

# The Phenomenon of Foreign Fighters in Europe

**Ms. Orla Hennessy MA**

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This Background Note is intended to inform the European Union Radicalisation Awareness Network's (RAN) Internal/ External Working Group Meeting on foreign fighters in The Hague on 20 – 21 September 2012. It looks specifically at those who have travelled abroad for training and have then returned and committed, or attempted to commit, terrorist acts in Europe. It begins with a brief definition of the problem. It then reviews 32 specific cases of jihadi terrorism in Europe and reviews whether those involved have travelled abroad for training. It further explores potential reasons for those travelling, beginning with a summary of established narratives or motivational factors and applying those to the case of foreign fighters. Lastly, it raises some issues related to the recruitment of foreign fighters. In so doing, it seeks to state the current extent of the problem and to act as a starting point for further discussion about how to contain and prevent this problem.

## About the Author

**Ms. Orla Hennessy MA** is Programme Officer of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). In this capacity, she oversees specific ICCT programmes including ICCT's involvement with the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network. She is responsible for preparing, planning and organising the Centre's events and activities, supporting the Research Fellows and other staff members, and maintaining and further developing the website and other outreach tools. She studied History, Art History and Politics at University College Dublin and received her Masters in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College London with distinction. Previously, she has worked for the Irish Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and various NGOs including Health Connections International and the Global Reporting Initiative. She has extensive experience with online communications, marketing, social media and web design. Previous publications include the ICCT commentary "Containing al-Qaeda in Africa" (ICCT - The Hague, March 2012) and the ICCT Research Paper "Through the Militant Lens: The Power of Ideology and Narratives" (ICCT - The Hague, June 2012) which is co-authored with Prof. Dr. Rohan Gunaratna.

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## Contact

ICCT – The Hague  
Koningin Julianaplein 10  
P.O. Box 13228  
2501 EE, The Hague  
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 800 9531

E [info@icct.nl](mailto:info@icct.nl)

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## Introduction

In March 2013 Mohammed Merah, a French citizen of Algerian origin killed seven people in the town of Toulouse before being killed himself after a siege with police. Merah attacked three French soldiers as well as a Jewish school where he killed a rabbi and three small children. Conforming to the typical jihadist stereotype, he claimed he was motivated by the fate of Palestinians, France's military presence in Afghanistan and France's ban on the full Islamic veil.<sup>1</sup> Merah was a, "home grown" European terrorist - or one who had self-radicalised. The interesting part of the Merah story is that he was known to French intelligence after having travelled to Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he claimed, he wanted to join the Taliban and receive training from al Qaeda. In the aftermath of the shooting, President Nicolas Sarkozy immediately sought to expand France's terrorism laws including provisions to make it illegal to travel abroad to indoctrination or training camps.<sup>2</sup>

Europeans travelling abroad to seek combat training is not a new phenomenon. It currently poses a small but relevant threat to Europe – the phrase "a steady stream" or "a steady trickle"<sup>3</sup> has been used to describe the problem but nevertheless, it seems to be progressively growing throughout the last decade in tandem with the rise of jihadist militancy. What was perhaps once the preserve of separatist terrorists in Europe, has now shifted and there is a distinct pattern of European citizens travelling to conflict areas, ostensibly, to "join the Jihad", with "jihadists" here referring to those who manipulate certain teachings of Islam to justify extremism.

Although the phenomenon is currently limited, it poses distinct challenges for Europe because foreign fighters do not solely pose a threat to the countries in which they take part in the armed conflict. They may also become a danger to their home countries/regions as well since they will have acquired military training, possibly combat experience and a wide network of other militants – potentially both at home and abroad – and may employ such knowledge and networks on return. Furthermore, returned militants may seek to recruit new members and may also suffer mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

