



## St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

**Forum:** Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

**Topic:** Addressing the Mobilisation of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)

**Student Officer:** Ioannis Dimitrios Makrypodakis

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### PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Giannis Makrypodakis and I am an IB1 student at Pierce - The American College of Greece. This will be my second time attending SCMUN, my fifth time chairing, and my ninth conference in total.

First of all, I would like to congratulate each and every one of you for taking part in this committee for the 5th session of St Catherine's Model United Nations Conference. I hope that during the conference you will get to know your chairs, prepare resolutions, debate, and of course have fun. This particular guide concerns the first topic of the GA1 Committee which is "Addressing the Mobilisation of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)", and it should equip you with all the fundamental information on the matter. Despite the study guide, you are highly encouraged to conduct research on your own so as to get a better and more thorough understanding of the topic. Also keep in mind that bibliography can be helpful since it indicates the sources where you can get more information from.

Should you have any questions about the topic, committee, or conference in general, do not hesitate to contact your Co-Chair, Dimitris Flerianos at [dimitris.florianos@gmail.com](mailto:dimitris.florianos@gmail.com) or your Chair, Christy Gnoth at [christy.gnoth@gmail.com](mailto:christy.gnoth@gmail.com).



## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) refers to individuals travelling in a nation other than their own or in conflict zones with the objective of planning or participating in a terrorist act or receiving terrorist training.<sup>1</sup> While this phenomenon is not recent, it roots back in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Bosnia in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the situation has escalated with the outbreak of the civil war in Syria and the growth of the Islamic State.<sup>3</sup> According to the United Nations, more than 40,000 foreign fighters from 110 countries have travelled to Syria and Iraq so as to join terrorist groups whilst other researchers found that 5,904 individuals originated from Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The return of these individuals pose a threat to international and domestic security. Firstly, these individuals might commit terrorist acts in their country or residence utilizing the training they had received abroad.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, they might serve as recruiters encouraging new recruits to join an extremist group.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, they might have a direct effect on the society, by spreading propaganda and be responsible for further radicalization of the public.<sup>7</sup> Another issue associated with their return is the fact that they might pass down the knowledge they have received to terrorist groups in their home country and thus, it is even harder for governments to counter terrorism within their borders.

Except for the threats posed by the returnees though, comprehending mobilization is of utmost significance. According to research, social networks are some of the most significant drivers of mobilization. People might join through friends and other people

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<sup>1</sup> "Foreign Terrorist Fighters | Office of Counter-Terrorism." [Www.un.org, www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters).

<sup>2</sup> "Foreign Terrorist Fighters | Office of Counter-Terrorism." [Www.un.org, www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters).

<sup>3</sup> "Foreign Terrorist Fighters | Office of Counter-Terrorism." [Www.un.org, www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters).

<sup>4</sup> "Foreign Terrorist Fighters | Office of Counter-Terrorism." [Www.un.org, www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/foreign-terrorist-fighters).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations. "Foreign Terrorist Fighters." *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/expertise/foreign-terrorist-fighters.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/expertise/foreign-terrorist-fighters.html).

<sup>6</sup> Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Resolution. "Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Resolution." *Security Council Report*, 2017, [www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2017/12/foreign-terrorist-fighters-resolution.php](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2017/12/foreign-terrorist-fighters-resolution.php).

<sup>7</sup> "New CTED Trends Report Stresses Challenges Stemming from Returning and Relocating Foreign Terrorist Fighters | Security Council - Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)." *Un.org*, 2017, [www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/new-cted-trends-report-stresses-challenges-stemming-returning-a-and-relocating-foreign-terrorist](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/new-cted-trends-report-stresses-challenges-stemming-returning-a-and-relocating-foreign-terrorist).



