



THE FOREIGN FIGHTER PROBLEM: A CONFERENCE REPORT

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FPRI's Program on National Security held a conference on the foreign fighter problem, July 14-15, 2009, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Michael Horowitz, Michael P. Noonan, Mackubin T. Owens, Harvey Sicherman, and Stephanie Kaplan served as panel moderators. Nearly 100 individuals from academia, government, NGOs, the media, the military, and the public attended, and another 180 individuals from around the world participated by webcast. Audio and video files of the proceedings are posted on FPRI's [website](http://www.fpri.org/research/nationalsecurity/foreignfighters/) at:

<http://www.fpri.org/research/nationalsecurity/foreignfighters/>

The papers presented at the conference will be published in *Orbis* and other outlets.

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The views expressed herein are those of the speakers and should not be construed to represent any agency of the U.S. government or other institution. What follows is a summary of the keynote address, major panel presentations and discussions.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Former Ambassador **Dell L. Dailey** (Lt. Gen. U.S. Army Ret.), the U.S. Department of State's Coordinator for Counterterrorism (2007-09), delivered the conference's keynote address. Ambassador Dailey opened by emphasizing two themes: global partnership and global engagement. He noted that, "our challenge is to overcome cultural and political differences to inspire a sincere commitment to end a threat that we all share." He reviewed various aspects of the problems that would be the topics for panel discussion, emphasizing in particular the requirements for successful collective action. Amb. Dailey closed by urging participants to use the conference as a "launching pad for regional and state dialogue."

PANEL 1: The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon

David Malet, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Colorado State University–Pueblo, cited four diverse examples, historical and contemporary, of the phenomenon to support his assertion that "not all foreign fighters are Islamic Fundamentalists, and also foreign fighters are not a new phenomenon." Malet argued that current recruitment mechanisms of insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan are not unique to those specific conflicts, but rather stem from a combination of established messaging practices and targeted appeals by transnational groups.

Malet explained that local insurgents, typically the weaker party in civil conflicts, attempt to recruit foreign fighters in order to "broaden the scope of conflict" and to maximize their chance of victory by garnering outside support in the form of manpower and specialists. He provided a formula for transnational recruitment based on his review of records from a spectrum of different historical cases. He argued that insurgents recruit foreign fighters by framing distant civil conflicts as posing a direct threat to the transnational community to which the recruit is closely

affiliated. This affiliation, whether ethnic, religious, or otherwise, ties directly into the recruitment messaging because it emphasizes the necessity of defensive mobilization and action in order to preserve the affiliated community. Malet notes that foreign fighter types are often quite active in institutions of that community, but tend to be “marginalized within their broader politics.” These social structures make them more susceptible to selective targeting by recruiters.

Malet made clear that the foreign fighters are cause for serious concern for three key reasons: (1) they have been increasing in relative numbers, (2) they learn from one another, gaining tactical expertise with every passing conflict and are becoming more dangerous, and (3) transnational foreign fighter movements tend to be more successful.

Malet concluded by offering specific policy suggestions. Malet cautioned that threatening foreign fighters with violence would be inherently ineffective considering their call to arms already stemmed from a perceived existential threat to their in-group. He suggested instead that preventing recruitment would be a matter of marginalizing the centrality of the transnational group’s social structure and narrative. He also stressed the importance of encouraging the reintegration of potential foreign fighters into their home society by bolstering civic identity institutions and establishing alternate identities for them as citizens, therefore removing the rationale for their participation in foreign conflicts.

Mary R. Habeck, an Associate Professor in Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), agreed with many of Malet’s remarks, finding the recommendations for preventing recruitment specifically compelling. Habeck, however, contended that there was a distinction between recruitment based on ethnicity or political views and recruitment based on religion. She argued that the latter is often more difficult for governments to deal with, specifically because they lack the legitimacy to challenge religiously-sanctioned behavior. Habeck noted that this is a particular problem in non-Muslim majority governments today.