This Background Note is intended to inform the European Union Radicalisation Awareness Network's (RAN) Internal/ External Working Group Meeting on foreign fighters in The Hague on 20 – 21 September 2012.<sup>4</sup> It looks specifically at those who have travelled abroad for training and have then returned and committed or attempted to commit terrorist acts in Europe. It begins with a brief definition of the problem. It then reviews 32 specific cases of jihadi terrorism in Europe and reviews whether they have travelled abroad for training. It further explores potential reasons for those travelling, beginning with a summary of established narratives or motivational factors and applying those to the case of foreign fighters. Lastly, it raises some issues related to the recruitment of foreign fighters. In so doing, it seeks to state the current extent of the problem and acts as a starting point for further discussion about how to contain and prevent this problem. It acknowledges, however, that the topic is one which is wracked with complications. Definitions of the term are contradictory, information on the subject is often vague or still classified by government agencies and may often be incomplete. The paper concludes with a series of potential recommendations to help inform further work on the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> *Obituary: Toulouse gunman Mohamed Merah*, BBC News, 22 March 2012. Available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17456541> accessed 20 June 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Associated Press, *France plans to expand terrorism laws after Toulouse shootings*, The Guardian, 11 April 2012. Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/11/france-terrorism-laws-toulouse-shootings> accessed 25 June 2012.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, MI5 Chief Jonathan Evans speaking in relation to the UK's experience, Nick Hopkins, *MI5 Chief warns al-Qaida regaining UK toehold after Arab spring*, The Guardian, 25 June 2012. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jun/25/mi5-uk-terrorism-threat-warning> accessed 25 June 2012.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about RAN visit <http://www.icct.nl/activities/projects/eu-ran>

## 1. Defining the “foreign fighter”

At its broadest level, “foreign fighters” refer to people who voluntarily leave their homes and join foreign conflicts. In global terms this currently refers to a relatively small number of people but nevertheless distinctions and definitions within this group are legion. For instance, there are those who will travel to a specific war and take up arms in a specific theatre with a specific aggressor, or equally, it could be someone who joins an extremist group and incites propaganda in the name of the fight.

Similar to the definition above, David Malet defined the term as: “non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict”.<sup>5</sup> Building on this, Thomas Heggehammer adds four further provisos [foreign fighters are those who]:

- 1) have joined, and operate within the confines of, an insurgency,
- 2) lack citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions,
- 3) lack affiliation to an official military organization, and;
- 4) are unpaid.<sup>6</sup>

Using elements of the definition above this paper relates specifically to those foreign fighters who join the violent jihad. Furthermore it focuses on European citizens who travel to participate in the “fight”. It attempts to be broad enough to incorporate those who may not actually take up arms (but are still radical and cause for concern as they may attempt to recruit others and incite violence) and specifically highlights jihadists. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, the foreign fighter will operate within the confines of the jihad, including those seeking training etc., will lack affiliation to an official military organisation and is also unpaid. The second element is deliberately rejected as, in many cases, these foreign fighters may be European citizens but will be part of a wider diaspora or generation of immigrants.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the differences between those who join a conflict and those who join a terrorist organisation. The reason being that foreign fighters joining a conflict abroad, are not necessarily predisposed to become violent extremists. However, terrorist organisations may seek to capitalise on this type of foreign fighter and there may even be competition between terrorist recruiters and those seeking to recruit for the conflict. Thus, there are clear overlaps and correlations between the various types (which require greater study) but the distinctions should be made nonetheless.

### 1.1 Methodology

This paper briefly examines 32 terrorist attacks committed or attempted by jihadists in Europe from 2004 to the present day and in each case seeks to ascertain whether the perpetrators have travelled abroad for training. It builds upon previous studies which examine attacks and attempted terrorist attacks undertaken by Islamic jihadists in Europe throughout the past decade.<sup>7</sup> The selection process was broad and took both high profile cases and lesser known cases which were specifically:

1. Cases where it was clear that the terrorist attack was committed by a Jihadist
2. Cases where attacks targeted EU Member States or involved citizens/residents of European member states

<sup>5</sup> David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts*, PHD Dissertation, George Washington University, August 2009. Available online at <http://gradworks.umi.com/3359978.pdf> accessed 28 June 2012. P.9

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Heggehammer, “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad”, *International Security*, 35, 3 (2011), available online at <http://www.jihadismstudies.net/> accessed 26 June 2012.

<sup>7</sup> See Teun Van Dongen, *Jihadistisch terroristische aanslagen in de EU, 2004-2011*, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), Rapport No 11 , 01 , 12 (2012). Available online at <http://www.nctb.nl/Actueel/Rapporten/> accessed 29 June 2012 and Paul Cruickshank, *The Militant Pipeline, Between the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region and the West*, Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper, February 2010. Available online at <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/cruickshank.pdf> accessed 2 July 2012.

## 1.2 Acknowledged limitations

Firstly, the list of terrorism incidents here is not exhaustive and this paper acknowledges that there may be discrepancies with other similar, lists. Terrorism plots and those visiting terrorism camps, by their very nature are covert activities. Thus finding reliable, exact information is difficult and as mentioned above, may be classified by various government agencies.

