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RETURNEE FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS (FTFs): EVOLVING THREATS AND RESPONSE STRATEGY

Abstract

The 'Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF)' phenomenon in contemporary time has got prominence since the inception of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Thousands of different nationals especially from European countries travelled or made efforts to travel in war-torn Iraq and Syria to fight for the terrorist groups, predominantly the Islamic State (IS/Da'esh). It is argued that a bulk of the FTFs might have gone back to the countries of origin or home countries after the substantial loss of IS territory/Caliphate in Syria. The concern regarding the returnee FTFs assumed high priority on the political agenda of many Western countries for about last half a decade and stressed on a broad array of policies and strategies: policy on prevention of radicalization; information sharing and intelligence exchange; responses to returnees with criminal justice trial; de-radicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration with the mainstream population. However, the 'Global Village' is not immune from the menace and spillover effects of FTFs and the returnees. Thus, the present paper makes an effort to trace the universal response strategies against FTFs and the returnees including the associated families. It attempts to answer some fundamental questions, i.e., who are the foreign terrorist fighters? why do they go to foreign land to fight? and what are they likely to do when the fight is over? It furthermore examines how some of the affected countries have responded to the menace of FTFs and the returnees. The paper also argues that global communities are facing formidable challenges to counter the terrorist activities of FTFs and the returnees. Thus, there is a need to have a comprehensive approach to eliminate the risks eminating from contemporary FTF phenomenon.

Keywords: Foreign Terrorist Fighter, Returnee, Radicalization, Terrorism, IS, Da'esh, Syria

1.   Introduction

The versatile terrorist activities conducted by returnee FTFs demand more insight into the prevalent trends from different parts of the world. Scholars and policymakers by and large agree on the importance and implications of the returnee FTFs' trend in contemporary time as they pose major national and international security threats.[1] Today, many countries have already experienced the terrifying

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[1] Hamed el-Said and Richard Barrett, *Enhancing the Understanding of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon in Syria*, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, July 2017.

blow and many more around the globe are in trauma as to who will be the next. The deadly concern is heightened with the expansion of so-called Islamic State (IS) in conducting their terrorist attacks, propagating their ideology and widening their networks beyond the Middle Eastern countries. There is no denying of the fact that Middle Eastern civil wars have attracted numerous individuals from different countries around the globe to fight for the belligerent groups. Some governments with their unskilled, untrained and under-resourced law enforcement agencies face practical difficulties in monitoring, identifying, plotting and foiling the terrorist attempts of FTFs due to scanty information.

The danger is that the experiences of pandemonium can cause psychological trauma like post-traumatic stress syndrome many war veterans suffer from, let alone further radicalization.[2] Arguably, some of the FTFs have either committed severe war crimes or had been the onlooker of the atrocities.[3] FTFs generally operate in 'Hard-to-Reach' areas and /or war-torn countries as it is difficult to reach out to them in terms of both negotiation and gunning them down.[4] There prevails a great fear that the FTFs upon returning to home country may engage in terrorist activities and expand their radicalization efforts. With the recent piece-meal attacks in Western societies, for example, Paris and Brussels in particular, the emerging challenges posed by FTFs and the returnees seem to be more critical than ever. It demands that the governments and the security agencies should be more proactive in dealing with the spill over effect. FTFs, building on their experiences, may engage in further recruitment and radicalization or carry out terrorist attacks in their home countries.[5] According to some estimates 2,000 to 3,000 FTFs (as of September 2014) from Western countries might have participated in Syria and Iraq conflicts including over 100 Americans.[6] To date, the majority of the FTFs come from Western countries like France, Britain, Belgium and Germany.[7] It is argued that FTFs, who travelled to Syria and Iraq, vary between 30,000 to more than 42,000.[8] The problem of returnee FTFs may further aggravate due to the protracted nature of Middle Eastern conflicts.[9]

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[2] Amy-Jane Gielen, "Supporting Families of Foreign Fighters. A Realistic Approach for Measuring the Effectiveness", *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 2, 2015, pp. 22-48.

[3] Sandra Kraehenman, "The Obligations under International Law of the Foreign Fighter's State of Nationality or Habitual Residence, State of Transit and State of Destination", in Andrea de Guttry, Francesea Capone and Christophe Paulusses (eds.), *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond*, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser, 2016, pp. 229-258.

[4] Kim Mans and Ruben Tuitel, *Foreign Fighters in their own Words: Using YouTube as a Source*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016.

[5] Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, "Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq", *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, Policy Paper No. 34, 2014.

[6] Agence France Presse, "3,000 European jihadis now in Syria, Iraq: EU official," *The Daily Star*, 23 September 2014.

[7] Dafna Rand and Anthony Vassalo, *Bringing the Fight Back Home: Western Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria*, Center for a New American Security (CNAS), 2014, p.1.

[8] Radicalization Awarness Network, *Responses to Returnees: Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their Families*, European Union: Radicalization Awareness Network, 2017.

[9] Richard Barrett, *Foreign Fighters in Syria*, New York: The Soufan Group, June 2014.

Indeed, concerns are on the rise about the expansion of networks and applications of acquired skills elsewhere to fight against the similar grievances. According to one expert, the menace is something like a 'ticking time bomb'.[10] The belligerents in the war zone especially in the Middle East and Afghanistan have all the potential to influence one another and cross-fertilize within the different groups and individuals. There are possibilities of further polarization by those who impart training and run the training camps for new recruits. Usually, the lone fighters go to the war zone and in the process start working in the bigger canvas.[11] This bigger extremist network and its associated bonds can invoke other extremist groups to stimulate violence against the perceived grievances in any part of the world.[12] Some FTF returnees might also involve in self-motivated terrorist activities due to sympathetic radicalization and ideological alikeness with the fighting in Syria or Iraq.

The 'Global Village' is not immune from the menace and spill over effects of FTFs and the returnees. The disquiet about FTFs assumes high place on the political agenda of many Western countries for about last half a decade and emphasizes upon a wide range of policies and strategies. Policymakers and security practitioner are mostly concerned with prevention of radicalization, intelligence sharing and exchange of information, criminal justice responses to FTFs and the returnees, de-radicalization, rehabilitation and integration with the mainstream population. In this context, the paper attempts to answer some fundamental questions, i.e., who are the foreign terrorist fighters? why do they go to foreign land to fight? and what are they likely to do when the fight is over? It furthermore examines how some of the affected countries have responded to the menace of returnee FTFs. The study argues that global communities are facing formidable challenges to counter terrorist activities of FTFs and the returnees. Thus, there is a need to have a comprehensive approach to eliminate the risks eminating from contemporary FTF phenomenon. The paper has five sections. Section 1 is the introduction. Section 2 highlights on the contours of foreign fighters. Section 3 attempts to figure out the recruitment and radicalization process while section 4 deals with the response strategy where a sub-section has been dedicated to understand Bangladesh perspective.

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[10] Colum Lynch, "Europe's New 'Time Bomb' Is Ticking in Syria", *Foreign Policy*, 09 July 2013.
[11] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, *Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System*, Vienna: United Nations, 2017.
[12] Erica Harper, *Reconceptualizing the Drivers of Violent Extremism: An Agenda for Child & Youth Resilience*, Terre des homes and WANA Institute, 2018.

2. Contours of Foreign Terrorist Fighters

2.1 *Who They Are?*

The term 'foreign terrorist fighter' (FTF) is not defined in international law but the term is used today primarily to refer to jihadist fighters.[13] The phenomenon of FTFs does not have an ascertained legal meaning under the existing international legal framework.[14] With the emergence of FTF phenomenon in the second decade of the 21st century primarily due to Middle East conflicts including Afghanistan, question comes in mind as to 'Who are the FTFs?' A simple definition of FTF entails 'individuals, driven mainly by ideology, religion and/or kinship, who leave their country of origin or their country of habitual residence to join a group engaged in an armed conflict in another country'.[15] In the UN system framework, FTFs are only addressed when they are connected to any or some terrorist groups or likely to commit terrorist attacks, i.e., when they are terrorists.[16] This definition however, does not differentiate between FTFs who joined violent extremist groups and those who joined government forces. Over time, terrorists have emerged in different forms with different names in different era and conflicts. However, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reaffirms 'that terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, whenever and by whosoever committed'.[17] According to UNSC resolution S/RES/2178 (2014), FTFs are the 'nationals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training.'[18]

Though the contemporary FTFs phenomenon is viewed in the context of Syria and Iraq as the largest FTFs mobilization hub, it actually began with the

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[13] Marcello Flores, "Foreign Fighters Involvement in National and International Wars: A Historical Survey", in Andrea Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen (eds.), *Foreign Fighters Under International Law and Beyond*, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016, pp. 27-47.

