


FACT SHEET: Comprehensive U.S. Government Approach to Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Syria and the Broader Region

 obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/24/fact-sheet-comprehensive-us-government-approach-foreign-terrorist-fighte

September 24, 2014

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 24, 2014

As the President has said, we take seriously the terrorist threat posed by fighters in Iraq, Syria, and the broader region, including foreign terrorist fighters. More than 15,000 foreign terrorist fighters from more than 80 countries have traveled to Syria to fight alongside terrorist groups including dozens of Americans from a variety of backgrounds. The White House is leading an interagency effort to address this threat. Our approach brings together homeland security, law enforcement, intelligence, diplomatic, military, capacity building, and information sharing efforts.

Broad Engagement with Foreign Partners

We employ a whole-of-government outreach effort with foreign partners to highlight the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters as well as their funding streams and to urge steps to interdict wherever possible. The countries involved in this effort are long-time counterterrorism partners, and together, we are committing significant resources to track and disrupt foreign terrorist fighter travel.

- President Obama, exercising the United States' current position as the rotating President of the UN Security Council, will chair a meeting of the Council focused on foreign terrorist fighters on September 24. The President has been focused on this issue, and the convening of world leaders is another element of our comprehensive, whole-of-government response to this challenge. We expect that during that session a binding UN Security Council Resolution will be adopted to expand upon current obligations within international law and underscore the centrality of countering violent extremism efforts to respond to and suppress the foreign terrorist fighter threat.
- Over the course of the last several months, Lisa Monaco, the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, and other senior administration officials have consulted with foreign partners and allies on this issue.

- The Department of State in March appointed Ambassador Robert Bradtke as Senior Advisor for Partner Engagement on Syria Foreign Fighters. Since then, Ambassador Bradtke has led a comprehensive effort, including marshaling representatives from a number of U.S. departments and agencies, to encourage key European, North African, and Middle Eastern partners to prioritize the threat, address vulnerabilities, and adapt to prevent and interdict foreign terrorist fighters. Ambassador Bradtke is actively engaging partners through multilateral fora, including the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law, which recently opened in Malta to serve as a hub for training judges and prosecutors on counterterrorism-related casework, beginning with a focus on foreign fighter facilitation.
- Secretary of State John Kerry co-chaired the GCTF ministerial meeting on September 23. At the ministerial meeting, the GCTF adopted a framework of good practices that countries can use to counter the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters.
- The Department of State also hosts the interagency Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) to counter recruitment and radicalization online through counter-messaging, a tool State encourages partner countries to employ as well. CSCC is engaged in a sustained campaign against Syria and Iraq-based terrorists' online messaging to combat their ability to recruit foreign terrorist fighters.
- Further, the U.S. Intelligence Community works closely with foreign partners to identify and assess both tactical developments as well as broader trends vis-à-vis foreign terrorist fighters. The Intelligence Community's robust sharing of intelligence and analytic insights with foreign counterparts ensures that the proper authorities and senior officials are aware of relevant developments and are best placed to take steps to interdict foreign fighters and disrupt their support networks.

Drawing on Law Enforcement and Homeland Security Tools

Together, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are working closely with a group of European Justice and Home Affairs Ministers to address a wide range of measures focused on enhancing counter-radicalization, border security, aviation security, and information sharing.

- DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson has made aviation security his priority, and DHS is engaging with foreign partners and industry to share and implement capabilities to detect potential threats. DHS has shared best practices, tools, and programs with foreign partners to help address the challenges posed by porous borders in detecting foreign fighter travel.

- DHS, alongside DOJ, also continues to encourage foreign Ministries of Interior and Justice to adopt similar techniques and expand operational collaboration. Most recently, Deputy Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Deputy Attorney General James Cole have led multiple engagements with European Union member countries. We share the concern of our partners abroad over the hundreds of Europeans who have traveled to fight with terrorists in Syria.
- The FBI's Terrorist Screening Center's information-sharing agreements with over 40 international partners provide a mechanism for identifying and sharing terrorist travel activity. DHS is also encouraging more countries to join the United States and more than 60 other countries in using travel information like Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record data to identify both known and previously unknown foreign terrorist fighters.
- DOJ is working with European and other foreign partners to exchange best practices on enacting criminal laws to address foreign terrorist fighters and developing investigative tools to bring effective prosecutions. U.S. law enforcement authorities also support INTERPOL's Fusion Cell, which focuses on information sharing on foreign terrorist fighters.

Maintaining Domestic Vigilance

At home, we have multiple efforts underway to develop a comprehensive framework to counter violent extremist recruitment, including programs with non-traditional partners, such as mental health, social service, and education providers.

Local communities are the front lines of defense and response, and are essential in addressing foreign terrorist fighter recruitment, especially as Syria-based groups focus on recruiting Westerners. Local law enforcement authorities and community members are often best able to identify individuals or groups exhibiting suspicious or dangerous behaviors and to intervene before they commit acts of violence or attempt to travel overseas to foreign conflict zones.

DOJ, DHS, and NCTC work with local law enforcement to build on community-based activities to strengthen resilience in communities targeted by violent extremist recruitment and undermine narratives used by foreign fighter facilitators. For example, U.S. Attorney Offices have co-hosted Community Resilience Exercises in Durham, Seattle, and Houston; and the DHS Secretary is hosting an exercise in Columbus, Ohio, on September 24.

The FBI also works closely with DHS, the Intelligence Community, federal and state law enforcement agencies to share information and identify, investigate, and prosecute U.S. citizens with intentions to travel to foreign countries to support designated terrorist groups. For example, DHS has developed tools to aide its front-line personnel—be they transportation security officers, customs or border patrol, or immigration officials--in identifying suspected violent extremists.