Citing what she referred to as a “fight over authenticity in religion,” Habeck argued that competing groups in the Middle East are engaged in a struggle to define the “true, authentic Islam.” She explained that this struggle is not about something new, but rather about calling believers back to their true roots, to the old, established tradition. She said that “the fight uses words that many Muslims find appealing” and that resonate with the community including *jihad*, *muhajiroon*, *ansar* and that these terms have been rebranded to suit the recruitment needs of these groups.

Habeck further suggested that the current Islamic foreign fighter phenomenon is distinct from other conflicts because the major appeal is in the next life by means of martyrdom. As opposed to seeking out real gains in the current struggle, it is enough to have participated and died in doing so. She continued that when the primary motivators are avoiding hell and attaining paradise, it becomes more difficult to combat.

Erin Simpson, formerly on the faculty of the Marine Corps’ Command and Staff College, found that many of Malet’s conclusions illustrated the need for additional research on the subject. She raised some specific questions and highlighted key arenas in which additional data would be pertinent. Simpson suggested that governments should interview detainees in systematic fashion in order to better understand the motivations of foreign fighters and the nature of the networks that gained them passage to the conflict zones.

Simpson raised the question of whether foreign fighters change the character of the insurgency. Specifically, she asked: (1) “What is the relationship between those foreign fighters and the local civilian population?” (2) “Do we have reason to believe that foreign fighters interact with that local civilian population in a different manner than local fighters,” both generally speaking and in Iraq specifically?, and, (3) Are foreign fighters more effective?

Simpson suggested that in certain instances, as was the case with the Sahwa or “awakening” in Iraq’s Anbar Province, foreign fighters are more effective in the conflict’s beginning but that their relationship with the local population erodes over time, causing the latter group to rise up against the former. Simpson argued that this may be a potential crack to be exploited by altering the messaging in a way that the local conflict is delegitimized by the presence of foreign fighters.

Clinton Watts, a consultant for Innovative Analytics and Training, agreed with most of Malet's remarks and spoke specifically about the issue of recruitment tactics. Malet argued that foreign fighter recruitment techniques are not so different from ours. Watts described the parallels between the stock footage of al-Qaida training exercises featured on American television *ad nauseum* in 2003 and the U.S. Army's "Be All You Can Be" recruitment videos. He said that the video featured "totally different ideology" but "mirrored what they thought it was to be a fighter." He explained that the combination of familial - social promotion of such conflicts coupled with the saliency of these recruitment tactics has proven to be a successful formula worldwide. Watts said that just as the best recruiter of a Marine is a former Marine, the same goes for foreign fighters. He reiterated Malet's assertion that messaging is extremely important and can be consistent even when ideology differs in disparate conflicts.

Watts used a compelling analogy to emphasize the importance of transnational, community-based affiliations in which he argued that one would be more likely to support a fellow sports team supporter encountered abroad than one's own neighbor with whom one has spoken with only on occasion. Owing to the strength of such ties, Watts argued that it is crucial for policy makers to neutralize the family and social network influence, specifically in areas known to generate high numbers of recruits.

PANEL 2: Foreign Fighters and Sovereignty

Major **Ian Bryan** of the Air National Guard and the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, argued that while sovereignty creates a serious obstacle to reducing the foreign fighter problem, it also provides great value to the United States and her allies. He went on to say that disregarding sovereignty not only has the potential to degrade U.S. legitimacy but also to chip away at that pillar of the international system.

Bryan provided a definition of what he considered to be foreign fighters, including in this group their logistical support, such as financiers and facilitators. In arguing that interdicting foreign fighters before they reach the battlefield is of the highest priority, Bryan conceded that this feat posed a sticky set of implications for sovereignty. He then expounded on the origins of sovereignty as an international norm, tracing it back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Bryan explained that respecting sovereignty is intimately tied into a country's perceived legitimacy and as Bryan said, "perception matters." One of the most obvious reasons to preserve legitimacy is because "a foreign policy perceived as legitimate is usually the best way for America to get what it wants from the world." Another, and perhaps more nuanced reason, to preserve legitimacy is in order to prevent the corrosion of international law, norms, structures and institutions that otherwise serve U.S. interests.