[14] Andrea Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen, "Introduction", in Andrea Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen (eds.), *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond*, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016, pp.1-3.

[15] Almir Maljevic, Sean Griffin and Simon Goddard, *Foreign Terrorist Fighters Manual for Judicial Training Institutes South-Eastern Europe*, Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017.

[16] Andrea Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen, "Concluding Remarks", in Andrea Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen (eds.), *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond*, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016, pp. 259-282 ; see also Andrea Guttry, "The Role Played by the UN in Countering the Phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters", in Andrea Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen (eds.), *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond*, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016, pp. 517-522.

[17] United Nations Security Council, *UNSC Resolution S/RES/2178 (2014)*, UNSC, 2014, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_ doc.asp? symbol=S/RES/2178(2014), accessed on

[18] Ibid., para. 6(a).

Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s.[19] Apart from the numerical size, the modern FTF formation is distinctive of the forerunners on two different counts. Firstly, from the graphic illustration in figure 1, it is seen that the threat is, indeed, global where the Middle East centric terrorist organizations have attracted FTFs from as many as 120 countries from around the globe.[20] Secondly, while the previous FTFs were more or

Figure 1: Foreign Fighters by Region[21]
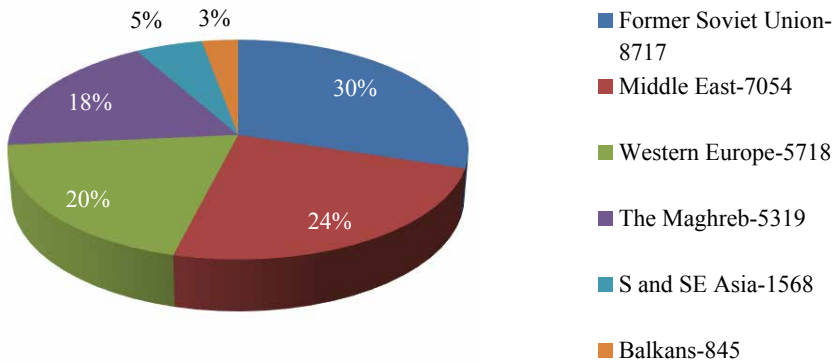
less the individuals of combat age (recruiting age of a military soldier), the present FTFs wave is demographically more diverse to include men, women and children.[22] Following Table shows foreign women and children in the Islamic State.

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[19] Rik Coolsaet, "Facing the Fourth Foreign Fighters Wave: What Drives Europeans to Syria, and to Islamic State? Insights from the Belgian Case", *Egmont-Royal Institute for International Relations*, Egmont Paper No. 81, 2016.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, New York: The Soufan Center, 2017.

[22] Timothy Holman and Cerwyn Moore, "Remainers and Leavers: Foreign Fighters after the Islamic State", *CREST Security Review*, No. 4, 2017.

Table 1: Foreign Women and Children in the Islamic State[23]

Country	Total	Women	Children
Germany	~ 900	~ 190	56
Indonesia	~600	113	
Italy	110	6	
Kazakhstan	~500	>200 women	and children
Kyrgyzstan	~500		>130
Kosovo	~300	44	27
Malaysia	91	12	17
Morocco	1.623	~275	
Netherland	280	>90	>90
Russia	3.417		>350
Spain	204	21	
Sweden	267	~70	45
Switzerland	~70	7	
Tunisia	~3000	~1000	
UK	~850	>100	50
Australia	165	-25	70
Austria	<300	17	40
Belgium	~528	~85	~118
Bosnia	148	60	81
Canada	~185	~35	
EU	~4,000	~680	
France	1,910	~320	460

Many scholars and security analysts opine that FTFs triggered and exacerbated the conflicts in Middle East with widespread sexual and sectarian violence[24] which arguably helped to stimulate 'the largest humanitarian crisis since the creation of the United Nations'.[25] In the plight of terrorism, the FTFs get the scope to develop close tie with sympathizers from across the world.[26] It is argued that the current FTFs' wave is 'the most operationally experienced, lethally skilled

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[23] Richard Barrett, op. cit.
[24] Holman and Moore, op. cit.
[25] Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs/Emergency Relief Coordinator statement to the Security Council on Missions to Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Kenya and an Update on the Oslo Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, 10 March 2017.
[26] Daniel L. Byman, "What Happens when Arab Foreign Fighters Return Home", *Brookings Institution*, 07 May 2015.

and highly networked group to date'[27] and with the changing power dynamics, there look like two generations within the current wave, i.e., individuals not taking part in the close combat and the ones who stay in the combat zones with varying length of time fighting actively in the front line with sufficient military training and diverse experiences.[28]

2.2   *Oversight and Relapse*

The diverse experiences and the multiplicity of contemporary returnee FTFs might emerge with varied potential outcomes bypassing or penetrating through the national governments' intelligent toolkits. The typological illustration of different effects can include:[29]

 a) The FTF(s) who die during fighting can be regarded as 'martyr' in the home country, thereby can have inductive impact on the community.
 b) Veteran FTFs can have temporary return to the country of residence and can shift to other conflict zone(s).
 c) FTFs upon returning home can make an effort to recruit others in disguise.
 d) A reintegrated FTF can display apparent disengagement from violence while looking for opportune moment.
 e) Returnee FTF(s) can resort to terrorist plot(s) displaying apparent normalcy in activities.

There can emerge sub-categories of returnee reintegrated FTFs who could truly disengage upon becoming disillusioned but there could be yet another group who disengages without being disillusioned still bearing core extremist ideology.[30] The latter group can perpetrate violence and terrorist acts on the opportunity or the sensitive targets. For example, on 24 May 2014, a French citizen Mehdi Nemmouche killed four people in Brussels who were inside a Jewish Museum.[31] It was later known that the attacker participated in the fighting in Syria in the previous year. For many Western intelligence practitioners, it appeared to be a forerunner of many more. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) report in October 2016

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[27] Lydia Khalil and Rodger Shanahan, "Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The day after", Lowy Institute, 13 September 2016, available at https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/khalil_ and_shanahan_ foreign_ fighters_in_syria_and_iraq_final_ web_120916_0.pdf, accessed on 05 January 2019.
[28] Radicalization Awarness Network, op. cit.
[29] Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, "The Foreign Fighters' Threat: What History Can (not) Tell Us", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 8, No. 5, 2014, pp. 59-73.
[30] Colin P. Clarke and Amarnath Amarasingam, "Where Do ISIS Fighters Go When the Caliphate Falls? They have options", The Atlantic, 06 March 2017.
[31] Anne Penketh, "Brussels Jewish Museum shooting: suspect with Islamist links arrested", *The Guardian*, 01 June 2014.

finds that 50 foreign fighters from Western countries were so outlawed that they had been directly speaking in front of the video camera which were later uploaded on YouTube.[32] Figure-2 shows the participation of Western FTFs in videos during Syrian conflict.