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in their network instead of being influenced by content on the internet.<sup>8</sup> In addition, another essential matter is the way extremist groups recruit members. Oftentimes these groups employ people through mosques or through local recruiters. Online propaganda also plays a major role since it facilitates the formation of connections with individuals from other nations, therefore making it easier for young people to come in contact with members of groups abroad.<sup>9</sup>

This year's topic of "Addressing the mobilization of FTFs" aligns with this year's agenda theme, which is "Beyond Borders" as it is an issue which has an international impact. FTFs operate "beyond borders" and they move from nation to nation with the objective of joining extremist groups. Additionally, extremist groups have recruiters internationally spreading radicalization and propaganda indicating the international nature of these groups thus presenting a clear link to the conference's theme.

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<sup>8</sup> "Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq | START.umd.edu." [Www.start.umd.edu](http://www.start.umd.edu), [www.start.umd.edu/publication/social-network-analysis-german-foreign-fighters-syria-and-iraq](http://www.start.umd.edu/publication/social-network-analysis-german-foreign-fighters-syria-and-iraq).

<sup>9</sup> Behr, Ines, et al. "Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism." *Rand.org*, RAND Corporation, 2013, [www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR453.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR453.html).



## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Foreign Terrorist Fighters

“Foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) travel to conflict zones to engage in terrorist acts. The persuasive use of propaganda by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) led to an unprecedented flow of volunteers from countries around the world to live under the rule of the terrorist group. This included not only men, but also women and families.”<sup>10</sup> FTFs are individuals that leave their home countries in order to join a terrorist group abroad. In the case of ISIS, tens of thousands of people travelled to Syria and Iraq because of the group’s propaganda of the so-called caliphate as a religious duty.

### Radicalization

“The process or act of making a person more extreme in their views or actions.”<sup>11</sup> If someone is becoming radicalised, it means they are displaying extreme views in support of extreme ideologies or beliefs, terrorist groups and activities.”<sup>12</sup> - It forms the starting point of FTF mobilization. Online propaganda, personal grievances, identity conflicts, and social networks can all contribute to radicalization.

### Mobilization

“The act of organizing or preparing something, such as a group of people, for a purpose.”<sup>13</sup> In the context of ISIS, radicalized individuals were mobilised by recruiters, encrypted communication channels, logistical guidance, and promised belonging, adventure or status.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations. “Foreign Terrorist Fighters.” *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/expertise/foreign-terrorist-fighters.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/expertise/foreign-terrorist-fighters.html).

<sup>11</sup> “Definition of Radicalization.” *Collinsdictionary.com*, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 28 July 2025, [www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/radicalization#google\\_vignette.k](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/radicalization#google_vignette.k)

<sup>12</sup> Action Counters Terrorism. “What Is It? | Counter Terrorism Policing.” *Action Counters Terrorism*, 11 Aug. 2021, [actearly.uk/radicalisation/what-is-it/](http://actearly.uk/radicalisation/what-is-it/).

<sup>13</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. “Mobilization.” *@CambridgeWords*, 21 Feb. 2024, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mobilization#google\\_vignette](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mobilization#google_vignette).



## Counter-Terrorism

“The comprehensive measures governments, organizations and communities take to prevent terrorist attacks, stop people from becoming terrorists and mitigate the impact in the event of an attack.” Efforts such as the UN Security Council resolutions 2178 and 2396 directly target the threat posed by FTFs, requiring states to strengthen border controls, monitor travel, share intelligence and address the dangers of returning fighters.<sup>14</sup>

## Extremism

“Violent extremism is the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence.”<sup>15</sup> These extremist narratives are essential in moving individuals from mere sympathy to active involvement as Fighters.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Historical Background on FTFs

During the Soviet-Afghan war the conflict became the first one to entail foreign fighter terrorists with the emergence of the Afghan-Arabs. They were primarily Arab volunteers who went to Afghanistan with the objective of supporting the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviets. Their mobilization was supported by Islamic leaders like Abdullah Yusuf Azzam who declared that all Muslims are obligated to defend and safeguard Muslim lands from foreign occupation. Additionally, Osama bin Laden co-founded the Maktab al-Khadamat in Pakistan which was responsible for funding, recruiting and organizing the foreign volunteers. Supported indirectly by Saudi Arabian, Pakistani and US intelligence networks, they provided aid to the Afghan resistance and thus, this

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<sup>14</sup> UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE (CTED).