Bryan employed two examples in which sovereignty had been transgressed, yet yielded polar results. The first set related to operations conducted by the United States in Pakistan, which arguably diminished Pakistan's ability to deal with the transnational threat and cooperate with the United States. The second related to NATO and its involvement in the Kosovo conflict; a case in which sovereignty was disregarded yet yielded more favorable results. Bryan's conclusions: not all means of transgressing sovereignty are equal and like-minded governments might bind together again, as was the case with NATO in Kosovo, but the result may be unfavorable to the broader international community.

In light of these assessments, Bryan suggested that effective long-term action against foreign fighters, terrorist, and a host of emerging transnational problems requires both international cooperation and a set of suitable legal doctrines. He urged that the international community work to amend legal doctrine in order to adapt to issues like the foreign fighter problem.

Colonel **Mackubin Owens**, USMCR (ret.), Editor of *Orbis* and Associate Dean of the U.S. Naval War College, agreed with much of Bryan's remarks, touching specifically on "the need to balance the requirement to respond to threats from foreign fighters who seek sanctuary or transit through states" and to maintain "the very cornerstone of the international order which is sovereignty." Owens concluded from Bryan's comments that a new geopolitical reality has emerged and therefore argued that "we need to change strategy."

Owens offered that, in light of the current foreign fighter threat, perhaps it should “be our policy to respect the sovereignty only of those states that can govern legitimately and effectively.” As for “ungoverned spaces,” Owens suggested that “it is sometimes necessary to intervene; to violate what otherwise [can] be seen as the source of problems hiding behind this issue of sovereignty.”

Jakub Grygiel, an Associate Professor at The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at The Johns Hopkins University, agreed with some of Bryan’s remarks but stressed that a “clear operational urgency to break the sovereignty of another state in order to eradicate or perhaps mitigate the flow of foreign fighters” exists. He acknowledged, however, that, as Bryan mentioned, there are serious, long-term repercussions and implications of doing so.

Grygiel suggested that there are three different types of sovereign actors: (a) those who support foreign fighters, like Iran, (b) those who oppose foreign fighters and will kill them, like China, and (c) those who are weak and have little or no control over their own territory, like Pakistan and Somalia. He followed that “just making that distinction ... changes and alters our calculation of the costs and benefits of breaking sovereignty because they will be different in the different cases.” Grygiel also noted that, as in the case of Russia issuing Russian passports to South Ossetian citizens in 2008, there are instances in which countries deliberately undermine sovereignty.

Grygiel also made the point that while as Bryan suggested, there are “clear costs of violating sovereignty,” “there are also clear costs of not breaking sovereignty—the clear costs of an overly respectful attitude towards sovereignty.” Grygiel explained that “respecting sovereignty too often could also erode our legitimacy” and that since foreign fighters do not accept sovereignty, it may hinder our ability to defend ourselves and to understand the problem if we cling to this concept too much. He also commented that perhaps “our defense of sovereignty is not always why people support us.”

Michael Noonan, Managing Director of FPRI’s Program on National Security and moderator of this panel, raised the point that holding the actual country that hosts foreign fighters accountable for what occurs within its borders could ameliorate part of the problem. While Noonan conceded that foreign fighters are indeed difficult to coerce, he suggested that since states are easier to coerce, it could prove prudent to correlate the two in order to exert pressure.

PANEL 3: Foreign Fighters and their Economic Impact

Matthew Levitt, Director of the Stein Program on Terrorism, Intelligence and Policy at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, addressed the topic of foreign fighters and their economic impact through a detailed case study of Syria and al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). Levitt began by stating a simple fact that “running an insurgency is an expensive endeavor” and that a significant infrastructure is required in order to sustain an international terrorist network. He further noted that “The foreign fighters’ use of third-party countries for training and fundraising and transit is not merely an operational phenomenon—it’s an economic one as well.” Syria, according to Levitt, is a classic example of such a country and AQI has long benefited from a network of associates operating within its borders.

