In particular by looking at the interests of offenders and the *affordance* created by the environment. It also adds deterrence as an outside pressure to affect the behavior of those actors. Credible deterrence should be understood as a cost for a reasonable actor, that is to say an actor who seeks to accomplish a given goal and who knows he will be punished for doing so will accept deterrence as a cost for his action. Non-credible deterrence will likely be ignored. Opportunity theory has been modeled by economists to explain the reasons why certain terrorist organizations choose to use a given tactic over another, such as hostage-taking over suicide-bombing by using the consumer-choice model.[84] The principal critique of those models is the fact that they place too much emphasis on the belief that actors can and act rationally. Those are valid concerns. They are made particularly true in contexts where actors seem to have no potential physical gains. For example, suicide terrorism is often argued to be irrational as death is a physical cost that no benefit should be able to outweigh for any individual. However, the concept of reasonableness, which can be used to justify the use of this model, shows that preferences are determined by social structures which place pressure on an individual to meet group expectations; thus foreign fighters can still see a benefit from joining a conflict from which they have very little to gain (in material terms). Similar logic supports even more self-destructive actions such as suicide terrorism, which can be seen as a form of altruistic suicide but that creates real perceived benefits for the individual.[85] These are indications that rational-actor models can still be useful. The caveat is that the underlying premises on rationality need to developed further to encompass the concept of reasonableness. With this caveat in place, it is likely that those models will give a representative view of what they seek to explain.

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84 Todd Sandler and Walter Enders, "An economic perspective on transnational terrorism," in Tilman Bruck, ed., *The Economic Analysis of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2007): pp. 13-28.
85 Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win*, (New York: Random House 2005).

The main impact of counter-foreign fighter policies is the *transference effect* which sees these actors choose different strategies to further the AQN. In the most destructive cases, that will be through terrorism but it is possible that some revert back to being moral supporters of the narrative. The consumer-choice model is apt at demonstrating the *transference effect* as it is already used in the field of economics to aggregate variations in the choices individuals makes in their consumption patterns so that those variations can be studied at the systemic level. For the choices faced by dissidents, it is particularly useful as it can allow us to investigate the impact of public policies and economic factors on the choice of tactics for potential violent actors.[86]

To understand how this model can be applied to the choices of dissidents, it is necessary to understand how the conventional model works. In traditional economics, the consumer-choice model is used to explain how individuals choose to consume one good over another under a set of economic constraints. Those constraints are their needs, their budget, and the cost of the goods. This can be used to explain how consumers behave when confronted with a choice between two goods. For the purposes of explaining the behaviour of dissidents, their needs are represented by their political objectives (personal or organizational), their budget (available resources such as money, time, and networks), and the cost in terms of how much of said resources are necessary in order to enact their chosen tactic in relation to the chances that it succeeds. A similar model can be used to explain how dissidents choose to become a terrorist or a foreign fighter. This can serve to highlight the impact of government policy on their choice. It is important to note that this model is not meant to explain the behaviour of any given individual but instead to evaluate the systemic impact of government policy on dissenters. It is

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86 Todd Sandler and Walter Enders, "An economic perspective on transnational terrorism," in Tilman Bruck, ed., *The Economic Analysis of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2007): pp. 13-28.

quite possible that no amount of deterrence will stop some individuals from committing acts of

domestic terrorism or becoming foreign fighter, in the same manner that not all criminals can be

deterred. However, what this model can do is demonstrate how government policies can affect the

aggregate behaviour of dissenters and thus influence overall trend in foreign fighters who seek to

migrate abroad.

It is necessary to define some key variables before using the consumer-choice model to explain

the choice between becoming a domestic terrorist or migrating as a foreign fighter. First, the overall

political objectives (needs) of individuals who migrate to join IS can be defined as an attempt at

advancing the broader Al-Qaeda narrative, which claims that the West is in a state of war with Islam

and Muslims and that Muslims thus have a divine mandate to fight in violent jihad.[87] Second, the

resources for potential foreign fighters consist of their personal property and income as well as their

ability to access the IS network (at home or abroad). Third, the cost that they face is the economic cost

of migrating and the risk of getting caught, including the opportunity cost of not doing a different

strategy. By understanding these variables, a theory of what can affect their decision can be developed.

