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TNT FOREIGN FIGHTER PROJECT

Foreign fighters operating in and beyond Syria, Iraq, and Libya threaten global security. Since 2011, tens of thousands of volunteer fighters from more than 100 countries gained lethal skills, experience, and networks, which can now be used with devastating effect on civilian and military targets. The CSIS Transnational Threats Project (TNT) launched a multi-year study to better understand the nature of this threat. The effort combines scholarly research with insights from face-to-face meetings in conflict zones with violent extremists, organized crime figures, social media producers, activists, and local security officials, among others.

The Foreign Fighter Project begins by examining the role of foreign fighters in history, tracing the lineage and connections of foreign fighters

from the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan through Chechnya and Bosnia, and on to the post-September 11 violence across the Middle East, North Africa, and South and Central Asia. Trends in organizational behavior, ideology, and lines of communication explain much of what is new—and what is not—in the Islamic State's unprecedented mobilization of foreign volunteers.

Tunisia is in the crosswinds of a broader struggle with jihadi-salafi violence that has intensified since 2011. Thousands of young Tunisians have left for conflict zones in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, while others have joined armed groups at home and mounted attacks that rattled a country undergoing a turbulent transition from authoritarian rule. This project component examines the interrelated security, political, socioeconomic, and religious dimensions of Tunisia's efforts to confront an evolving extremist threat, and considers this case's implications for what has become a global and generational challenge.

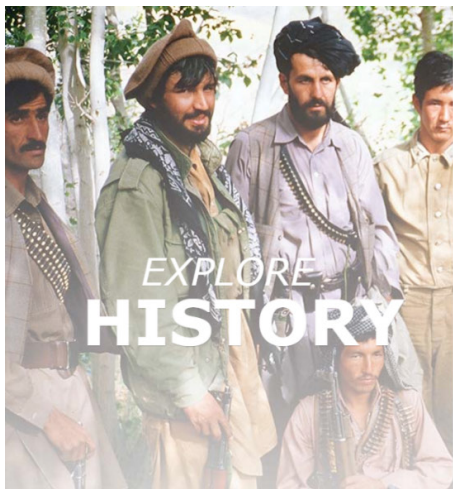
Looking ahead, international counterterrorism pressure may precipitate a wave of foreign fighter migration away from Iraq and Syria. As the Islamic State loses territory and al Qaeda shifts strategy, the groups may carry out more spectacular international operations to signal continued relevance and power. This may well result in thousands of battle-hardened fighters having strategic impact for years to come. To map this foreign fighter fallout, the project traces mobilization pathways to understand who may return and how, then examines pre-existing grievances and demographic factors across Russia, Europe, and Southeast Asia to help create frameworks for limiting the damage migrating fighters pose.

Forthcoming nodes of the study will cover those areas prone to foreign fighter fallout. To see TNT's project findings, monitor **foreignfighters**.csis.org.



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