Levitt explained that in Syria, foreign fighters do not enjoy state sponsorship in the classical sense, but that the Syrian Government’s refusal to eradicate their activities and their presence has given de facto support. In fact, Levitt asserted that the local Syrian economy along its Iraqi border has not only been bolstered but is completely entwined with foreign fighter activities and the revenues they generate. Likewise, Levitt asserted that “the foreign fighter pipeline in Syria is believed to have benefited the local populations on both sides of the Syria/Iraqi border in the form of jobs, increased cash flow into the local economy [through the] purchase of supplies, staples and rents.” Because Syria does not have the economic means currently to replace the financial padding provided by foreign fighter smuggling and bribes, he explained that it is unlikely to stamp out the foreign fighters lest it cause serious economic unrest within its own territory. Further, if Syria were to crack down decisively on foreign fighters, it would likely have to defend itself against a now angry, trained, and armed group residing within its borders.

Levitt added that aside from the economic benefits that Syria enjoys by hosting foreign fighters, it also uses the phenomenon to generate political clout. According to Levitt, Syria's tolerance of foreign fighters can be seen as an extension of its foreign policy and is intended to further its interest in Iraq. He noted that for every example of Syrian assistance in policing the borders, there is another example of how it has hindered it. During much of the Bush Administration, Syria's support of foreign fighters or its turn-a-blind-eye policy was intended to undermine Coalition efforts in Iraq. Likewise, Syria's oft criticized relationship with Iran and its surrogates has been somewhat offset by its support of the Iraqi insurgency. Nevertheless, Levitt emphasized economic considerations dominate Syria's tolerance of foreign fighter infrastructures existing within its borders.

In light of these conclusions, Levitt offered several policy suggestions on how to combat this threat. He suggested that a key element would be to create "a plan to backfill the local economies with jobs and services to replace the losses sure to follow the shuttering of the smuggling economy." He added that an anti-corruption and civil society campaign could be beneficial in breaking the traditional, deeply ingrained culture of bribing. He also suggested that diplomatic efforts be made to address the underlying policy concerns that have led Syria to support insurgents and the like in the first place. Levitt's final caveat was that any efforts made on the Syrian side would only bear fruit if they were duplicated on the Iraqi side.

Brian Fishman, a Fellow with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, agreed with many of Levitt's remarks. He provided a relevant historical precedent for Syria's current stance vis-à-vis border smuggling, reminding the audience that during the Saddam-era, he too overlooked smuggling along the Iraqi-Syrian border in order to curry favor with the local tribes. Fishman explained that there are different kinds of smuggling that need to be addressed; official borders are different from the un-policed borders. In the former case, as Levitt asserted, bribing government officials is the main way to conduct business. In the latter case, smugglers have to deal with local tribes. As for AQI, Fishman explained that initially the group stepped on some toes, but eventually learned to work with the locals to take advantage of their well tried avenues of smuggling. He suggested that this is a potential crack to exploit.

Fishman sought to make additional distinctions relevant to the foreign fighter phenomenon. He referred to the fact that foreign fighter smuggling and other activities occur regularly on multiple borders, citing not only the Syrian-Iraqi border but also the very critical Saudi-Jordanian and Libyan-Egyptian borders. Additionally, Fishman sought to clarify that "there have been at least two waves of foreign fighters in Iraq," the former of which was more experienced than the latter. The oft-referenced Sinjar records, which have offered a rare glimpse into this issue, refer only to the second wave. Fishman deduced from this shift that the conflict has diminished the quality— if not the quantity—of foreign fighters.

Christopher Hewitt, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland - Baltimore County, took issue with some of Levitt's assertions, beginning with his emphasis on funding as being of primary importance to the foreign fighter phenomenon. "I've been looking at terrorist campaigns for a long time," Hewitt averred, "and I would argue that the most important factor for a terrorist group is social support. If you have social support, you can get funding."