What is important to note at this point is that it is assumed that violent dissidents will choose a tactic to

accomplish their goal since doing nothing would be the worst outcome and would indicate that their

political objectives have changed. A graphical representation of the consumer-choice model for

potential activists who want to further the AQN could thus look like figure 1.

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87 Gurski, *The Threat from Within: Recognizing Al Qaeda-Inspired Radicalization and Terrorism in the West* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

Figure 1

Choice between Domestic Terrorism and Becoming a Foreign Fighter
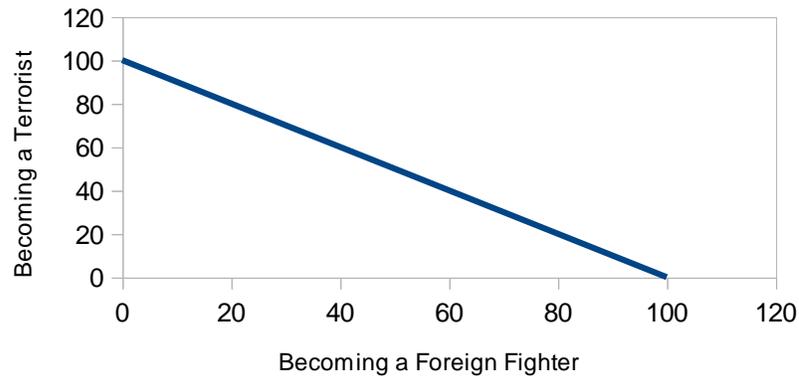
In order to help read Figure 1, it is necessary to understand that the individual can consume at any point on or below the line, but because the individual wants to maximize his returns, he will spend all his resources on a point on the line to get the expected returns. In order to move up or down on the line, the individual must give up some of the payout of one good to receive more of the other. The proportion of this trade-off is called the marginal rate of substitution and is useful under conditions in which the payout is asymmetrical. Figure 1 represents a theoretical situation in which the costs and expected payouts of becoming a foreign fighter are equal (symmetrical). That is to say, if this hypothetical violent dissident spent all of his resources on migrating to become a foreign fighter or on conducting domestic terrorism, he would get an equal payout of 100 in both cases. This means that the net benefit of the violent dissident is the same everywhere along the line. There are thus equal chances that the violent dissident will become either a domestic terrorist or a foreign fighter.[88] The traditional consumer-choice model does not portray expected payout on the axes of the graph, instead it shows

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88 For explanatory purposes, this is a simplification of the model which leaves out some of the more comprehensive details. For more on the consumer-choice model, see Robert Frank and Ian Parker, *Microeconomics and Behaviour 4th Canadian Edition* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2010). For more on the use of the model in field of terrorism, see Sandler and Enders, "An economic perspective," pp. 13-28.

quantity of the good consumed.[89] Figure 1 portrays a hypothetical scenario as a starting point as the lack of data on foreign fighters makes it impossible to know in what proportion actors who wanted to support the AQN choose each action prior to 9/11. It is thus not possible to infer the expected payouts prior to the enactment of counter-terrorism and counter-foreign fighter policies. A look at the case of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989) indicates that this hypothetical scenario has some merit. Estimates on the number of foreign fighters who joined the conflict during this period of time vary wildly (from 3000 to 30 000 individuals). Many of those estimates are likely biased by organizations that have stakes in portraying a given point of view. However, it is probably safe to assume that there probably never was more than a few thousand foreign fighters directly involved in the conflict in Afghanistan.[90] A summary look at the ITERATE database on terrorism shows that there were 8602 terrorism events worldwide during this same period of time.[91] Evidently, not all acts of terrorism were done by Islamist organizations who claimed to support what would become the AQN. Finding the exact numbers attributed to radical Islamist organizations can be a subjective process. For the purposes here, it can be safe to assume that the numbers of foreign fighters and terrorists who were radical islamists for this period of time were probably in a similar level of magnitude.