Secondly, where possible, all of the sources of those who have allegedly travelled to terrorist training camps are included. For this article the information was retrieved solely based on open sources and so it is recognised that some of the information may be subject to dispute. Again, such information is difficult to obtain but for this paper the author has been as careful as possible to substantiate and cross-check sources.

Finally, of the 32 cases studied here, all of the perpetrators have either entered the criminal justice system (through arrests or are undergoing trial) or have been convicted of crimes in Europe. As such, this list does not cover those who travel to training camps but have not yet been convicted of a crime.

## 2. On the incidence of foreign fighters in Europe

Date	Attack/Attempted attack	Training received?	Where?
11-Mar-04	Madrid train bombings	Yes	Afghanistan <sup>8</sup>
Mar-04	UK Fertilizer bomb plot	Yes	Pakistan <sup>9</sup>
2-Nov-04	Murder of Theo van Gogh (Amsterdam)	No	n/a
7-Jul-05	London bomb attacks	Yes	Pakistan/Afghanistan <sup>10</sup>
21-Jul-05	Attempted London bomb attacks	Yes	Pakistan/Afghanistan <sup>11</sup>
14-Oct-05	Hofstad group foiled attack	No	n/a
31-Jul-06	Attempted train bombing Aachen - Hamm	No	n/a
9-Aug-06	Foiled Heathrow Bomb plot	Yes	Pakistan <sup>12</sup>
Sep-06	Foiled Vollsmose bomb plot in Denmark	No	n/a
1-Feb-07	Foiled kidnapping of British soldiers	yes	Pakistan/Afghanistan <sup>13</sup>
29-Jun-07	Attempted bomb attack of Tiger Tiger night club in London	No	n/a
30-Jun-07	Failed car bomb attack on Glasgow airport	No	n/a
4-Sep-07	Sauerland Group foiled bombing of Frankfurt airport & US military base in Ramstein	Yes	Pakistan <sup>14</sup>
30-Apr-08	Attempted suicide bombing of Bristol shopping centre	No	n/a
22-May-08	Failed Suicide attack in Exeter	No	n/a
21-Oct-08	Two Danish citizens found guilty of "conspiring to commit terrorism"	Yes	Pakistan <sup>15</sup>
12-Oct-2009	Bomb attack on Milan army barracks	No	n/a

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Nash, *Madrid bombers 'were inspired by Bin Laden address'*, The Independent, 7 November 2006. Available online at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/madrid-bombers-were-inspired-by-bin-laden-address-423266.html> accessed 23 June 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Cruickshank (2010) op. cit. p. 3

<sup>10</sup> Van Dongen (2012) op. cit. p. 43

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Dominic Casciani, *The would-be bombers of Walthamstow*, BBC News 8 July 2010. Available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10455244> accessed 24 June 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Helen Carter, *Fanatic planned to kidnap British Muslim serviceman and behead him 'like a pig'*, The Guardian, 30 January 2008. Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/jan/30/terrorism.world> accessed 23 June 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Van Dongen (2012) op. Cit. P. 46

<sup>15</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008: Denmark*, UNHCR, 20 April 2009. Available online at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,DNK,,49fac68d28,0.html> accessed 20 June 2012.

4-Feb-09	Nine Germans travel to Pakistan for terror training	Yes	Pakistan <sup>16</sup>
9-Nov-09	Attempted attack on Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten	Yes	Pakistan <sup>17</sup>
1-Jan-10	Attempted murder of Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard	yes	Somalia <sup>18</sup>
14-Apr-10	Attempted murder of MP Stephen Timms	No	n/a
10-May-10	Malika el Aroud convicted with eight others in Belgium on terrorism charges	Yes	Pakistan/Afghanistan <sup>19</sup>
10-Sep-10	Attempted letter bomb to Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten	No	n/a
13-Nov-10	4 French Citizens charged with "criminal association linked to a terrorist enterprise"	Yes	Pakistan <sup>20</sup>
11-Dec-10	Failed suicide attack in Stockholm	yes	Yemen/Iraq <sup>21</sup>
29-Dec-10	Failed bomb attack on Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten	Yes	Pakistan/Waziristan <sup>22</sup>
3-Feb-11	Shooting of US Soldiers at Frankfurt airport	No	n/a
29-Apr-11	Arrest of German terrorist cell "Dusseldorf Group"	yes	Pakistan/Afghanistan <sup>23</sup>
Nov-11	Arrest of 11 British suspects in Birmingham on Terrorism charges	Yes	Pakistan <sup>24</sup>
Apr/Dec-11	Suspected German terror plot - four arrested	Yes	Pakistan <sup>25</sup>
22-Mar-12	Mohammed Merah Toulouse shootings	Yes	Pakistan/Afghanistan <sup>26</sup>
20-Jun-12	Arrest of French al-Qaida suspect in Pakistan	Yes	Pakistan <sup>27</sup>