He also argued against the portrayal of the insurgency in Iraq as homogeneous, which, in his view, ignored the ethnic, religious, and ideological differences. He explained that while a Sunni nationalist insurgency was the original incarnation of fighting against the U.S. invasion, it became a religious, sectarian fight under Zarqawi. He asserted that although there was a tactical alliance between the two groups, it later fell apart because the foreign fighters tried to impose their view of correct Muslim practice on the local Iraqi Sunnis. Hewitt added that this very sentiment, to an extent, contributed to the Anbar Awakening.

Lastly, Hewitt clarified that AQI is to be held responsible first and foremost, not the Syrian networks. He said that, contrary to Levitt's portrayal of the relationship, the former creates the need for the latter. He ended by strongly rejecting the assertion, which he attributed to Levitt's paper, that "if only the Syrians would behave properly and tighten up border security, all would be well-- that would be the end of the foreign fighter problem."

Lieutenant Colonel **Basheer Ilyas**, USA, the Joint Staff Action Officer for Counter Threat Finance (CFT), strongly agreed with Levitt's remarks, specifically commending him on his emphasis on "the impacts on the populace, the impacts on the fighters themselves, and also the political leadership." He drew a parallel between organized crime and terrorist groups, arguing that both raise, store and transfer money in a similar fashion. However, Ilyas explained that while "the illicit financial networks represent a significant strength" they "equally represent a critical vulnerability to exploit."

Ilyas agreed with Levitt that targeted financial sanctions are highly beneficial but conceded that the tool is often compromised by the simple fact that the people who are sanctioned are in the best position to evade them. "As we designate one entity, another pops up under a different name with the same nefarious characters behind the wheel," warned Ilyas. Nevertheless, he added, "the importance and relevance of targeted financial sanctions... remains significant." Publicizing the names and transgressions of certain individuals, otherwise known as the "name and shame tactic," is effective in discouraging others from doing business with designees for fear of repercussions. "Public designations cause targets to resort to other less secure, costly mechanisms for moving assets globally."

Ilyas concluded by saying that "We may not be able to destroy their [foreign fighter] pipeline, but maybe we can seriously damage it and force our adversaries to spend financial and human resources to defend themselves."

PANEL 4: Case Study: Syria and the Foreign Fighter Problem

David Lesch, a Professor of Middle East History and Chair of the Department of History at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX, continued the discussion on Syria and the foreign fighter problem, albeit from the perspective of Syria's foreign policy considerations. Lesch, who has interviewed President Bashar al-Assad on several occasions, offered unique insight into Syria's behavior regarding foreign fighter activities taking place within its borders.

In order to understand Syria's motivations, Lesch urged the audience to consider things from the Syrian perspective, beginning first with the reminder that Syria has been "virtually surrounded—after of course, the U.S. invasion in 2003—by actual or potential hostile forces." Lesch recounted that the Bush administration had been angered, to say the least, about Syria's lack of "cooperation in stemming the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq." On the heels of 9/11, Lesch recapped, the Bush administration gave the Assad regime an ultimatum, compelling it to choose sides. Lesch explained that Syria had a practiced history of walking a fine line between the West and the rest, teetering in one direction or another as it fit its foreign policy needs. Lesch conceded that Assad "did not adequately adjust to the important underlying changes in American foreign policy after 9/11," and assumed the same old rules still applied. These misunderstandings, he said, led the Bush administration to step up its anti-Syria rhetoric and led Syria to go further in its defiance of the Bush policies.

The line was, therefore, drawn in the proverbial sand and Syria sought to counter U.S. efforts in Iraq. Lesch explained that Syria went about this strategy "in an asymmetrical fashion that foiled perceived U.S. threats yet did not incur the wrath of the United States in the form of a full-fledged military response." Syria also had additional cause to turn a blind eye to foreign fighter activities due to the domestic constituency in the country that "identified strongly with the Iraqi insurgency." Likewise, Lesch pointed out that Assad's then weak grip on power prevented him from doing Bush's bidding and that by not doing so, he was able to take advantage of a threatening climate to consolidate his power and crack down on civil society and democracy activists. Assad also wanted to avoid the "possibility of insurgent/jihadist blowback from Iraq into Syria" similar to what happened following the Afghan mujahideen resistance in the 1980s.