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89 This change is necessary as the choice between becoming a foreign fighter or a domestic terrorist are mutually exclusive (one cannot be both at the same time). It is thus more useful to portray expected payouts for each actions.
90 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013): 175.
91 ITERATE (iterate_1968-2011_merged; accessed January 20, 2016), https://ciser.cornell.edu/ASPs/search_athena.asp?IDTITLE=2340

Figure 2

Choice between Domestic Terrorism and Becoming a Foreign Fighter
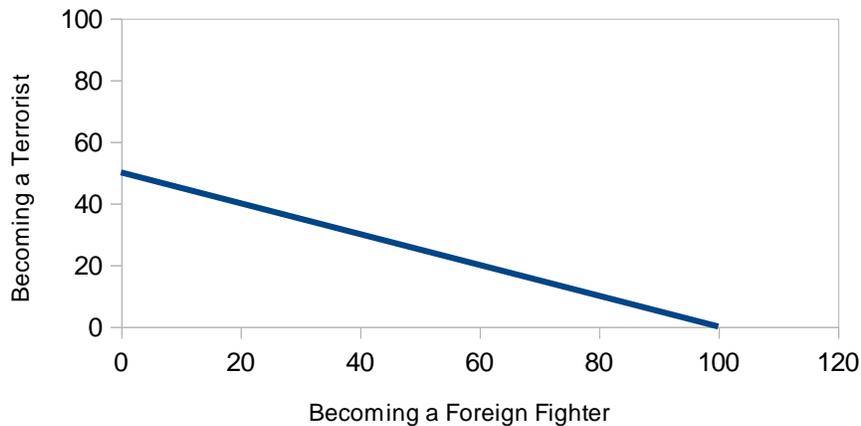after the Implementation of Counter-Terrorism Policies

Figure 2 depicts the post 9/11 trend which has seen the establishment of a number of policies

aimed at stopping terrorism. As an example, Canada did not have dedicated counter-terrorism laws or

policies before then. Following 9/11, Canada enacted Bill C-36 in December 2001, defining terrorism

for the first time in the Criminal Code. This was followed by other policies and national strategies such

as the *Building Resilience Against Terrorism: Canada's Counter-terrorism* strategy enacted in 2011.[92]

Counter-terrorism policies such as those enacted by Canada thus had the effect of raising the cost of

becoming a terrorist but left the cost of becoming a foreign fighter comparatively unaffected.   This

means that in order to get the same payout, a would-be terrorist would have to spend much more

resources than a would-be foreign fighter. Some payout is now even impossible if the person were to

choose the tactic of terrorism (Figure 2, the maximum payout for terrorism is 50 instead of 100) which

indicates that some forms of terrorism were made much harder, for example hijacking airplanes. This

represents the fact that high-visibility and organized terrorist strikes are becoming more difficult, if not

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92 Public Safety Canada, *Building Resilience Against Terrorism: Canada's Counter-terrorism Strategy* (Public Safety
Canada, 2011), http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/rslnc-gnst-trrrsm/index-eng.aspx

impossible, for individuals or groups with limited resources. One of the successes of IS was thus their

ability to encourage individuals to become foreign fighters. Their ability to communicate and advertise

their message attracts those violent dissenters in Western countries for whom terrorism is not a viable

option. Figure 2 indicates that incidents of domestic terrorism should become lower as more violent

dissidents migrate to fight with IS. This is especially representative of the trend witnessed during the

2012- mid 2014 period prior to the introduction of counter-foreign fighter policies which has seen a

significant migration of foreign fighters without a noticeable uptick in terrorism in the West.

Figure 3

Choice between Domestic Terrorism and Becoming a Foreign Fighter
after the Implementation of Counter-Terrorism Policies and
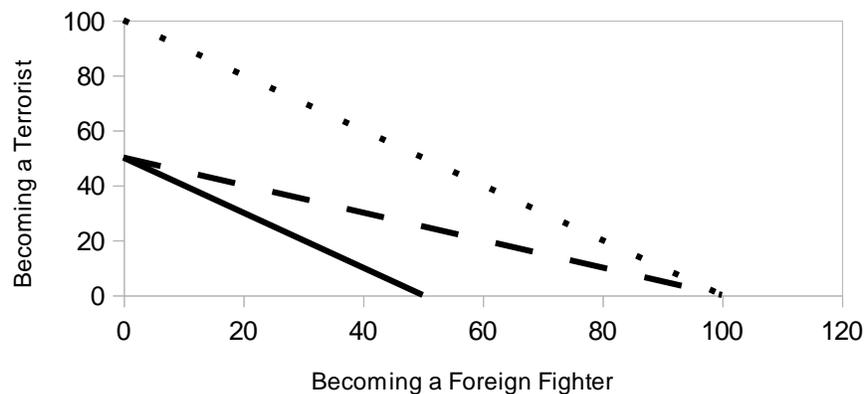Counter-Foreign Fighters Policies