Figure 2: Western FTFs in Videos Who Participated in Syria (N=50)[33]
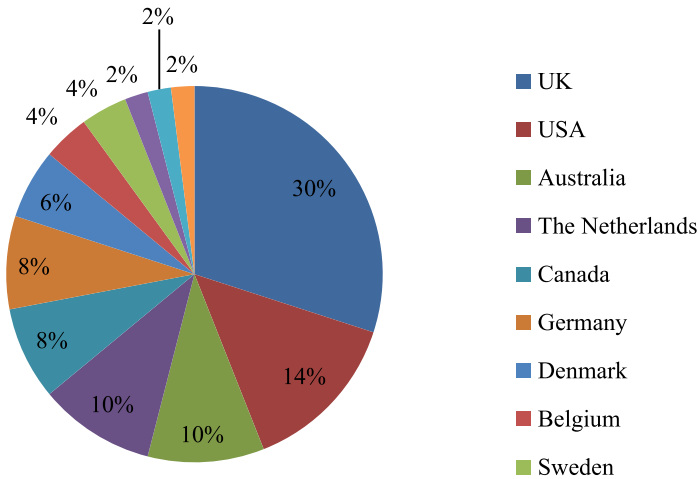
There is a fear that Syria and Iraq conflict might wage a brutal wave of terrorism across Europe and other parts of the world.[34] The extensively reported connection of quite a few ex- FTFs in the attacks in Brussels, London, Paris and Istanbul from 2015 to 2017 seem to substantiate the fear. Several researches also suggest that though returnee FTF-related attacks are infrequent, the past incidents had been particularly lethal and brutal.[35] As such there is a need to develop some perspective on the terrorism perpetrated by returnee FTFs though their numbers may be relatively small.[36] Arguably, this kind of terrorism may be conducted based on absolutely home country's dynamics without any 'foreign' engagement.[37] Thus, the threats which the returnee FTFs pose

[32] Kim Mans and Ruben Tuitel, op. cit.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Kim Willsher, "Returning jihadists 'threaten new wave of terror in Europe", *The Guardian*, 19 December 2018.

[35] Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), *The Challenge of Returning and Relocating Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Research Perspectives*, New York: United Nations, 2018; Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 107, No. 1, February 2013, p. 11.

[36] Charles Lister, "Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or Reintegration?", Brookings Institution, Policy Briefing, August 2015, p. 2.

[37] Alastair Reed, Johanna Pohl and Marjolein Jegerings, "The Four Dimensions of the Foreign Fighter Threat: Making Sense of an Evolving Phenomenon", International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, *Policy Brief*, June 2017, available at https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ICCT-Reed-Pohl-The-Four-Dimensions-of-the-Foreign-Fighters-Threat-June-2017.pdf, accessed on 08 January 2019.

in the countries of origin or return are intrinsically difficult to measure and require constant analysis.

Available statistics suggest that FTFs who went to the Middle East conflict zones and actively participated with the associated terrorist groups in Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Somalia, travelled from approxiamately 110 countries around the globe. It has been also suggested that more than 40,000 FTFs had travelled to Iraq and Syria alone until late 2017.[38] Such huge influx raises big question about the effectiveness and awareness of the intelligence agencies of the countries of origin let alone the countries of transit. Despite the reality of danger, the threat emanating from FTFs and the returnees can also be exaggerated. Since the 2003 United States of America's (USA) war against Iraq and War on terror in Afghanistan, there was an apprehension about the huge influx of the returnee FTFs who were perceived to take part in those conflicts from foreign countries. Indeed, the oversight of sympathizers, volunteers, FTFs and the returnees with respect to Syria and Iraq Civil Wars seems to have fallen heavily on the overall security affairs of the Western life with the potentiality of expanding to other parts of the world. Arguably, FTFs fill the void created due to lapses and poor responses of the respective governments and international community on the Muslim sufferings especially, the oversight of the crimes against Sunni Muslims in Syria and Iraq.[39]

2.3   *Trends and Potentials*

The returnee FTFs from Syria and Iraq are viewed differently by the Western societies and security agencies than the past FTFs phenomenon.[40] It is feared that young European and American Muslims may go off and volunteer to fight in Syria and Iraq and thereafter, return as anti-Western terrorists.[41] Moreover, while in the combat zone, they may be connected with and/or establish terrorist networks with the sympathizers and volunteers around the world, intensify the radicalization efforts and provide training, weapon and ammunitions and financial support to new recruits. This would strengthen their motivation and raise level of confidence. According to Charles Farr, a UK Security and Counter Terrorism (CT) expert, 'Syria is a very profound game-changer'[42] and 'the returnees are not only coming back with radical

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[38] United Nations, "Greater Cooperation Needed to Tackle Danger Posed by Returning Foreign Fighters, Head of Counter-Terrorism Office Tells Security Council", available at https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13097. doc.htm, accessed on 08 January 2019.
[39] International Crisis Group, "How the Islamic State Rose, Fell and Could Rise Again in the Maghreb", *Middle East and North Africa Report N°178*, Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, 24 July 2017, available at https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/178-how-the-islamic-state-rose_0.pdf, accessed on 09 January 2019.
[40] CTED, op. cit.
[41] Kristin M. Bakke, "Help Wanted? The Mixed Record of Foreign Fighters in Domestic Insurgencies", *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2014, pp. 140-187.
[42] Colum Lynch, op. cit.

ideas; they are also traumatized and fully prepared to use violence.'[43] It is also feared that 'there's going to be a Diaspora out of Syria at some point of time' who might be the cause of future 9/11.[44]

Though history records comparatively less direct threat posed by the returnee FTFs, the successful ones were more lethal and deadly.[45] It becomes difficult for states to assess which FTFs may pose a threat, or act as radicalizers, recruiters and creators or reinforcers of terrorist groups in the future.[46] The FTFs are assumed to expand their networks globally and build strong ties with other terrorist groups and sympathizers.[47] It is argued that the Western FTFs in Syria, who have gained skilled military training and experience, might have linkage to some other violent activists.[48] Moreover, as the conflict continues, FTFs are gradually gaining ground, are increasing dramatically and looking for new targets around the globe once the war is over.[49] Despite robust military operations and effective counter measures by respective countries, FTFs had played critical role in forming and strengthening terrorist groups and networks which, of course, include radicalization and recruitment process.[50] The IS 'exploits socioeconomic grievances and feelings of alienation, marginalization, discrimination, or victimization, precipitated by a host of factors, including real or perceived lack of opportunities, lack of good governance, inequality, injustice, and feelings of injustice'.[51] Such complexities of the phenomenon can be associated with (a) spontaneous travel and return from and to Middle East conflict zones especially from Syria with relative ease,[52] (b) changing motivational factors shifting from ideological travel decision to support the 'Caliphate'[53] and (c) taking advantage and making best use of technology and social media for spreading propaganda and reaching out to the global audience including financial transactions[54] for attack plots

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[43] Minister of Security and Justice, Government of the Netherlands, "National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV): Level of Threat Continues to be Substantial", available at https://www.government. nl/latest/news/2013/07/01/national-coordinator-for-security-and-counterterrorism-nctv-level-of-threat-continues-to-be-substantial, accessed on 11 January 2019.

[44] Sari Horowitz and Adam Goldman, "FBI Director: Number of Americans Traveling to Fight in Syria Increasing", *The Washington Post*, 02 May 2014.

[45] "Foreign terrorist fighters pose long-term challenge: study", *Xinhua*, 12 April 2018.

[46] CTED, op. cit.

[47] Marc Hecker and Elie Tenenbaum, *France vs. Jihadism: The Republic in a New Age of Terror*, Paris, France: The French Institute of International Relations, 2017.

[48] The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Foreign Fighters in Syria", available at http:// www. terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20607/E_207_13_1157524947.pdf, accessed on 11 January 2019.

[49] Peter Bergen and Alec Reynolds, "Blowback Revisited", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 6, 2005.

[50] "Foreign terrorist fighters pose long-term challenge: study", op. cit.

[51] CTED, "Foreign Terrorist Fighters", available at https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/foreign-terrorist-fighters/, accessed on 11 January 2019.

[52] Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2015, pp. 14-30.

[53] CTED, op. cit.