<sup>15</sup> “What Is Violent Extremism?”

<https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/Documents/What-Is-Violent-Extremism.PDF>.

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allowed the movement of individuals, money as well as ideology on a cross border unprecedented scale.

### **The conflicts between Syria and Iraq and their impact**

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq prompted the emergence of extremist groups and precisely the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The unstable circumstances following the Iraq war in combination with the initiation of the Syrian civil war led ISIS to quickly expand to other nations and therefore declared the caliphate. The rise of ISIS is considered to be the largest ever mobilization of FTFs. According to the United Nations, more than 35,000 FTFs from 110 different nations went to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.<sup>16</sup> These individuals got themselves recruited in ISIS for multiple reasons like religious motives as well as ideological ones. The movement of FTFs did not only affect the conflict in Syria and Iraq but became a global concern. ISIS has been responsible for multiple terrorist attacks throughout Europe, the United Kingdom as well as in the United States of America. Indicative are the attacks in Paris, in 2015 in local patisseries, in the Stade de France and the most fatal one in Bataclan music hall.<sup>17</sup> The conflicts in Syria and Iraq enabled the rise of ISIS, which quickly expanded and declared a caliphate. Thus, this led to the largest mobilization of FTFs in modern history. Tens of thousands of suspected ISIS members and their families are detained in camps such as al-Hol and Roj in northeast Syria. Overcrowding, poor living conditions, and indefinite detention without access to justice, have created serious humanitarian and security challenges. Children and other vulnerable populations remain at risk of population and some camps have reportedly become “incubators” for extremist ideology.

### **Mobilization of FTFs**

The mobilization of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) is a crucial process. Individuals are being recruited into organizations like ISIS with multiple ways that entail social media, social circle etc. Online propaganda plays a vital role in recruiting members. Extremist groups have developed special strategies to promote content which indirectly glorifies

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<sup>16</sup> “Action against Threat of Foreign Terrorist Fighters Must Be Ramped Up, Security Council Urges in High-Level Meeting | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” *Un.org*, 29 May 2015, [press.un.org/en/2015/sc11912.doc.htm](http://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11912.doc.htm)?

<sup>17</sup> “Action against Threat of Foreign Terrorist Fighters Must Be Ramped Up, Security Council Urges in High-Level Meeting | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” *Un.org*, 29 May 2015, [press.un.org/en/2015/sc11912.doc.htm](http://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11912.doc.htm)?



violence and distorts religious beliefs as well as political ideas. Through social media platforms and other video sharing websites, extremists reach people on a global scale and recruit individuals from different backgrounds. It is popular for young people to be targeted since at that age many individuals feel marginalised for their own reasons and thus, they come as a “saviour”. This approach does not only spread propaganda but also gives them the feeling of belonging and community which is what they search many times. Consequently, these individuals get recruited and follow these groups.<sup>18</sup>

The moment one shows interest, the extremists proceed to communicate with the individuals through encrypted chats. Typically, the recruiters give instructions and further share their ideologies and they might even provide financial support. Indicative is the report of Europol's TE-SAT reports (2020) and George Washington's University program on extremism (2018) who stated that the transformation of open social media to encrypted private chats has made it increasingly difficult to track down recruiters and expose their communications with individuals globally.<sup>19</sup> The strong end-to-end encryption substantially limits visibility. Precisely, the platform itself cannot access the content in the app, and thus, outsiders including law enforcement agents cannot intercept communications without device access. Additionally, the lack of cross-platform and monitoring also further hardens the identification of harmful behaviour. To be more specific, individuals might start from one platform, and later on continue in other apps or online platforms. Another issue is also the digital illiteracy and education among users. Precisely, some users may not understand how recruitment works and they might not even understand the shift into encrypted spaces. In addition, some users may not be able to recognise suspicious behaviours and therefore be tricked.