Figure 3 represents the situation following the implementation of counter-foreign fighter

policies. Using this model, one could predict that the number of domestic terrorism incidents is likely

to increase in countries that have implemented counter-foreign fighter policies. Such a prediction

would agree with the norm hypothesis stipulated by Hegghammer which assumes that, all else being

equal, dissidents will first choose to become foreign fighters before any other tactic.93 Thus, by raising

93 Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I stay or Should I go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between

the cost of becoming both a foreign fighter and a terrorist, it is likely that the *transference effect* will be seen through an increase in domestic terrorism. On Figure 3, the dotted line represents the initial situation (Figure 1), the dashed line represents the situation after the implementation of counter-terrorism policies (Figure 2), and the full line represents the situation after the implementation of the aforementioned policies to counter foreign fighter migration. As can be seen, the end result is that the full line is very similar to the dotted line in Figure 1, with both policies having the effect of cancelling each other out in terms of relative payout. What is interesting to note though is that the payout of any tactic for violent dissident is now lower. This means that the scale of domestic terrorism should be lower while the number of foreign fighters migrating should be less than that represented in Figure 1. The number of incidents of domestic terrorism, however, should rise as this tactic has a marginally much better payout (due to lower marginal cost) than under a situation in which there are no counter-foreign fighter policies.

Figure 3 represents a theoretical argument meant to represent the shift in relative payouts. There is no quantitative evidence to support this argument as there is not enough data available to conduct empirical testing. However, the case in 2014 of two individuals, Martin Couture-Rouleau and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, with no connections who committed terrorist acts shortly after being denied their passports seem to indicate that this model should be further investigated once more data is available. In a less straightforward case in Germany, Rafik Yousef was shot dead after attacking police officers with a knife. He was banned from traveling outside of Berlin due to previous criminal sentence (for plotting a terrorist attack). He wore an eletronic tag which seriously hampered his ability to attempt illicit travel. This shows how affordance might have affected his choice. However, there are no indications that he had any desires to travel to join IS. A look at the terrorism incidents in France, Belgium, and the United

Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review* (February 2013): p. 11.

Kingdom since 2014 indicates that they had no clear cases of terrorism that could be attributable to the transference effect as outlined by Figure 3 in these countries. It is highly likely that there are many false negatives too. That is to say, individuals who had desired to become foreign fighters but did not because of counter-foreign fighter policies who instead resorted to domestic terrorism without anybody knowing about their desire to become foreign fighters.. There are probably other factors at play in explaining the relationship between domestic terrorism and foreign fighters but the transference effect would appear to be a good point for further research. Especially as it appears that the impact of counter-foreign fighter policies that criminalize the act and ban travel might increase the risks of domestic terrorism at home.

Threat of returning foreign fighters

As the number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq is increasing, there are increasing concerns over a 'blow-back effect' which would see experienced and battle-hardened foreign fighters return to their home states to commit terrorist acts.[94] Hegghammer's 2013 published study on this effect is often cited in the debate over returning foreign fighters. The results are summarized as follow: very few returning foreign fighters become terrorists but when they do, the attacks are more likely to happen and are deadlier.[95] His findings thus present decision-makers with a low-probability, high-risk scenario. His findings did not include the most recent trend in Syria and Iraq. Hegghammer has begun investigating this trend and his findings would suggest that their threat is even lower in this current conflict.[96] These trends can obviously change very rapidly, but it would indicate that the threat needs to be well-understood.

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94 Lorenzo Vidino, "European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Dynamics and Responses," *European View* 13 (2014): 217-224.
95 Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I stay or Should I go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review* (February 2013): p. 1-15.
96 Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nasser, "Assessing Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West," *Perspective on Terrorism*, (forthcoming).