In short, Lesch argued, Syria was motivated by a series of strategic considerations that led it to behave the way that it did. He therefore suggested that it would be in the United States' best interest to create a climate in which it is strategically beneficial for Syria to work with us rather than against us. He also stressed the prudence of assessing Syria's capability to fulfill the extent of American demands prior to making them, citing specifically the plausibility of Syria reigning in Hizballah, reconciling Hamas and Fatah, helping vis-à-vis Iran, stabilizing the situation in Iraq, and preventing foreign fighters from entering Iraq via Syria.

Murhaf Jouejati, a Professor of Middle East Studies at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, agreed with many of Lesch's remarks. He sought to underline two major points regarding Syria's character: "Syria is a rational actor" and "Syria does not fear democracy." Jouejati offered additional strategic motivations for Syrian behavior, however, this time, to explain why Syria's tacit cooperation with foreign fighters was not more overt. For example, he explained that it has been in Syria's interest to have a whole and stable Iraq on its border for several reasons, including the negative impact the alternative would have on Syria's Kurdish population. Likewise, Jouejati suggested that, overall, "U.S. and Syrian interests on Iraq converge far more so than Syrian-Iranian interests although Syria and Iran have a strategic relationship." Because of this, he surmised, the current status quo is flexible. Jouejati echoed Lesch's sentiment that Syria can either be brought into the fold, in which case it could help the United States achieve some of its goals in the region, *or* Syria can be pushed out, in which case it could cause many additional problems for the United States.

Andrew Tabler, a Soref Fellow in the Program on Arab Politics at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, agreed with some of Lesch's remarks but also noted that there is "a tendency, especially early on in the rule of Bashar al-Assad, to frame U.S.-Syrian relations under the Bush Administration as a sort of neocon plot to overthrow the regime." Tabler explained that the hard line taken by the U.S. administration was "in response to what they saw as Syria's troubling behavior against U.S. interests in the Middle East." He made reference to several of Syria's violations of UN sanctions on Iraq at the start of Bashar al-Assad's regime in order to remind the audience of the original source of the strain. He described the Bush-Assad relationship as a Cold War.

While Tabler agreed with Lesch's assertion that Damascus was guilty for selectively hearing what the United States considered to be support for terrorism and that it also misread U.S. intentions, he contended that Assad was completely in control of Syria when he consolidated power. Assad was, therefore, responsible for all of Syrian behavior and ostensibly lost all plausible deniability.

Tabler concluded by saying that Syria has controlled the flow of foreign fighters as a means to gain leverage in the region. The Obama Administration's overtures to the Syrian government, including the return of an American ambassador to Syria, have the potential to entice Assad to stem this flow. Conversely, if these overtures are unsuccessful, we are likely to see the pipeline turned back on at a time where the U.S. is drawing its troops down in Iraq.

PANEL 5: Disrupting the Foreign Fighter Flow

The fifth and final panel of the conference focused on policy prescriptions for "Disrupting the Foreign Fighter Flow." **Barak Mendelsohn**, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Haverford College and a new Senior Fellow at FPRI, began the discussion by citing a major difference in today's foreign fighters seen in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. He said that while foreign fighters have often upgraded "local groups by adding commanding skills, by bringing technical, tactical and strategic knowledge and through assistance in training....What is new that we didn't see in the first wave, in the 1980s or 1990s, is today foreign fighters often are suicide bombers. And that's a new phenomenon."

The recognition of this development led Mendelsohn to ask about the importance of foreign fighters to the overall war on terror. Could the role they play be served by locals in their stead? Mendelsohn pointed out that severe "information gaps" exist in our understanding of this phenomenon. Among the questions he asked were: "How many foreign fighters are there?" "How are they divided... between the different jihad arenas?" "Is there any central mechanism that helps to disperse those Jihadis or is it just a matter of opportunity? It depends on the particular local connections, on financial conditions, the ease of travel?"