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<sup>18</sup> Weimann, Gabriel. "Using the Internet for Terrorist Recruitment and Mobilization." [iospress.nl, IOS Press, 2025, pp. 47-58, ebooks.iospress.nl/publication/24117](https://iospress.nl/ios-press/2025/47-58_ebooks.iospress.nl/publication/24117).

<sup>19</sup> "EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat)." Europol, [www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/tesat-report](https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/tesat-report).



**Figure 1:** Depicting the number of ISIS militants coming from several countries to Iraq and Syria.<sup>20</sup>

### FTFs return

The return and relocation of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) is an essential process that entails many concerns. After a loss of territory or a decline, many FTFs attempt to come back to their home country. According to the United Nations Counter - Terrorism Committee Executive Doctorate (CTED) member states are responsible for handling such procedures and they should always perform such operations while respecting international law.<sup>21</sup> The process typically starts by identifying the individuals, and then followed by either repatriation or extradition. When the individuals arrive in their home country,

<sup>20</sup> Iraqinews. "ISIS Has 30,000 Foreign Fighters from More than 100 Countries - Iraqi News." *Iraqi News*, 28 May 2015, [www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/isis-30000-foreign-fighters-100-countries](http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/isis-30000-foreign-fighters-100-countries). Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

<sup>21</sup> "The Challenge of Returning and Relocating Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Research Perspectives | Security Council - Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)." *Un.org*, 2018, [www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/challenge-returning-and-relocating-foreign-terrorist-fighters-research-perspectives](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/challenge-returning-and-relocating-foreign-terrorist-fighters-research-perspectives).



they might face criminal prosecution for terrorist acts or they might enter monitoring and rehabilitation programmes.<sup>22</sup>

## General Consequences

### Security Concerns

The return of FTFs raises high security concerns, taking into account that these individuals have been involved in terrorist acts. The European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) issues a warning that a part of the returning FTFs pose a threat since they might engage in potential terrorist acts or function as recruiters.<sup>23</sup>

The FTFs' re-integration in the society also entails some concerns. If security concerns are left aside, the social implications also play a role. These individuals might be marginalised or even excluded. This might fuel further radicalization though. The Global Centre on Cooperative Security along with the International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) have emphasized on the fact that there should be community based approaches so as to smoothly carry out the re integration of these individuals.<sup>24</sup>

## Europe Bombing Attacks

Europe was hit by a major wave of terrorist attacks between 2015 and 2016 leaving hundreds of people dead and nations shocked. Many of these attacks were ISIS linked whose objective was to have a global reach and kill the ones who did not embrace the Quran. These attacks entailed FTFs who had returned from conflict zones and they had been trained and coordinated by extremist groups. According to Europol many of the attackers were Europeans who had been abroad to join ISIS.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "The Challenge of Returning and Relocating Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Research Perspectives | Security Council - Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)." *Un.org*, 2018, [www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/challenge-returning-and-relocating-foreign-terrorist-fighters-research-perspectives](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/challenge-returning-and-relocating-foreign-terrorist-fighters-research-perspectives).

<sup>23</sup> "EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat)." *Europol*, [www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/tesat-report](http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/tesat-report).

<sup>24</sup> van Ginkel, Bibi, et al. "The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union. Profiles, Threats & Policies." *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies*, edited by Eva Entenmann, Apr. 2016, <https://doi.org/10.19165/2016.1.02>.

<sup>25</sup> Europol. *Europol Public Information Changes in Modus Operandi of Islamic State Terrorist Attacks Review Held by Experts from Member States and Europol*. 18 Jan. 2016, [www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/changes\\_in\\_modus\\_operandi\\_of\\_is\\_in\\_terrorist\\_attacks.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/changes_in_modus_operandi_of_is_in_terrorist_attacks.pdf).



## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date of the Event	Event
2003 - 2011	Iraq War - the rise of Al Qaeda. The US led invasion to Iraq resulted in instability and thus, the rise of Al Qaeda which was the precursor of ISIS. <sup>26</sup>
2011	Outbreak of the civil war in Syria - it followed widespread anti-government protests during the Arab spring. The conflict rapidly escalated into a full - scale civil war.
2013-2014	Formation of ISIS under Abu Bakr al - Baghdadi. ISIS declared the caliphate attracting thousands of FTFs from around the world. <sup>27</sup>
2014	The adoption of resolution 2178 by the United Nations Security Council which addressed the threat of FTFs and urged member states to take action. <sup>28</sup>
2015	Paris 2015 attacks, which took place in

<sup>26</sup> Britannica Editors. "Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) | History, Leadership, & Founder." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 29 Apr. 2011, [www.britannica.com/topic/al-Qaeda-in-Iraq](https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Qaeda-in-Iraq)?

<sup>27</sup> Dews, Fred. "Key Dates in the Rise of the Islamic State (ISIS)." *Brookings*, 12 Dec. 2014, [www.brookings.edu/articles/key-dates-in-the-rise-of-the-islamic-state-isis/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/key-dates-in-the-rise-of-the-islamic-state-isis/)?

<sup>28</sup> Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014). 2014, [digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/780316/files/S\\_RES\\_2178%282014%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0&isterDownload=1&version=1](https://digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/780316/files/S_RES_2178%282014%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0&isterDownload=1&version=1). Accessed 3 Nov. 2025.



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	many parts of the city, and some of which were fatal. <sup>29</sup>
January 2016	Establishment of Europol's Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC).
2016	Bombings taking place in Brussels that were ISIS linked in the Brussels airport and metro leaving behind 32 people dead
December 21st, 2017	Adoption of Resolution 2396 by the UN Security Council (UNSC) which addressed the issue of returning FTFs and required member states to strengthen monitoring and prevention strategies. <sup>30</sup>
2018	There is increased global focus on Returning FTFs.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

### United States of America (USA)

The United States of America has played a significant role in relation to global counter terrorism operations. The US has prioritized strategies in order to track down recruit networks, facilitators etc. One of the most effective ways that the US has taken action against FTFs is through militarily targeting terrorist organizations that function primarily

<sup>29</sup> HISTORY.com Editors. "ISIL Stages Series of Terrorist Attacks in Paris, Culminating in Massacre at Bataclan Theater | November 13, 2015 | HISTORY." HISTORY, 24 July 2019, [www.history.com/this-day-in-history/november-13/paris-terrorist-attacks-bataclan?](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/november-13/paris-terrorist-attacks-bataclan?)

<sup>30</sup> "S/RES/2396(2017) | Security Council." Un.org, 2017, [main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres23962017](http://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres23962017).



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by recruiting FTFs. The US, in collaboration with global allies, has extensively airstriked against ISIS and other similar extremist groups with the objective of interrupting their recruitment channels. Precisely, through the operation inherent resolve, the US-led coalition conducted airstrikes on ISIS camps, training facilities and financial infrastructure, including oil fields in order to disrupt recruitment and other operations. Except for military actions though, the US has also focused on mitigating radicalization and propaganda spread which plays a major role on FTFs recruitment.<sup>31</sup>

### Türkiye

Türkiye has for a long time now played a crucial role in the mobilization of FTFs. During the peak of the conflict between Syria and Iraq in 2010, Türkiye functioned as one of the primary transit hub routes for individuals who wished to join extremist groups like ISIS. The borders between Syria and Türkiye are as long as 900 kilometres long and therefore, it was really difficult to prevent the movement of people, resources and other goods into the conflict zone. The United Nations Security Council has multiple times emphasized that FTFs from many parts of the world including Europe have been using Turkey as a crossing point before going into territories which are controlled by extremist groups.<sup>32</sup> Since then, the Turkish government has taken measures to further tighten border control. These include intelligence sharing with international partners, biometric screening etc.<sup>33</sup>

