

## EXTREMIST MIGRATION: A FOREIGN JIHADIST FIGHTER THREAT ASSESSMENT

Shima D. Keene

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

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

Part of tackling this challenge lies in developing a better understanding as to what the potential threat is, as well as why and how extremist migration occurs. A comprehensive assessment of not only the threat but also its potential second- and third-order effects, coupled with the adoption of a full-spectrum approach, would enable effective mitigation measures to be adopted. Consequently, the U.S. Army must familiarize itself with all aspects of the foreign fighter problem, including motivation, recruitment

methods, and migration routes, for a proactive analysis to be developed to identify future security threats. In addition, the Army should identify which measures should be taken with allies and partner agencies to disrupt not only migrating foreign jihadist fighters but also the networks that support them. Achieving effective outcomes would require new thinking as well as the development of a new approach to address the threats. This would undoubtedly require a change in culture that is more holistic in nature and that combines the front line, intelligence and analytical talent, and engineering and business personnel who have detailed knowledge of the industries involved. As challenging as it may be, the cost advantages of anticipating issues before they occur would be significant and must be embraced by the U.S. Army.

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