**Fig. 1. Returned foreign fighters: attacks and attempts in Europe**

Of the 32 cases studied, 12 (whether conducted by individuals or larger cells) had not attended terrorist training camps. Of those who had visited training camps the majority had travelled to south Asia with a heavy prevalence of those heading to Pakistan or Afghanistan. The results above confirm earlier surveys which indicate that there is a strong correlation between plotters travelling to train in Pakistan and terrorism plots against the West.<sup>28</sup>

Many of those travelling to the region seek out al Qaeda or a splinter group in order to further their training and a large number end up in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) between

<sup>16</sup> Raffaello Pantucci, *German Trials Highlight the Role of the IMU as a Feeder for al Qaeda Operations in Europe*, 19 May 2012. Available online at <http://raffaellopantucci.com/2012/05/19/german-trials-highlight-the-role-of-the-imu-as-a-feeder-for-al-qaeda-operations-in-europe/> accessed 19 June 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Van Dongen (2012) op. Cit. p. 48

<sup>18</sup> Van Dongen (2012) op. Cit. p. 49

<sup>19</sup> *Belgium convicts eight on terrorism charges*, BBC News, 10 May 2010. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8673229.stm> accessed 22 June 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Elaine Ganley, *French charge 4 suspected in terror training*, Associated Press, 13 November 2010. Available online at <http://news.yahoo.com/french-charge-4-suspected-terror-training.html> accessed 3 July 2012

<sup>21</sup> Duncan Gardham, Marcus Oscarsson and Peter Hutchison, *Sweden suicide bomber: Taimur Abdulwahab al-Abdaly was living in Britain*, The Telegraph, 12 December 2010. Available online at

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/8198043/Sweden-suicide-bomber-Taimur-Abdulwahab-al-Abdaly-was-living-in-Britain.html> accessed 19 June 2012.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.thelocal.se%2F22118%2F20090916%2F&date=2009-09-16>

<sup>23</sup> Van Dongen (2012) op. Cit. p. 51

<sup>24</sup> EUROPOL, TE-SAT, 2012, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, available online at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/europoltsat.pdf> p. 16

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Jackson, *France shootings: Could Merah have been stopped?*, BBC News, 24 March 2012. Available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17487320> accessed 24 June 2012.

<sup>27</sup> *Pakistan arrests 'key French al-Qaeda operative'*, BBC News, 20 June 2012. Available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18517313>

<sup>28</sup> Cruickshank (2010) op. Cit. P. 8

Afghanistan and Pakistan. German authorities have also noted that “hundreds” of German nationals (many with Turkish backgrounds) have sought out the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union<sup>29</sup> – as was the case for those arrested in February 2009.

## 2.1 Foreign fighters and Somalia

However, while it appears that most foreign fighters travel to south Asia for training there has also been an increase in those travelling to Somalia. In its annual terrorism situation and threat report, EUROPOL commented that there has been an “increased interest in travelling to Somalia via Kenya in 2011. In previous years, most followers seeking to fight for al-Shabab tended to be of Somali origin. In 2011, however, al-Shabab attracted European violent jihadists from beyond the Somali diaspora. Some radicalised individuals have shown a preference for travelling to Somalia over Pakistan. However, this may be perceived by al-Qaeda inspired extremists as simply an easier route to violent jihad rather than a predilection for al-Shabab”.<sup>30</sup>

Cases of Europeans travelling to Somalia to attend training camps are more problematic in some countries than others. In their 2010 study Michael Taarnby and Lars Hallundbaek argue that particularly problematic countries include those in Scandinavia and the UK. Germany and the Netherlands experience much lower numbers in comparison and “in Spain and Belgium, [where there has been] plenty of jihadi recruitment, particularly from North African terrorist groups and al-Qaeda networks, Somalia does not figure as a popular destination at all.”<sup>31</sup>

Somalia is singled out particularly here because the incidence of Europeans travelling there has begun to increase in the last two years, with many such as EUROPOL and MI5 singling it out for specific attention. It should, of course, also be noted that some foreign fighters will travel from Europe to Yemen or the Caucasus and elsewhere, but numbers remain much less compared to south Asia or Somalia.