### European Union (EU)

The European Union has been classified as one of the “primary sources” of foreign terrorist fighters. According to Europol an estimated number of 6,000 individuals left their home country, in Europe, in order to join terrorist extremist groups between 2015 - 2016.<sup>34</sup> This happens in Europe due to factors like social marginalization, exposure to

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<sup>31</sup> COMMITTEE PRINT " ! 114TH CONGRESS 1st Session COMMITTEE 2015 PRINT 114-B FINAL REPORT of the TASK FORCE on COMBATING TERRORIST and FOREIGN FIGHTER TRAVEL COMMITTEE on HOMELAND SECURITY HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES FIRST SESSION. 2015, [www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-114HPRT97200/pdf/CPRT-114HPRT97200.pdf](http://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-114HPRT97200/pdf/CPRT-114HPRT97200.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Turkish Measures in Countering Terrorism. 2022, [www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/79/int\\_terrorism/turkey\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/79/int_terrorism/turkey_e.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Turkish Measures in Countering Terrorism. 2022, [www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/79/int\\_terrorism/turkey\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/79/int_terrorism/turkey_e.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> “European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2016.” Europol, [www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016#downloads](http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016#downloads).



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extremist propaganda online, identity and ideological grievances, and networks that facilitate the recruitment. The overwhelming majority of these originate from Germany, France, Belgium as well as the United Kingdom and almost all of the European Union member states reported incidents of radicalization and recruitment.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, during that time (2015-2016) Europe was hit with a wave of terrorist attacks, primarily by ISIS members. They took place in major cities like London, Paris, Belgium etc.<sup>36</sup> The reasons behind them were almost always religious. Since then, regarding FTFs, many of the individuals leaving Europe to join groups, were third or second generation immigrants who experienced social exclusion or marginalization vulnerabilities which the extremist groups look for so as to exploit.

The past few years, Europe has implemented multiple strategies and has further tightened border control in order to effectively control the movement of people both entering and exiting European nations.<sup>37</sup> In recent years, the European Union has strengthened its border management in order to control the movement of people entering and leaving European member states. Some of the key measures include the development of Entry/Exit systems (ESS) which can digitally track non-EU nationals and also perform systematic checks against databases like the Schengen Information Centre (SIS), and coordinated intelligence between member states.

### **Islamic State**

The Islamic State (ISIS) has been one of the most powerful terrorist organizations in modern history as well as the primary recruiter of FTFs. ISIS gained popularity back in 2014 when it captured large territories in Syria Iraq and later established the caliphate. As previously mentioned in the guide over 35,000 individuals from over 110 nations travelled to join ISIS.<sup>38</sup> ISIS has many recruitment strategies including online propaganda, manipulation and recruitment networks. Additionally, ISIS has been

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<sup>35</sup> "The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the EU - Profiles, Threats & Policies." *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - ICCT*, 2016, [icct.nl/publication/foreign-fighters-phenomenon-eu-profiles-threats-policies](http://icct.nl/publication/foreign-fighters-phenomenon-eu-profiles-threats-policies).

<sup>36</sup> White, Daniel. "Europe Sees Record Number of Terror Attacks in 2015." *TIME*, Time, 20 July 2016, [time.com/4414478/europe-sees-record-number-of-terror-attacks-in-2015/](http://time.com/4414478/europe-sees-record-number-of-terror-attacks-in-2015/).

<sup>37</sup> Niall McCarthy. "Infographic: Scores of ISIS Foreign Fighters Have Returned Home." *Statista Infographics*, Statista, 25 Oct. 2017, [www.statista.com/chart/11613/scores-of-isis-foreign-fighters-have-returned-home/](http://www.statista.com/chart/11613/scores-of-isis-foreign-fighters-have-returned-home/).