[54] Scott Gates and Sukanya Podder, "Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2015, pp. 107-116.

elsewhere upon losing the territory. In this context, Iraq seems to be more convenient than Afghanistan as it is geographically nearer to Arab heartland.[55] Syria, on the other hand, provides easier route as Brian Fishman contends, 'it is far easier for foreign fighters to enter Syria than it was in Iraq.'[56]

3. Recruitment and Radicalization

3.1 *Functional Scheme*

FTF returnees seem to have risen in status - gained a kind of street cred which enables them to radicalize and recruit others.[57] Many a times, it has been found that FTF returnees from Iraq and Afghanistan have been praised for their valiant actions and bravery elevating them in prestige and thereby allowing them to convince others to enter the fray.[58] In 2006, some 20 from France and 70 from the UK joined the fight in Iraq who later received greater honors and prestige from their community upon return.[59] Figure 3 shows the schematic model of FTFs radicalization.[60]

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[55] Shaarik H. Zafar, "Western Foreign Fighters in Syria: Implications for U.S. CVE Efforts", The Washington Institute, 14 March 2014, available at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/western-foreign-fighters-in-syria-implications-for-u.s.-cve-efforts, accessed on 12 January 2019.

[56] Brian Fishman, "Syria Proving More Fertile Than Iraq to Al-Qa'ida's Operations", *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 6, No. 11, 2013, pp. 1-2.

[57] Lorenzo Vidino, Livio Pigoni and Aglaya Snetkov, *Foreign Fighters: An Overview of Responses in Eleven Countries*, ETH Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland: Center for Security Studies, 2014.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Ansar al-Fatah and 'Iraqi' Networks in France", in Bruce Hoffman and Fernando Reinares (eds.), *The Evolution of the Global Terrorism Threat: From 9/11 to Osama Bin Laden's Death*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 353-372.

[60] Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, op. cit.

Figure 3: Schematic Model of FTFs Radicalization
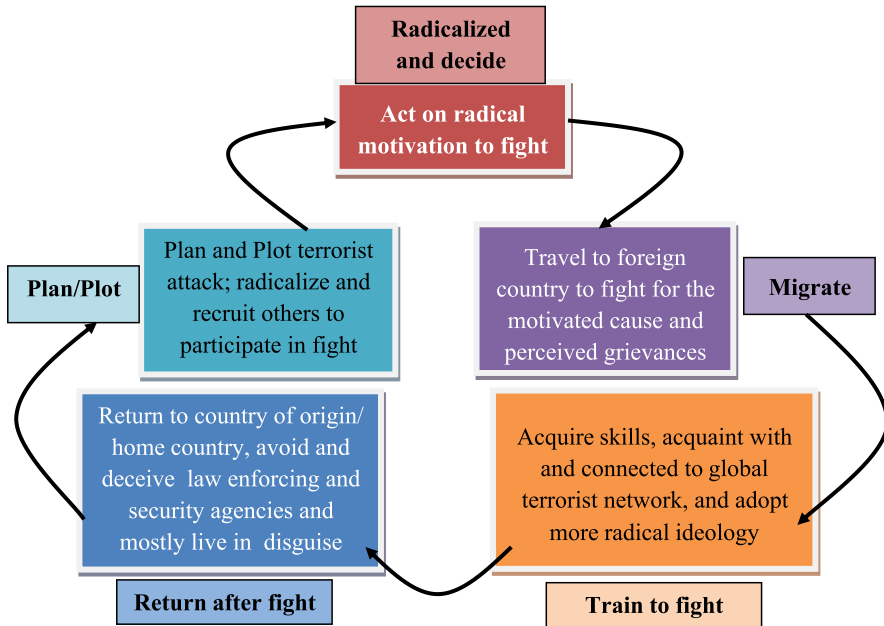
The transformation into FTFs maintains a cyclic chain where a new recruit at the end of the process becomes the skilled recruiter. The process is repetitive, with today's follower becoming tomorrow's leader. Not surprisingly, this process poses a real threat because returnee FTFs are likely to craft a wave of terrorism not only in the West but also in any part of the globe.

During the 2000s, FTFs started using social media, e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc., as new tools to recruit, motivate and muster the followers.[61] These tools have been effectively made use of globally and especially in Syrian conflict which is called 'the most socially mediated civil conflict in history'.[62] The recruits are mostly the youths between 16 and 25 years which is a principal social media age.[63] It is possible to quickly disseminate the extremist ideas and other associated

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[61] Shiraz Maher, "British Foreign Fighters in Syria", *ICSR Insight*, 15 October 2013, available at https://icsr. info/2013/10/15/british-foreign-fighters-in-syria/, accessed on 14 January 2019.

[62] Marc Lynch Deen and Freelon Sean Aday, "Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War", *United States Institute of Peace*, Peaceworks No. 91, 2014.

[63] Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, Al Qaida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records, West Point, New York: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007, available at https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2010/06/ aqs-foreign-fighters-in-iraq.pdf, accessed on 14 January 2019.

information by using social media across the wide range of sympathizers, volunteers and followers.[64] The perpetrators target to motivate the supporters by providing sermons, showing brutal actions against the perceived enemy and many other varieties of propaganda.[65] Some of the FTF groups including some individuals make use of the social media to motivate the radicals to carry out attacks in their home countries.[66] It is argued that IS is particularly skilled at stirring up their image by using social media and recruiting FTFs.[67]

3.2   *Apprehension and Reality*

The fear and apprehension regarding FTF and returnee phenomenon are sometimes exaggerated but its prevalence and impact are justified. The analysis from historical records says that most of the FTFs have not ended up as terrorists.[68] There are many mitigating factors which restrict the conversion rate of FTFs into terrorists and keep the number far lower than feared. This can be further controlled and kept low by devising appropriate policy thus decreasing the dangers which the returnee FTFs pose. According to a security analyst, though the Iraq war contributed to the formation of terrorist network, the same was effectively disrupted from further expansion.[69] Teun van Dongen contends, 'plausible as this may have sounded; no successful terrorist attack has been carried out by a jihadist who gained experience by fighting in Iraq.'[70]

It is argued that all the returnee FTFs do not perpetrate terrorism in the home country; at one point of time some might have gained anti-Western mentality, but they never indulged in violent hatred of the West before.[71] Though Mohammad

[64] Aris Roussinos, "Jihad Selfies: These British Extremists in Syria Love Social Media", *Vice Channels*, 05 December 2013, available at https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/gq8g5b/syrian-jihadist-selfies-tell-us-a-lot-about-their-war, accessed on 15 January 2019.
[65] Joseph A. Carter, Shiraz Maher and Peter R. Neumann, *Greenbirds: Measuring the Importance and Influence of Foreign Fighter Networks*, London, United Kingdom: ICSR, 2014.
[66] Abul Taher and Amanda Perthen, "From shop assistant to the British Bin Laden: Former House of Fraser trainee is sadistic Al Qaeda killer fighting with Syrian civil war's most brutal gang - and he calls for violence in the UK on social media", *Mail Online*, 01 June 2014, available at https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2644895/The-British-Bin-Laden-House-Fraser-trainee-unmasked-sadistic-Al-Qaeda-killer.html, accessed on 15 January 2019.
[67] Jeff Stone, "ISIS Attacks Twitter Streams, Hacks Accounts To Make Jihadi Message Go Viral", *International Business Times*, 17 June 2014.
[68] Rik Coolsaet and Thomas Renard, *Returnees: who are they, why are they (not) Coming Back and how should we Deal with them? Assessing Policies on Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*, Egmont–The Royal Institute for International Relations, 2018, available at http://www.egmontinstitute.be/returnees-assessing-policies-on-returning-foreign-terrorist-fighters-in-belgium germany-and-the-netherlands/, accessed on 15 January 2019.
[69] Jean-Pierre Filiu, op. cit.
[70] Daniel Byman, "What do the Paris attacks tell us about foreign fighters?", *The Washington Post*, 16 November 2015.
[71] Caroline Cox and John Marks, *The West, Islam and Islamism: Is Ideological Islam Compatible with Liberal Democracy?*, London: Institute for the Study of Civil Society, 2003.