## 3. Why Turn to Terrorism?

Many have tried to explore what makes someone turn to violent extremism but in reality, the causes are usually multiple and there will be numerous personal motivations. In sum, there is no “one size fits all” reason to become a terrorist. In saying that, it has been argued that there are four distinct, although not mutually exclusive, narratives that can motivate (specifically jihadi) terrorists on a broad level:

- i) The *political* narrative concerns themes like the crimes of the West and its supported proxies, the global suppression of certain (religious) minorities and the inequitable distribution of income, welfare or land. Violent extremists succeed in telling a very persuasive, politically subjective story, often without aspiring to be part of the political solution themselves;
- ii) The *moral* narrative argues that concepts such as liberal democracy, the freedom of speech and gender equality are unachievable, hypocritical Western ideals. They emphasise that these so-called liberties have only resulted in the moral degradation of Western societies;
- iii) *Religious* narratives are often employed to further delegitimise the West and advance the perception that fighting against the immoral West is a just cause. Jihadi terrorists often succeed in utilising a persuasive theological argument that sanctions the use of violence against enemies of Islam; an argument they claim to be valid globally and to be an individual duty upon every Muslim;

<sup>29</sup> Frank J. Ciluffo, Jeffrey B. Cozzens, Magnus Ranstorp, *Foreign Fighters, Trends, Trajectories and Conflict Zones*, George Washington University, Homeland Security Policy Institute, (October, 2010). Available online at [http://www.gwumc.edu/hspi/policy/report\\_foreignfighters501.pdf](http://www.gwumc.edu/hspi/policy/report_foreignfighters501.pdf) p. 9

<sup>30</sup> EUROPOL, TE-SAT, 2012, Op. Cit. p. 17

<sup>31</sup> Michael Taarnby & Lars Hallundbaek, *Al-Shabaab: The Internationalization of Militant Islamism in Somalia and the Implications for Radicalisation Processes in Europe*, February 2012. Available online at [http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/fileadmin/downloads/Forskning\\_og\\_dokumentation/Forskningspulje/Taarnby-rapport.pdf](http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/fileadmin/downloads/Forskning_og_dokumentation/Forskningspulje/Taarnby-rapport.pdf) accessed 2 July 2012. p. 39

- iv) The *social, heroic* narrative exploits feelings of social exclusion and presents jihadism and the struggle against the West as an adventure, filled with heroism, glamour and admiration, by emphasising romantic notions of brotherhood of arms and exciting life in camps.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, foreign fighters are motivated by various reasons including some of those outlined above. In terms of those who travel abroad, the social or heroic aspect may be particularly important here as the trip can be seen as an adventure and more exciting than one's day to day life in Europe.

An exploratory study in 2006 of *Jihadi terrorists in Europe* did produce some broad characteristics about who was joining terror groups and how they were being recruited. The study analysed 242 convicted terrorists in Europe (whose motivations were based on specific interpretation of the Islamic religion and are thus categorised as “jihadists”). It concluded that almost all jihadi terrorists in Europe are male, and that many of them relate to each other through kinship or friendship. A clear majority of them were from Arab countries and have roots especially in North Africa (mainly Algeria and Morocco). Many of these first, second or third generation immigrants also came from the lower strata of society. A quarter of those studied had a previous criminal record and out of the 70 persons whom they could find information about their recruitment, most were recruited in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of the foreign fighter's actual decision to travel, it is also possible to argue that there is a number of practical constraints which will be taken into consideration, such as financial and logistical constraints, the amount of risk/opportunity involved and social aspects, such as if one is travelling with or to a specific group.

It is important, however, to note that narratives and motivational factors are place and time specific and depend on the *personal* story of the recipient. Also they are subject to change over time and dependant on one's position within the hierarchy of the organisation's structure. For instance, the higher up in the terrorist organisation the more the specific political ideology becomes a relevant part of the story. Within a process of radicalisation it is also important to recognise that the travel itself can be the tipping point when one turns from empathiser to fully fledged extremist.

### 3.1 Recruitment

For training camp operators, a would be trainee can be trained in a number of ways: either as a suicide bomber, given basic combat training (which may or may not be effective) or used as a propaganda showpiece.<sup>34</sup> In terms of training, recruitment groups will often make use of their sprawling networks – where like-minded organisations will cooperate and share information and potential trainees will be heavily vetted. Organisations will also make use of “bridge figures” or those who are often well educated and multi-lingual, well connected to many organisations and can help facilitate recruitment in the region in which they are based. For instance Said Mansour was a veteran Danish facilitator who had a list of visits to 73 jihadi leaders and thousands of pieces of propaganda material.<sup>35</sup> Recruiters will also make use of jihadist “celebrities” or those young heroic jihadists who can be used to make the jihad look glamorous. Recruiters will of course, also make great use of the internet and media outlets to spread their message.