<sup>38</sup> Iraqinews. "ISIS Has 30,000 Foreign Fighters from More than 100 Countries - Iraqi News." *Iraqi News*, 28 May 2015, [www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/isis-30000-foreign-fighters-100-countries](http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/isis-30000-foreign-fighters-100-countries).



responsible for multiple terrorist attacks across the world which took place for religious purposes.<sup>39</sup>

## RELEVANT UN TREATIES CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

### United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014)

The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2178 on 28 December, 2014.<sup>40</sup> It was a crucial step in addressing the issue of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF). It was introduced at the peak of the Syrian and Iraqi war with the resolution recognising the global nature of terrorism. Additionally it urged all member states and their governments to criminalise the recruitment, coordination and financing of individuals who travel with the aim of joining extremist groups. While this resolution provides clear strategies, its effectiveness was limited due to member states not implementing it as well as issues when it comes to balancing security with human rights.<sup>41</sup>

### United Nations Security Council 2396 (2017)

Resolution 2396 was adopted by the UN Security Council on December 21st, 2017. The main focus of this resolution was to address the issue of the returning FTFs. This Resolution recognised that while ISIS and other extremists groups started losing territory, the many Foreign Fighters were attempting to return to their home countries or even go to new countries. This resolution required all UN member states to use Biometric data, advanced passenger information and other measures in order to control cross border movement.<sup>42</sup>

As a whole, this resolution helped enhance global monitoring and ameliorate prevention strategies. However as in the previous revolution, there were challenges

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<sup>39</sup> Iraqinews. "ISIS Has 30,000 Foreign Fighters from More than 100 Countries - Iraqi News." *Iraqi News*, 28 May 2015, [www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/isis-30000-foreign-fighters-100-countries](http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/isis-30000-foreign-fighters-100-countries). Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014). 2014, [digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/780316/files/S\\_RES\\_2178%282014%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0&isterDownload=1&version=1](http://digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/780316/files/S_RES_2178%282014%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0&isterDownload=1&version=1). Accessed 3 Nov. 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014). 2014, [digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/780316/files/S\\_RES\\_2178%282014%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0&isterDownload=1&version=1](http://digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/780316/files/S_RES_2178%282014%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0&isterDownload=1&version=1). Accessed 3 Nov. 2025.

<sup>42</sup> "S/RES/2396(2017) | Security Council." *Un.org*, 2017, [main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres23962017](http://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres23962017).



regarding implementing the measures while balancing human rights and privacy rights.<sup>43</sup>

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

### Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) in the Hague

The global counterterrorism forum was established in 2011. It is an international platform which was created to further strengthen global cooperation and promote counterterrorism strategies apart from the United Nations framework. Its administrative unit is in the Hague, and it brings together 30 member states in collaboration with the European Union and other United Nations bodies.<sup>44</sup> The GCTF through the Hague - Marakesch Memorandum in 2014 that provided guidelines for managing FTF travel, prosecution and reintegration into society, all of which are essential.<sup>45</sup>

While GCTF is of utmost significance, since it involves international cooperation and is constantly contributing to tackling the issue, its impact relies on states' will as it is a voluntary framework which is not legally binding.<sup>46</sup>

### Europol's Counter-Terrorism Centre in Europe (ECTC)

Europol's Counter - Terrorism Centre in Europe was created in January of 2016. ECTC functions as Europe's central hub for managing counterterrorism efforts amongst European Union nations. It was created in response to the massive wave of terrorist attacks across Europe as well as to tackle the threat posed by returning FTFs. ECTC

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<sup>43</sup> "S/RES/2396(2017) | Security Council." *Un.org*, 2017, [main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres23962017](http://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres23962017).

<sup>44</sup> "EU Co-Chairs the GCTF High-Level Week to Strengthen Multilateral Security and Counterterrorism Efforts." *EEAS*, 2024, [www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-co-chairs-gctf-high-level-week-strengthen-multilateral-security-and-counterterrorism-efforts\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-co-chairs-gctf-high-level-week-strengthen-multilateral-security-and-counterterrorism-efforts_en).