Merah is often cited by French officials as an example of FTFs, indeed, he was already indulged in anti-Western terrorism before he joined fighting in the foreign land.[72] Merah himself chose to carry out terrorist attacks in France, not necessarily directed by the IS, Al-Qaeda core or any other terrorist organization.[73] This kind of argument has been challenged in recent times where some countries have suffered setbacks from the attack of returnee FTFs. Hegghammer argues that the radicalized FTFs from the West are more likely to travel to conflict zones than to conduct terrorist activities at home.[74]

However, according to Malet 'the vast majority of them went on to lead essentially ordinary lives,' despite their political activeness.[75] But the recent terrorist attack in Indonesia by an IS affiliated organization named Jamaah Ansaurut Daula (JAD)[76] has been an eye opener to the rest of the world that the menace of returnee FTFs is not only West-centric, but also has all the potentials to spread and expand to other parts of the world. They can leverage the strongly knitted domestic support to conduct terrorist attacks both at home and abroad. They can even connect to the disengaged former transnational terrorist groups and get combat and financial support to perpetrate attacks on their designated targets.

3.3   *Motivating Factors*

An analysis of the case of Merah reveals that he had three reasons for the violent cruelty; 'to avenge the killing of Palestinian children by Israel; to punish France for its ban on the burqa for Muslim women and to exact a price from France for sending troops to Afghanistan'.[77] Though the crises in Middle Eastern Muslim countries began with foreign intervention in Iraq, the present conflicts consciously or unconsciously involve the ideological differences and more of sectarian clashes between different ethnic communities. It does not seem to confine to Middle East conflicts and grievances only, also involves global 'Muslimophobia'. Of course, the legacies of ancient theological divide have added fuel to the ongoing conflicts and at times resurgence of conflicts in Muslim countries beyond the Middle East. Growing sectarian clashes are argued to have stimulated transnational terrorist networks that

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[72] Christopher Dickey, "Mohamed Merah and the War on Terror's New Front", *The Daily Beast*, 22 March 2012, available at https://www.thedailybeast.com/mohamed-merah-and-the-war-on-terrors-new-front, accessed on 15 January 2019.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", op. cit.

[75] David Malet, "Foreign Fighters Playbook: What the Texas Revolution and the Spanish Civil War Reveal about al Qaeda", *Foreign Affairs*, 08 April 2014.

[76] Sylvene See, "Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters: A Catalyst for Recidivism Among Disengaged Terrorists", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 10, No. 6, 2018, pp.7-15.

[77] Dickey, op. cit.

pose grave threat beyond the Middle East region.[78] These kinds of sentiments have grown during Iraq war which has sprouted through the Syrian conflict.[79] But the nature and prevalence of conflicts depict that both the regimes of Syria and Iraq have consciously used the conflict from sectarian perspective to discredit opponents and rally the non-Sunnis behind the governments.[80] As a result, many groups in opposition have taken the advantage of and embraced sectarianism. Some may argue that the menace emerged as the by-product of the 'Arab Spring', in reality, the turmoil in many countries of the Middle East including North Africa paved the way to develop political space that helped religious bigots to establish influence and power.[81] However, it may be reckoned that many volunteers who participated in the Syrian conflict in last half of 2013 were encouraged and motivated by prominent religious leaders to defend Sunnis' interests against the Shias.[82] Along with the grievances arising from Muslim sufferings due to arguably unjust war/Civil Wars, political exploitation and biased governments, the sectarianism is also one of the deeply rooted motivating factors for the radicalization of many FTFs.

Eschatological motivation is another discourse which the FTFs and new recruiters take on the basis of inevitable apocalypse. They view the Syrian conflict as a war between God's forces and his enemies. It reflects that both symbolically and historically, Syria is reckoned as the spiritual heart of the Arab and Muslim world, concerned with the final 'Day of Judgment'. Historical evidence shows that Syria was one of the first countries which oriented itself with Islamic religion as soon as Muslim forces expanded its influence from the Arabian Peninsula during the 7th and 8th centuries (661–750 CE) and 'ruled by one of Islam's most important dynasties, the Umayyads - the first great Muslim dynasty to rule the empire of the Caliphate.'[83] The glorification of such historic narratives influences many FTFs to commence clandestine activities to achieve their utopian goals.

Theologically, the ultimate fate and the sufferings of Syria are connected with the core Muslim beliefs all over the world. According to an apocalyptic prophecy by the last and final prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), Syria would

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[78] Council on Foreign Relations, "The Sunni- Shia Divide", available at https://www.cfr.org/interactives/sunni-shia-divide#!/sunni-shia-divide, accessed on 12 January 2019.
[79] Geneive Abdo, "The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a Sunni Divide", *Brookings Institution*, 10 April 2013, available at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/sunni-shia-abdo.pdf, accessed on 15 January 2019.
[80] Justin J. Gengler, "Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf", in Lawrence G. Potter (ed.), *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, London: Hurst and Company, 2013, pp. 31– 66.
[81] Daniel Byman, "Sectarianism Afflicts the New Middle East", *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2014.
[82] The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization", available at https://www.terrorism-info.org.il//Data/articles/Art_20733/101_14_Ef_ 1329270214.pdf, accessed on 15 January 2019.
[83] Asma Afsaruddin, "Umayyad Dynasty: Islamic History", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at https://www.britannica.com/topic/Umayyad-dynasty-Islamic-history, accessed on 16 January 2019.

be the final place for decisive last battles for the end of time.[84] William McCants,[85] an expert on terrorism and Islam argues that the IS leaderships motivate the recruits 'by being more ruthless, more apocalyptic and more devoted to state-building than its competitors. The shrewd leaders of the IS combined two of the most powerful yet contradictory ideas in Islam-the return of the Islamic Empire and the end of the world-into a mission and a message that shapes its strategy and inspires its army of zealous fighters.' McCants fears that the returnee FTFs have already defied conventional views of waging wars and acquiring recruits. He further argues that even if the IS is defeated, jihadist terrorism will never be the same.[86] Importantly, lessons can be taken from recent incidents that the returnee FTFs learn from the predecessors' failures or successes thus, emerging as ever-evolving threats. This nature of threats can take up the bloody role of IS even if they are gone. Thus, it is significant to understand the motivational aspects from the perspective of ideology, history and politics with a view to grasping the threats' discourse including foreseeing future developments in the arena of global terrorism arising from returnee FTFs.

There remains a psychological impact to connect the conflict of Middle Eastern Muslim countries to the problems at home, such as discrimination or specific affronts, such as the cartoons published by a Danish newspaper that mocked the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).[87] Thus, new-fangled motivation reinforces the existing grievances and strengthens local-global nexus.

Furthermore, when FTFs' networks find that their comrades are consistently targeted, some can divert their efforts on the home government rather than fighting in the foreign land. Such kind of coercive measure might also construct 'suspect communities' where it would provide fertile ground for radicalization and where the community as a whole is less likely to cooperate with the security agencies in particular and the government as a whole.[88] According to one expert, the youths of such communities become more prone to be FTFs with the potentiality to return to home country and carry out terrorist acts.[89]

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[84] Mariam Karouny, "Apocalyptic prophecies drive both sides to Syrian battle for end of time", *Reuters*, available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-prophecy-insight/apocalyptic-prophecies-drive-both-sides-to-syrian-battle-for-end-of-time-idUSBREA3013420140401, accessed on 16 January 2019.

[85] McCants, op. cit.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Shaarik H. Zafar, op. cit.

[88] Floris Vermeulen, "Suspect communities—Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2014, pp. 286-306,

[89] Lynn Davies, *Review of Educational Initiatives in Countering-Extremism Internationally: What Works*, Gothenburg, University of Gothenburg: The Segerstedt Institute, 2018.