While Hegghammer's research is often cited, it is important to place a few caveats on it. Firstly, he himself highlights the fact that a lot of his data is tentative and limited, mostly based on estimates. Even if his data was accurate, its limited sample size means that it is necessary to be careful when trying to generalize his findings to the whole population of returning foreign fighter, especially considering that he does not provide any measure of statistical significance. Those critiques of his research do not usually appear in the literature that cites him. This is not to say that his contribution is not useful. Instead, this should highlight the fact that maybe decision-makers should not worry too much about the high-risk, low-probability scenario presented by returning foreign fighters until there are more definitive studies to support Hegghammer's hypothesis. It is especially important to not over-emphasize the short-term risks of returning foreign fighters against the consequence of not allowing them to demobilize. It is quite possible that this long-term risk outweights the short-term considerations. Without more precise data, it is hard to measure this though. If the consumer-choice model presented above is true, it is also possible that counter-foreign fighter policies actually make the threat of domestic terrorism higher through the transference effect than the threat posed by returning foreign fighters. This would mean that those policies actually cause the problem that they seek to prevent.

Considerations of the long-term impacts of counter-foreign fighter policies are especially important because their consequence will be to discourage or prevent many foreign fighters from returning to their home states, due to cancellation of citizenship or travel bans. They are further deterred of doing so by the criminalization of becoming a foreign fighter. After the Soviet-Afghan war, the consequence of this was to hinder the demobilization of foreign fighters after the conflict.[97] This had the consequence of allowing them to grow and created a shifting mass of radicalized Islamists who

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97 David Malet, *Foreign Fighters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013).

migrated with conflicts and built up their network. If there are even more foreign fighters involved in Syria and Iraq right now than in previous conflicts, policy makers will have to weight those broader global implications against the risks posed by returning foreign fighters at home.

By keeping them from returning, researchers and policy-makers are also losing an important tool in understanding the motivations of foreign fighters but also in preventing more from migrating in the first place as there are reports emerging that returning foreign fighters are often disillusioned with the narrative put forth by IS. Those individuals could be used to create a counter-radicalization narrative. These returning foreign fighters probably present very little risks to their home state but can contribute immensely to intelligence capacities but also to deradicalization efforts. They can be used as an example to discourage other individuals from becoming foreign fighters. Counter-foreign fighter policies will need to be adapted to discriminate between disillusioned foreign fighters and those who are not.

To conclude, this chapter has looked at the impact of public policies and legislation on foreign fighters. Current policies of criminalization and travel bans seem to risk rising the domestic threat at home. At the same time, by preventing foreign fighters from returning, there is also a risk that we will see a lack of demobilization similar to the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan war which up to now has been a unique feature not repeated in other historical cases of foreign fighters. This lack of demobilization has been part of the cause to the current crisis in Iraq and Syria as well as other conflicts involving Muslims around the world. Blanket criminalization thus risks creating a long-term challenge while only providing a short-term solution to the problem.[98]

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98 Charles Lister, "Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or Reintegration?" (Washington: Brookings Institution 2015).

Conclusion: Challenges in the Study of Foreign Fighters

This paper sought to take a theoretical approach to the concept of foreign fighters to demonstrate that current counter-foreign fighter policies are inadequate to deal with this growing problem. It has mostly done so by conceptualizing foreign fighting as an activity which is distinct from other forms of political violence, in particular terrorism. It pushed forward a debate on who should be and should not be considered a foreign fighter by advocating the inclusion of non-combatants. This operationalization of the concept should be key in the creation of a database on foreign fighters. Such a database is one of the largest gaps in the research on foreign fighters. Without such a database, testing hypotheses is difficult and the conclusions of the research limited. This is partially side-stepped by using models that have been shown to work in other fields such as the consumer-choice model used in this paper. However, without testing these models with empirical data, it is difficult to be confident that they present a valid representation of what is happening on the ground.