<sup>45</sup> Rodiles, Alejandro, and Gavin Sullivan. "Assembling Global Security Law and the Politics of Scale-Making: The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)." *International Journal of Law in Context*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 2025, pp. 258–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1744552325100062>. Accessed 8 Oct. 2025.

<sup>46</sup> "EU Co-Chairs the GCTF High-Level Week to Strengthen Multilateral Security and Counterterrorism Efforts." *EEAS*, 2024, [www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-co-chairs-gctf-high-level-week-strengthen-multilateral-security-and-counterterrorism-efforts\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-co-chairs-gctf-high-level-week-strengthen-multilateral-security-and-counterterrorism-efforts_en).



includes joint investigations between law enforcement bodies.<sup>47</sup>

ECTC plays an important role in monitoring and tracking down terrorist networks as well as has strengthened the prevention of radicalization. Unfortunately, there are challenges regarding consistent exchange of information among all European Union member states as well as to balance security operations with privacy protection.<sup>48</sup> ETC significantly ameliorates the monitoring of terrorist networks and further supports the prevention of radicalization across the EU. However, there are still issues. Precisely, not a big percentage of member states consistently share information which thus creates intelligence gaps and makes it even harder to track FTF movements or online extremist activity in general.

### Good Practices on Addressing the phenomenon of FTFs

Good Practices on Addressing the phenomenon of FTFs were introduced by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2018 with the objective of providing an inclusive framework that upholds human rights principles for the re-integration, prosecution and recruitment of FTFs. The document highlights the essentiality of international cooperation, intelligence sharing as well as preventive actions while all measures remain aligned with the rule of law and fundamental human rights.<sup>49</sup>

The document significantly helps states develop unified strategies to monitor potential FTF activity as well as prevent radicalization. Similarly as in other attempts though, they are not legally binding and therefore it relies on political will which limits the document's effectiveness.

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<sup>47</sup> "Europol Review 2016 – April 2017." *Europa.eu*, 2016, [www.europol.europa.eu/annual\\_review/2016/TERRORISM.html](http://www.europol.europa.eu/annual_review/2016/TERRORISM.html)? Accessed 3 Nov. 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Sgueo, Gianluca. *Counter-Terrorism Funding in the EU Budget*. 2016, [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/580904/EPRS\\_BRI%282016%29580904\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/580904/EPRS_BRI%282016%29580904_EN.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> *Guidelines for Addressing the Threats and Challenges of "Foreign Terrorist Fighters" within a Human Rights Framework*. [www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/7/393503\\_2.pdf](http://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/7/393503_2.pdf).



## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### Enhancing Border Control

Enhancing border control can be one of the most effective measures on controlling the move of people and goods. By advancing monitoring measures can be achieved through biometric recognition systems, passenger name records and a database for FTFs which will include FTFs data. If border control agents feel it is required to check they will be able to search and find whether an individual is on Interpol watchlist.

### Developing Reintegration Programmes

When individuals return back to their home countries, they cannot be directly exposed to society. Their beliefs and ethics have been influenced a lot, therefore they might be spreading terrorism ideologies to the public as well as trying to recruit new members. Thus, they should undergo a "rehabilitation" procedure before being reintegrated in the society. These programmes typically include psychological counselling, ideological re-declination sessions, risk assessments and individual case management. Additionally, the provision of education and vocational training could also be enforced in order to further prepare these individuals for being reintegrated into society.

### Monitoring Terrorism Financing

A really important factor for the mobilization of FTFs is the provision of funds. FTFs often rely on small money transfers. Oftentimes, terrorist groups pretend to be a charitable organization and therefore, use these funds for their own purposes. Governments can strengthen their monitoring of such organizations by requiring transparency and audits by NGOs as well as expand the use of Suspicious Transaction Reports. To better monitor terrorism financing, governments can make use of the Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) and National banking authorities can require from NGOs that operate in conflict regions to provide a financial report regularly. Moreover, banks and money transfer services can further their use of suspicious transaction reports (STRs) so as to flag unusual activity and patterns, such as repeated small transfers to high risk areas.



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