Figure 4: Complex Model of Foreign Fighter Radicalization[90]
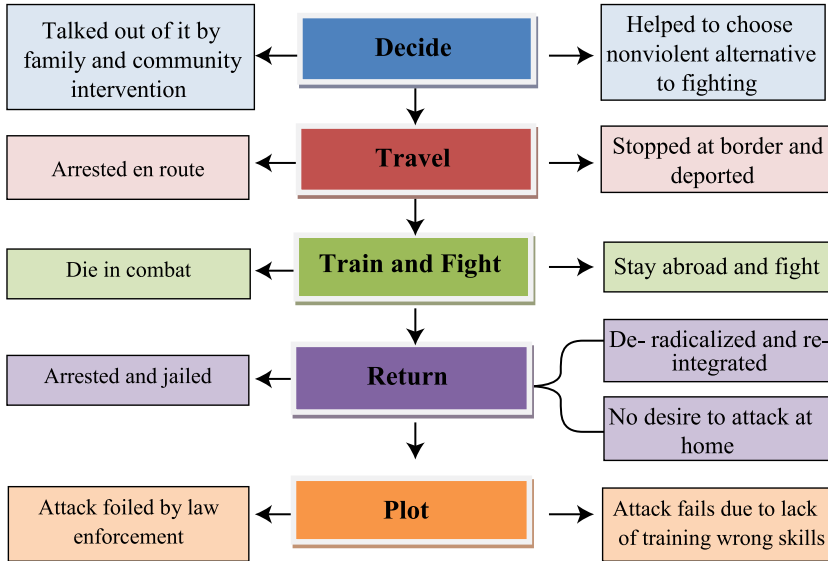
The governments across the globe are yet to develop coherent counter-narrative for discouraging potential recruits to volunteer for foreign fighters. The 'would-be' jihadists arguably bear the same view, as Western governments, of blaming the Assad regime for committing atrocities against civilians, and that he should be removed.[91] Not only that, the sympathizers and would-be volunteers are also very critical about the passive role of the global community on the Muslim sufferings in the Middle East and around the world in general and Syria and Iraq in particular. It is argued that the U.S. intervention in Iraq for defending religious and ethnic minority Yazidis who are regarded as infidels (unbelievers) by mainstream Muslims[92] and devil-worshippers by some[93], has, indeed, strengthened this narrative.

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[90] Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, op. cit.
[91] Shiraz Maher, "British Foreign Fighters in Syria", op. cit.
[92] Human Rights Council, "They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis", available at https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf, accessed on 16 January 2019.
[93] Raya Jalabi, "Who are the Yazidis and why is Isis hunting them?", *The Guardian*, 11 August 2014, available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/who-yazidi-isis-iraq-religion-ethnicity-mountains, accessed on 15 January 2019.

4. Response Strategy

Terrorism, being a small-numbers' game, is perpetrated by only a few well-trained, de-motivated but diehard individuals which creates panic, psychological trauma and horrific devastation basically on unarmed and innocent civilian lives. The model in figure 4 outlines the 'terrorist production system' from the perspective of Syria and Iraq conflict. The system is more or less effective in each stage and inevitably upon completion of the journey through the cycles, some will emerge as deadly terrorists. However, effective and timely intervention at every stage in the process would certainly break the chain, reduce the numbers of individuals transforming to be FTFs and thus dramatically decreasing the odds and effectiveness of the returnees.

Upon analyzing the data and facts, it can be argued that the numbers of sympathizers and volunteers joining Syria and Iraq conflict should neither be neglected nor be overstated. It has been noted earlier that some sympathizers may turn to be FTFs after the fight while many others are likely to be subjected to death during fight, continue the fight till death and/or come to normalcy upon returning to the home country. Legal measures and effective intelligence are yet other factors that can neutralize or at least reduce and squeeze the domain of FTFs and returnees.

4.1 *Intervention at Decision Stage*

Intervention at decision stage is one of the most effective ways to reduce the number of fighters willing to travel and fight in the conflict zones. It makes sense that those who cannot travel to conflict zones, cannot be further radicalized by in-situ and combatant foreign fighters. The concerned authorities can raise the awareness among the local community of potential sympathizers forecasting about the dangers and consequences of fighting in the foreign land, such as losing welfare-oriented facilities. They can also establish hotlines to enable families and local community to inform the concerned authority about any suspicion or apprehension regarding potential move to conflict zone abroad especially Syria,[94] capitalize on Muslim women to persuade the potential travellers from being radicalized and to refrain from joining the fray,[95] including 'Prevent' program aiming to reduce extremism.[96] All these have been proved to be effective. Moreover, community awareness briefings and consultations highlighting the realities and dangers of travelling to Syria intended to engage

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[94] Radicalization Awareness Network, *Working with Families and Safeguarding Children from Radicalization: Step-by-Step Guidance Paper for Practitioners and Policy-makers*, Nice, France: Radicalization Awarness Network, 2017.

[95] Murad Batal al-Shishani, "The challenge of keeping Denmark's Muslims out of Syria", *BBC News,* 19 May 2014, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27423789, accessed on 18 January 2019.

[96] Byman and Shapiro, op. cit.

communities, share information and appropriately participate in the development of community-led efforts to counter violent extremism[97] is another successful program of this kind. These briefings provide unique opportunity to foster trust between local communities and the government agencies, which over time can establish a two-way means of communication, whereby the community can learn about the efforts of the government in countering extremism as well as services offered by law enforcement to protect their neighbourhoods from these and other threats and public officials can receive information from the community about emerging threats.[98]

It is important for vulnerable countries to provide counter-narratives against the brutality of the conflict and the internecine violence among extremists. Unfortunately, most of the governments' efforts seemed to be poor in developing counter-narratives which fall short of community credibility.[99] As community leaderships enjoy better command and control over their own community, it is argued that they should be mobilized to raise the voice against atrocity and violence with appropriate and correct narratives because government's channel may be perceived hostile by the aggrieved sympathizers. Pragmatic point of view can better serve the purpose alongside the theological explanation; of course, concerned governments must take guard against inept religious authority. It would be particularly effective and convincing to the sympathizers and community people if they can hear from the returned foreign fighters about the atrocities, miseries and misguided actions. Saudi Arabia has alerted its citizens on Saudi state television for not travelling to Syria for fighting and telecasting running interviews with disillusioned returned fighters.[100] Indeed, these kinds of efforts are likely to spread across the message that upon return, the FTFs would be welcomed by the host community and would be able to lead a normal peaceful life.

Indeed, with the intelligent use of social media, security organizations can follow, monitor, detect and disrupt the FTFs' attack schemes and foil them before occurance. There is no denying of the fact that danger posed by returnee FTFs is alarming and real. It is assumed that Western security agencies have the tools to disrupt and mitigate the threat. These tools need to be developed and deployed across the globe and be adapted in the new context of Syria and Iraq. Experience thus far validates perspectives of security cooperation at global level so that the threats of returnee FTFs cannot become pandemic.

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[97] Shaarik H. Zafar, op. cit.
[98] Lisa O. Monaco, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism remarks at *the Harvard Kennedy School Forum*, 15 April 2014, available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/16/remarks-assistant-president-homeland-security-and-counterterrorism-lisa-, accessed on 18 January 2019.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Robert F. Worth, "Saudis Back Syrian Rebels Despite Risks", *The New York Times*, 07 January 2014.

4.2 *Travel Monitoring*

An important stage in the process of radicalization of potential FTFs is concerned with travelling to the conflict zone(s). Disruption during the transit through different countries is argued to be one of the most effective ways of dipping the threat of FTFs to Western countries and other parts of the world. Doing so will primarily require better cooperation among governments especially nodal transit countries. All governments must reckon that the menace of FTFs would not remain confined to the Western world only; the rest of the world would also receive the brunt of the same. Thus, cooperation amongst all is highly essential. The global security communities should establish effective and functional channels with intelligence agencies of vital transit counties to Iraq and Syria to warn about specific individuals travelling to them. It would help stop the individual right at the borders and deport them before getting into the fight.

Intelligence gathered from FTFs' mutual communications using phones and/or social media, monitoring shared open-sources and other inter-intelligence agencies exchanges can be effective tools for discerning transnational extremist networks. Cooperation among countries is essential for curbing the travel of 'would-be' FTFs as radicals from one country often try to travel to the conflict zones in the Middle East via another country for avoiding detection.