Nonetheless, Mendelsohn offered a few policy prescriptions. He touched on the need "to find ways to counter the appeal of external causes" and more specifically, "to find ways to offer competing narratives to events in which Muslims are presented as being victimized." He elaborated that there is also a "need to create alternatives for Muslims that want to help their fellow Muslims that they think are oppressed." On the regional level, Mendelsohn cited "the privatization of violence" as a condition that facilitates the foreign fighter institution. He posited,

therefore, that “re-establish[ing] the position of the state as an institution that actually serves the interest of the people” would be one way to undermine this institution.

Lieutenant Colonel **Robert Mackey**, USA (ret.), who served as a counterterrorism planner at the National Counterterrorism Center and now works as a freelance writer and organizational historian, continued the discussion from a slightly different perspective. Mackey began by asking rhetorically “what’s next five, ten, fifteen years from now?” He then answered that “we need to start looking at the outflow from Afghanistan, from Iraq, from the next battlefield and start trying to get ahead of that power curve to some extent.” Referencing some of the Arab foreign fighters in Afghanistan who were later repurposed, he cautioned about the potential for this to happen with this generation’s fighter and to plan against it. Mackey therefore pointed out the need to “integrate these people back into those societies in a peaceful way, to reduce the foreign fighter flow before it’s ever an outflow.” Mackey argued that for the long run, a military solution is not necessarily the solution to stemming the flow and later tracking the outflow of foreign fighters.

Mackey concluded by stressing “conflict management,” stating that “the best way to not generate foreign fighters is not to have wars....” He explained that war “gives these people an opportunity to fight. It gives them expertise in their field. It gives them an ability to practice. It’s their training center for the next fight.” Mackey advocated that “The United States and its coalition partners really need to start working with the partner nations more. To give them the tools they need to fight their internal fight.” In his view, “that is the best solution.”

Dan Green, a Visiting Fellow at the Terrorism Research Center, touched on yet another aspect of the discussion, focusing not only on *how* we deal with disrupting the foreign fighter flow but *who* deals with it. He said one of the first questions we must ask ourselves is, “informed by our experiences in these different wars of counterinsurgency and with foreign fighters, how might we go about reforming the U.S. government ... to deal with this in a sustained way for the long haul?” According to Green, one of the most important steps is to find “the right kind of people who are armed with the right perspective to do this in a sustained way.” Green perceived that the short stints in-country of those assigned to counter this problem hinders the capacity to get the job done. Harkening back to the British experience in which individuals spent many, many years abroad, Green argued for abandoning the “mindset of short-term rotations and short-term deployments and really focusing and creating almost a career track, if you will, for people who are armed with political skills.” This, in short, will provide us with an enduring capability to counter these types of threats and perhaps prevent them before they fully develop.

Michael Doran, a Visiting Professor at New York University and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and Senior Director at the National Security Council, began his remarks by relating that the biggest thing he took away from his time in government was the existence of “bureaucratic gaps and seams ... between [the] bureaucratic mission and challenge that we actually face out in the field.” He went on to argue that the foreign fighter problem, among other things, has led to the militarization of our foreign policy, but only because the gaps and seams caused ownership problems over policy areas. Furthermore, Doran explicitly noted that we lack “the capacity to do political warfare” and that agency roles become blurred when moving from hot wars to situations, as in Syria, requiring similar tactics but more political and diplomatic sensitivities.

CONCLUSION

FPRI president **Harvey Sicherman** summarized the major themes covered in the panels. He recounted that in terms of the foreign fighter phenomenon, the conference addressed “where they came from, how they get there, what they do when they get there, what they do after they leave, and tried to figure out—given the limitations of each of those areas—what might be done about it, including the limitations of the United States government.” The conference could not always offer definitive solutions but its work pointed out broad areas of agreement on what we know now and more importantly, what we need to know if we are to grapple successfully with these issues.

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