There is in fact evidence to suggest, however, that foreign fighters are often disappointed by what they find on arrival with poor conditions and very basic training levels.<sup>36</sup> The experience can also prove lonely particularly if there are language difficulties.

<sup>32</sup> E.J.A.M Kessels, “Introduction”, in E.J.A.M. Kessels (Ed.), *Countering Violent Extremist Narratives* (The Hague: National Coordinator for Counter-terrorism, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad. An exploratory study*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael. Available online at [http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2006/20061200\\_cscp\\_csp\\_bakker.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2006/20061200_cscp_csp_bakker.pdf) accessed 2 July 2012

<sup>34</sup> Ranstorp et al. (2010) Op cit. p. 15

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 22

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 16



## Conclusions

The aim of this paper is to provide an introductory overview to the phenomenon of jihadi foreign fighters in Europe, examine related potential motivating factors and recruitment mechanisms and to act as a starting point for further discussion. It is acknowledged that the above examples are not exhaustive and exclude instances where Europeans have been found in situ in conflict situations such as Ahmed Hussein Ahmed who earned the dubious title of being the first known British suicide bomber in Somalia.<sup>37</sup> Nor does it capture, for instance, the case of Mohamud Said Omar, an American Somali who was arrested in the Netherlands on suspicion of facilitating travel arrangements for Europeans to attend training camps in Somalia.<sup>38</sup> Said Omar was extradited to the US in 2010 and is currently undergoing trial in Minnesota. While such cases were not prosecuted in Europe the term “a steady stream” rightly sums up the phenomenon which appears to be growing and south Asia in particular seems to be a key region where European foreign jihadists go to train.

Based on the findings here and on other available research this paper provides the below recommendations. In general this topic has only just begun to be explored in real depth and so continued work is needed in many areas.

## Recommendations

**1. Define the phenomenon and conduct more study.** Information on this topic is extremely difficult to find and where there is research, the definitions of the phenomenon vary. Firstly, it is important to define the phenomenon outright as Heggehammer argues that “the Western tendency to conflate foreign fighters and international terrorists has been a major source of communication problems between the West and the Muslim world since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001”.<sup>39</sup> Once the term has been properly defined, scholars and policymakers should work together to compile their information in order to be able to gauge and monitor the extent of the problem.

**2. Importance of understanding why people become foreign fighters.** It would be useful to interview and profile those known “foreign fighters”, where possible, to learn why they chose to join a training camp and the jihad. At present, there is some information on this but not a lot. In order to try to prevent the phenomenon it is first necessary to understand why Europeans choose to travel to training camps. This would greatly compliment the growing literature on violent radicalisation.

**3. Greater understanding of recruitment process.** To what extent are vulnerable individuals targeted and invited? How and on which criteria are these individuals selected? Who finances the trip and facilitates the travels? Are individuals trained to prepare and execute attacks in the countries of origin or trained to be part of the struggle locally? Furthermore what level of knowledge are people being recruited at, is it merely just the curious, or those who are potentially leading a group/cell in a western country?

**4. Understanding where best to intervene.** Would it be best to prevent radicalisation, block financial resources for training, stop recruitment, prevent individuals from returning to EU, follow or arrest individuals upon return, or work on closing down of training camps with the authorities in the countries mentioned. If the answer is “a combination of actions” then which combination is the most effective?

**5. Understanding the legislative instruments.** In the aftermath of the Toulouse attacks, France sought to strengthen its terrorism laws including specific provisions targeting travellers to training camps. The

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<sup>37</sup> Taarnby, Hallundbaek, (2010) op. cit. p. 41

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 42

<sup>39</sup> Heggehammer op. cit. p. 90

EU Framework Decision on Terrorism on Incitement, Training and Recruitment also specifically mentions this as a crime. An exploration of various legal directives/legislation in other countries should be undertaken and the effectiveness of such legislation should also be analysed.

**6. Exploring current capacity building initiatives in other states.** It is also important to ascertain where there are projects already in place to prevent people travelling abroad to training camps. It is important to learn from ongoing initiatives and to understand also how and where civil society can be utilised in relation to the phenomenon.

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