4.3 *Disrupting the Functional Scheme*

FTFs mostly train and fight in conflict zones especially in the Middle East, remaining beyond the influence and reach of security forces and intelligence agencies. Of course, there are obvious ways and means to sway the FTFs' production function. One of the effective ways of lowering the morale of FTFs is sowing seeds of doubt about their success due to security forces' intervention both at home and abroad including fragile loyalty of the volunteers. Social workers-providing humanitarian assistance can work as a great source of information. But this has to be performed with due caution, because they can be viewed by the FTFs as potential spies as well. Awareness building is yet another effective way to family, community and social monitoring of suspicious activities. It is significant for security communities and practitioners in the field of counter-radicalization to exchange best practices and lessons. Organizing family and community meetings for prevention, outreach, rehabilitation and reintegration[101] can help keep radicalization efforts at low ebb. The other kinds of supports can be therapeutic, stimulating parents to address their emotions and anxieties or encourage families to actively challenge and deconstruct

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[101] Radicalization Awarness Network, "The RAN Declaration of Good Practices for Engagement with Foreign Fighters for Prevention, Outreach, Rehabilitation and Reintegration", available at http://www.icct.nl/download/file/RAN-Declaration-Good-Practices-for-Engagement-with-Foreign-Fighters.pdf, accessed on

some of the extremist narratives through motivating those who are at risk so that they willingly refrain and volunteer to return for reintegration with the community.[102] Likewise, practitioners of specific fields can help parents and family members adopt appropriate method of communication and interaction with respective relatives who are at a risk of being radicalized or already caught up by the ideology of violent extremism.

Promoting and propagating counter-narrative is significant where parents, religious and community leaders are encouraged and expected to take the lead.[103] Communities in general and families in particular can often be great source of assistance as there is no trust deficit between them and the government.[104] It is argued that community-based programmes to win the hearts and minds of the concerned families are effective especially for obtaining information about the returnee FTFs, but providing the same to intelligence organization to arrest the defected family member(s) may prevent fearful households from coming forward for spotting at-risk individuals.[105] In this context, appropriate community programmes of cognitive conditioning can be more effective for changing the psychological orientation of the radicalized faction rather than applying force or detention. There should be an effort to turn the mindset of returnee FTFs towards non-violence so that they themselves can play a catalyst role in the community. It may be noted here that coercion or hounding FTF returnees with the threat of arrest or creating an environment and feeling of alienation can backfire. Experience shows that many family and community members have been able to steer the returnee FTFs towards normalcy in the past; some of them even provided valuable information about their former collaborators and associates.[106]

4.4   *Plotting the Plots*

According to a UN estimate in 2015, more than 25,000 FTFs from over 100 countries joined Iraq and Syria conflicts.[107] Another study in 2016 suggests that a combination of more than 30,000 FTFs of all kinds participated throughout the entire conflict in Iraq and Syria since 2011.[108] It is significant being nuanced while

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[102] Available at https://hayat-deutschland.de/english/, accessed on 15 January 2019.

[103] United Nations Office on Drug and Crimes and United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, *Use of the Internet to Counter the Appeal of Extremist Violence*, New York: United Nations, 2011.

[104] Ahmad Mansour, "Mum, I'm Fighting for Allah Now", *The Washington Institute*, 06 February 2014, available at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/mum-im-fighting-for-allah-now, accessed on

[105] Andrew McDonnell, "Community Approach to Jihadis' Rehabilitation in Tunisia", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 27 September 2018, available at https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/77358, accessed on

[106] John Mueller (ed.), *Terrorism since 9/11: The American Cases*, Ohio, USA: Mershon Center, 2019.

[107] "Statement by the President of the Security Council", available at http://undocs.org/S/PRST/2015/11, accessed on 15 January 2019.

[108] Edwin BakkerMark Singleton, "Foreign Fighters in the Syria and Iraq Conflict: Statistics and Characteristics of a Rapidly Growing Phenomenon", in Andrea Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen (eds.), *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond*, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016, pp. 9-25.

arguing on the FTF phenomenon in Syria that all who joined the Syrian conflict, do not turn terrorists after returning to home country: a small faction may perpetrate terrorism after returning. Having said so, it would be probably incorrect to deduce that foreign fighters of Syria and Iraq would pose no potential threat. It is argued that individuals with the experience of foreign training and/or fighting have the potential for terrorist plots.[109] Thomas Hegghammer, a Norwegian academic argues that terrorists with foreign experience are far more lethal, dangerous and sophisticated than purely domestic cells.[110] The veteran FTF returnees appear to pose more threats than non-veteran 'would-be domestic jihadist'.[111] One study finds that Syrian conflict has impinged Muslims across the globe to an extent which can be compared to the conflicts in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Bosnia in the 1990s and Iraq in the 2000s.[112] However, what we should be concerned about most is the FTFs who joined the IS in Iraq and Syria.

To disrupt the attack plots of FTFs, concerned security agencies must remain focused on the trail of returnees. For this, they must acquire modern and sufficient devices and gazettes to monitor the footprints of returnee FTFs. There must be fore plan on the part of home governments to overcome the resource limitation with the increase numbers of returnee FTFs for maintaining effective and strong vigilance. Surveillance and monitoring a large number of suspects are highly resource intensive and costly as well.

According to an Australian security services' estimate, it would cost US$ 7.4 million a year to monitor just one returnee FTF round the clock.[113] Yet failing to monitor a known suspect would be difficult to justify in hindsight after an attack. More so, for intelligence agencies, often the difficulty remains with processing, analyzing and following up the information in a timely manner because data are often buried in a mountain of data.[114]

4.5   *Adopting Holistic and Comprehensive Strategy*

The phenomenon of FTFs involves responsibilities not only of the countries of origin and destination but also of the countries of transit. Involvement of these three types of countries also necessitates that the issue of FTFs should be dealt

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[109] Edwin Bakker, Christoph Paulussen and Eva Entenmann, "Returning Jihadist Foreign Fighters: Challenges Pertaining to Threat Assessment and Governance of this Pan-European Problem", *Security and Human Rights*, Vol. 25, 2014, pp. 11-32.
[110] Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", op. cit.
[111] Christopher J. Wright, "How Dangerous Are Domestic Terror Plotters with Foreign Fighter Experience? The Case of Homegrown Jihadis in the US", *Perspective on Terrorism*, Vol.10, No. 1, 2016. pp. 32-40.
[112] Aaron Y. Zelin, "European Foreign Fighters in Syria", *The Washington Institute*, 02 April 2013, available at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/european-foreign-fighters-in-syria, accessed on
[113] CTED, op. cit.
[114] Byman and Shapiro, op. cit.

at national, regional and global levels. Therefore, what would be the mode of response at national, regional and global levels necessitates another area of global framework. This includes legal responses as well as other socio-economic and developmental approaches to counter this phenomenon, in brief, devising a holistic and comprehensive approach.

It can be argued broadly that so far, policy responses adopted by countries follow three main approaches: (a) imprisonment, (b) elimination and (c) re-integration. Whatever policies are undertaken, it needs to be respectful to the principles of individual rights and rule of law whereas responses should be adequate and proportional to ensure people's safety and national security.

Crucial questions dwell around keeping track of the individual(s) who can make attempt to travel to and return from the Middle East conflict zones, their activities in the home country upon return from the fight, the process of reintegration in the society, motivation of family members and associates and societal involvement. These are key questions that must inform policies. While studies are limited in this field, a number of reports by academics, civil society and inter-state institutions, including the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), contribute to the understanding of FTF motivations and contributing factors, including by giving voice to disengaged FTFs.[115] Upon being gradually defeated on building and defending its caliphate, the IS seemingly started following the Al-Qaeda tactics of targeting the 'far enemy' with the same official motto 'remaining and expanding'.[116] Holding the motto good, the concept of 'expansion' seems to have shifted from acquiring new provinces[117] to creating multiple theatres of threats. For example, Europe has suffered from several attacks while thwarting many more. France foiled 20 planned terror attacks in a span of 12 months in 2017 alone,[118] from April 2017 to June 2017 the UK experienced three successful attacks while the security agencies could foil five plots[119] and in 2016 Germany bore five attacks.[120] It is thus important for international, regional and national security communities to take all possible steps to guard against the menace of FTF phenomenon holistically and comprehensively.

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[115] Hamed el-Saidand and Richard Barrett, op. cit.