The lack of data on foreign fighters is a recurring theme in the research on this new phenomenon and one that has been highlighted a several times in this paper. There are individual efforts by researchers or institutions to create databases that answer the specific needs of their research but there is no large scale, all-encompassing database with concrete information on individual foreign fighters that can compare to the databases on terrorism which extensively detail terrorist attacks (ITERATE, RAND/MIPT, or GTD). Foreign fighting, as a phenomenon, has obvious limitations in data collection that terrorism does not have. The act of foreign fighting is in itself an individual act. A single foreign fighter travelling does not attract the same level of attention as does a small-scale domestic terrorist attack. This means that foreign fighters are difficult to tract. This is especially true when gathering data from conflicts that have ended. The current generation of foreign fighters are active on

social media[99] which makes gathering information on these individuals easier. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR) at King's College London have been creating a database but it is limited and does not allow for large-N studies of patterns of foreign fighting in current conflicts. This is problematic as it makes it difficult to assess the impacts of counter-foreign fighter policies. Hegghammer also produces his own data, mostly by using open and secondary sources, which also has limitations. This data is shaped to test his hypothesis and is thus difficult to use for other purposes. Terrorist databases do not code for foreign fighters, unless they commit terrorist acts.

Most research on foreign fighters has thus been limited to the use of descriptive statistics at most. Numbers on foreign fighters are recycled and repeated, mostly based on aggregations of government self-reporting. The creation of a database on foreign fighters will be a large enterprise but would prove invaluable for research in the field, especially for post-Soviet-Afghan War foreign fighters who have failed to demobilize. This data would allow researchers to map their movement and the impact of different conflicts on the growth of their networks. If foreign fighters remain prevalent actor in the field of security studies, such a database will be needed to quantify the impact of counter-foreign fighter policies accurately and go beyond theoretical models. This paper has presented a starting point to coding such a database in chapter one and two by defining the concept of foreign fighters. Other researchers may find it useful to modify this definition, but casting the net wider is more useful, especially as the study of foreign fighters in conflicts not related to organizations that have links with the AQN becomes more prevalent.

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Joseph A. Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter R. Neumann, "#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (London: 2014).

Current counter-foreign fighter policies appear to be limited in their effectiveness. The number of foreign fighters joining the conflict in Iraq and Syria is increasing. On this basis, deterrence through criminalization does not appear to be working effectively. There are clearly other factors at play that motivate individuals to take increasing risks to fight abroad. Reasonableness attempts to accurately depict the motivations of foreign fighters by placing them in their social setting. Chapter four demonstrates that a possible consequence of counter-foreign fighter policies is a rise in domestic terrorism or other violent acts. This analysis mostly rests on individual motivations but there is also an organizational factor at play. As IS becomes weaker it is more willing to engage in acts of terrorism abroad.[100] Thus foreign fighters who are deterred from migrating might present an even greater risk of domestic terrorism than returning foreign fighters if they are encouraged to commit these acts to draw attention away from the deteriorating situation on the ground for IS.

The threat of returning foreign fighter by media, researchers and politicians may be overemphasized. Hegghammer's often quoted research in this case presents a low-probability scenario of more effective attacks. There is otherwise not much research which supports the claim that returning foreign fighters are a risk for their home states. This is an area that should be researched further as it will better inform policy-making to ensure that policies are well-adapted to the actual threat presented by returning foreign fighters. A well-adapted policy in this regard will in turn diminish the number of foreign fighters who fail to demobilize.

To conclude, the concept of foreign fighters, as most other new topics in security studies, has

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100   Ferry de Kerckhove, "The Strategic Outlook for Canada 2016: in search of a new compass," *Vimy Paper* no. 27, Conference of Defence Associations Institute (2016): 7.

gaps and areas where research can be expanded. This paper has regrouped the majority of the relevant research that can be applied to this concept. It has expanded the definition of foreign fighters to account for previously overlooked actors, it has defined a model to explain the motivations behind foreign fighting, and finally it has assessed counter-foreign fighter policies which are inadequate to deal with this phenomenon. The models and theories presented could not be tested due to the lack of large databases and there is room to conduct case studies on particular instances of foreign fighting to test these models. Otherwise, and the final conclusion of this paper is that, it is necessary to commit to the building of a database which emulates well-established databases in the field of terrorism to open the door to theory-testing using empirical data as a way of creating effecting counter-foreign fighter policies.

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