[116] Aaron Y. Zelin, op. cit.

[117] Nicholas A. Glavin, "Remaining and Expanding: Why Local Violent Extremist Organizations Reflag to ISIS", *Small Wars Journal*, available at https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/remaining-and-expanding-why-local-violent-extremist-organizations-reflag-isis, accessed on 21 January 2019.

[118] "France foils 20 planned terror attacks in 12 months", *The Local*, 09 January 2018, available at https://www.thelocal.fr/20180109/france-foils-20-terror-attacks-in-12-months, accessed on 21 January 2019.

[119] Vikram Dodd and Robert Booth, "London Bridge attack: terror threat in UK now at 'completely different' level", *The Guardian*, 06 June 2016.

[120] German Federal Ministry of the Interior, "Brief Summary 2016 Report on the Protection of the Constitution Facts and Trends", available at https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/annual-report-2016-summary.pdf, accessed on 21 January 2019.

4.6   *Bangladesh Perspective*

Bangladesh being a developing nation has its limitations in terms of resources and capabilities. Nevertheless, the country has made tremendous success in countering terrorism and violent extremism following a heightened level of extremist attacks during 2013-2016. Following the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in June 2016, government has undertaken 'zero tolerance' policy and all-out counter terrorism efforts. Yet in March 2017 alone, Bangladesh had experienced three terrorist attacks. Bangladesh government continues with 'zero-tolerance' policy against terrorism and the use of its land as a terrorist safe haven.[121] As far as returnee FTFs are concerned, in Bangladesh, there is no exact statistics, but it is usually perceived that individuals left the country for joining the fight in Syria and Iraq would be very insignificant if not nil. However, Bangladesh needs international assistance in devising appropriate response strategy. One area of required assistance lies in establishing and instituting modern and sophisticated border control and immigration system so that any suspicious movement across and along the border can be successfully detected and intercepted.

When analyzing the correlates of terrorism, Bangladesh should care for different factors that are statistically significant depending on the level of social construct. Socio-economic factors such as youth unemployment, militant politics, levels of criminality, access to weapons and distrust among communities are argued to be the most statistically significant factors correlating with terrorism. These reinforces some of the well-known drivers of radicalization and extremism. In developing countries, the history of conflict, levels of corruption, acceptance of the rights of others and group based inequalities are more significantly related to terrorist activity.[122] Besides, the FTFs phenomenon appears to be a staple feature of many of the local, regional and international armed conflicts for many decades.[123] A wide-ranging risk analysis especially its shifting nature alongside encompassing the threats associated with growing societal polarization which both FTFs and state react to, is vital in alleviating the menace.[124]

In terms of policy responses at the international level, Bangladesh should make use of every effort and experience of global security communities and concerned stakeholders including adapting to the best practices of the most affected countries. Besides, the government can make an effort to prepare and propagate counter-narrative by empowering community and religious leaders to eradicate the theological

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[121] United States Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 – Bangladesh", available at https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1fb6140.html, accessed on 21 January 2019.

[122] Institute for Economics and Peace, "Global Terrorism Index 2016: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism", available at http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2016.2.pdf, accessed on 21 January 2019.

[123] Marcello Flores, op. cit.

[124] Alastair Reed Johanna Pohl Marjolein Jegerings, op. cit.

misinterpretation of terror and killing. Local police should be trained in a way so that they can able to identify the existence of extremist behaviour in a community they interact with. The security forces should be equipped with modern counter-terrorism training, building unit capacity in crisis response, crime scene investigations, collection of evidence, protection of infrastructures, institutional development and sustainment including enhancement of digital and cyber investigation capabilities.[125] There should be monitoring and feedback mechanism at community level so that concerned law enforcement agencies can be informed about any extremist and terrorist plot at the earliest opportunity.

Given the complexity of FTF and the returnee phenomenon, the work requires collaboration among the United Nations (UN), regional multilateral organizations, national and local governments and civil society organization (CSO).[126] Because of individual psychosocial processes, it also requires sustained and trusted engagement and involvement of local mentors, including educators and religious leaders, families and other supportive social networks. In this context, locally-rooted CSOs have a crucial contribution to make. They have the trust of and access to the affected individuals, families and communities. Not only that, they can also be effective interlocutors with government and security actors.[127] Bangladesh as a nation of resilience, should be able to effectively engage the social strength to the national effort thus maintaining the national cohesion to face the odds.

5.   Conclusion

Though the trends of FTFs are declining, the threats of returnees to the home countries now are rising. Respective countries and global communities have much to do to reduce the threats posed by returnee FTFs. The West strongly perceives the returnee FTFs' attack as almost inevitable. But it is possible to keep the country and its people safe from returnee FTFs' terrorist ploys in any part of the world with appropriate strategy and actions. Unfortunately, terrorism has emerged as a cruel facet of modern life.[128] It is argued that the threat cannot be fully eradicated, but definitely be controlled and neutralized. Arguably, the fallout of Syria and Iraq

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[125] United States Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 – Bangladesh", op. cit.
[126] "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary - General", available at http://unoy. org/wp-content/uploads/UN-Plan-of-Action-to-Prevent-Violent-Extremism.pdf, accessed on 21 January 2019.
[127] "10 Steps to Strengthening Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts for Terrorism Offenders, Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, and Victims of Violent Extremism", *International Civil Society Action Network*, 06 May 2018, available at https://www.icanpeacework.org/2018/05/06/10-steps-strengthening-rehabilitation-reintegration-efforts-terrorism-offenders-returning-foreign-terrorist-fighters-victims-violent-extremism/, accessed on 21 January 2019.
[128] Miryam Lindberg, "Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century", available at http://www.gees. org/files/article/20022010093237_Analisis-07561.pdf, accessed on 22 January 2019.

conflicts would aggravate the situation and make it more difficult.[129] However, it is significant to assure the respective citizens not to panic. It is to recognize that the West as a whole has been able to deal with such phenomenon before and has adopted effective counter measures to significantly reduce the threat emanating from FTF returnees. It is important to revisit the response strategy to avoid policy mistakes and overreaction because failure would destine all to be doomed. All respective governments should ensure that concerned stakeholders be adequately resourced and the same is shared with other global security communities.

Another recommendation would entail assessing the effectiveness of intervention programmes and determining the implementation feasibility in different geographies. Law enforcement agencies work diligently within their jurisdictions despite resource constraints. This aspect needs due attention in terms of resource allocation and enhanced training so that they can demonstrate measures of effectiveness. This would also provide a window to prioritize efforts with regards to focus and resources. Local law enforcers should also share their best practices with other jurisdictions regarding intervention programmes aimed at disengaging community members from radicalization efforts. These programmes are especially useful since they encounter local conditions and community dynamics.

Security cooperation among UN member states under the UN umbrella is absolutely necessary. Other regional and sub-regional cooperation can also be effective in intercepting and disrupting terrorist plots. For example, the networks of FTFs with Iraq experience were disrupted in part by joint cooperation of American, European and Arab security services.[130] Intelligence gathered from mutual interactions and communications of FTFs, shared open-sources, social media connections and exchanges and other information obtained by one intelligence organization can prove significant in tracking and tracing transnational networks. Worries remain among countries especially in Europe about attacks emanating from their neighbours rather than from their homeland, where they have effective surveillance capabilities. It can, therefore, be recommended that law enforcement and intelligence agencies at all levels enhance mutual cooperation on global scale, focusing on identification of radicalization indicators among community people in which terrorism breeds. Local police should be trained at a level to be able to identify the existence of extremist behaviour in a community they interact. They usually arrive first on the scene after any occurrence; they should be able to find out the clues of radicalization, extremism and potential terrorist threats. The government should provide adequate fund and greater resources to law enforcement and security agencies to enable them to control the threat at the lowest level possible.

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[129] William Young, David Stebbins, Bryan A. Frederick and Omar Al-Shahery, *Spillover from the Conflict in Syria: An Assessment of the Factors that Aid and Impede the Spread of Violence*, Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2014.

[130] Jean-Pierre Filiu, op. cit.