

Global Counter-Terrorism Alumni Community Of Interest (COI) Workshop

16 – 19 November 2015, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

After Paris: What We Must Do To Combat Foreign Terrorist Fighters

Recommendations from PTSS Alumni

Three days after the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris, which were conducted in part by returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), the Marshall Center hosted a Global Counter-Terrorism Alumni Community of Interest (COI) to address the issue of countering FTFs. Twelve alumni gave presentations on their national perspectives and experience in countering FTFs. These presentations served as a catalyst for analysis, discussion, and exchange within the group of 75 CT professionals from 43 countries. The focus of the COI was to identify best practices and lessons learned, both positive and negative, that could be adapted by members of the international community to counter and mitigate the FTF threat. The following conclusions and recommendations are the product of alumni discussions at the COI.

1. **The Need for Long-Term Political Will.** The COI participants identified insufficient political will as one of the key challenges undermining efforts to counter FTF activities. The FTF threat will persist for decades. Countering it will require long-term strategic direction and leadership, prioritization of FTFs as a significant threat to global security, and commitment of adequate resources to counter each phase of the FTF cycle. Participants endorsed the utility of having a distinct strategy and action plan for dealing with FTFs, outlining effective measures, procedures and guidelines to counter the spectrum of FTF activities throughout the radicalization, recruitment, travel, overseas and return phases at national, regional and international levels. The effectiveness of strategies must be continually monitored and evaluated.
2. **Legal Frameworks.** There is a critical need for updated, appropriate, and proportional legal frameworks to deal with the rapidly evolving FTF threat. Of course, legal measures must address not only FTFs who travel abroad, but also those who support their efforts through publicity, propaganda, and recruitment. However, because many nations have been slow to enact appropriate legislation, many are still lacking comprehensive frameworks, which in turn acts an impediment to international cooperation. Each nation must therefore assess its laws and amend them as necessary as a matter of priority.
3. **Regional structures for cooperation.** FTFs are transnational actors who show little regard for national boundaries. Thus, COI participants identified the need to create regional structures for cooperation. These regional organizations need to be inclusive enough to include the relevant nations, yet not so large in membership as to become unwieldy and



unresponsive. Regional fusion centers (to include, for example, law enforcement and intelligence agencies, prosecutors and border control officials) should be established on a regional level to enhance cooperation and coordination.

4. **Intelligence-sharing.** A long-term, institutionalized and comprehensive system of intelligence-sharing both within and between nations is critical. Over-classification of information limits the ability to share with partners at a time and place best suited to use it. Exchange of information and cooperation among states as well as among individual state's agencies need to be improved to allow critical, actionable information to be shared in a timely fashion. The COI participants stressed that building trust (through face-to-face meetings) and fostering a climate of "daring to share" intelligence with partners must be endorsed and championed by senior leadership.
5. **Intelligence, evidence and technology.** The challenge of collecting and preserving intelligence so that it may be admissible as evidence in court is another key issue which many countries continue to struggle with. Intelligence is increasingly based on social media posts or other electronic communications, yet personal privacy concerns and the growth of freely-available encrypted software are presenting obstacles to both the collection of such intelligence and its application in prosecutions. Although there are no easy solutions to these problems, they must be urgently addressed, perhaps to include legislative amendments and closer cooperation with relevant companies.
6. **Border Security.** Participants repeatedly noted the struggles of border security organizations to deal with the increasing numbers of security conscious FTFs. There remains a need for shared, international databases of high risk travelers, which each nation actively contributes and has ready access to. Countries are still reluctant to share data on their citizens with foreign nations and international organizations. Over-classification of data makes it unlikely that point of entry personnel will have access to the actionable intelligence needed to detain suspect individuals. Reallocation of resources to address large refugee flows make identifying returning fighters an increasingly challenging prospect.
7. **Counter Financing Efforts.** While the amounts of money involved to support FTF activities are relatively small, FTFs have proven adaptive at devising new methods to fund their actions. SMS loans, fraudulent financial transactions and other forms of petty crime are particularly difficult to detect and prevent. Use and abuse of charities, welfare payments, funds provided by family members or earned by way of legitimate employment are also challenging in this context. Nevertheless, counter financing against FTFs is essential. Law enforcement efforts to identify and counter FTF funding must be evaluated and wherever possible, enhanced.
8. **Proactive Community Engagement.** National and local governments need to be more proactive in their efforts to counter FTFs, and community and family engagement should be a

bedrock component of this approach. Diaspora populations or temporary workers abroad should also be a focus of government outreach, since these communities may be vulnerable to extremist messages, particularly as they may host governments may have difficulty engaging with them. COI participants identified the need for long-term, comprehensive outreach programs and educational reform, to achieve greater social cohesion and inclusiveness.

9. **Counter- narratives.** Understanding and countering the ideology that drives thousands of people to join the fight is critically important. Governments must do more to both directly and indirectly challenge the narratives promoted by those who contribute to radicalization and recruitment. This is easier said than done. FTFs are driven by a wide range of motivations, suggesting the need for numerous, different counter-narratives. On the front lines of counter-messaging efforts should be credible and legitimate religious and secular authorities, former extremists and disillusioned FTFs as well as local community leaders and family members. Experts and psychologists can also provide useful insights. Understanding how to use the media, and particularly social media, to spread counter-narratives in a credible way to as large a target audience as possible is another key component of the counter narrative effort. COI participants recognized the need to invest more effort in counter-narratives as one of the most important aspects in dealing with FTFs over the long term.
10. **Non-governmental partners.** Private industry and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are critical, potential allies. COI participants recommended the inclusion and integration of these non-traditional actors into counter FTF strategies. For example, social media companies and various non-governmental organizations are crucial for intelligence gathering efforts and the dissemination of counter-messages. The challenge is identifying which non-governmental partners are suitable for collaboration and then working with them without delegitimizing or endangering them in the process.
11. **Prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration.** Governments should introduce effective prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration programs providing radicalized individuals alternative options and seeking their disengagement from violent extremism. How to identify individuals suitable for such interventions is a challenge. Even those returning fighters who are successfully prosecuted and imprisoned will need rehabilitation and reintegration support to eventually return to society. These programs must include relevant government officials as well as psychologists, counsellors, relevant family members, and local community leaders and contacts. Programs must be flexible and individualized enough to address the particular experiences and motivations of each person. However, many challenges remain – not least in terms of resources and evaluation of program impact. Despite the difficulties involved, COI participants widely agreed that more must be done to try and reduce the level of risk of imprisoned violent extremists and FTFs in particular.

About the COI

Global Counterterrorism Alumni Community of Interest (COI) Workshop: "Perspectives on Countering Foreign Terrorist Fighters": This is the sixth successive Counterterrorism (CT) Alumni Community of Interest event after successful annual workshops from 2010 through 2014. The Global CT Alumni COI workshops are designed to support and engage the over 1400 alumni of the Marshall Center's premier Program on Terrorism and Security Studies, as well as CT-focused alumni from other U.S. Regional Centers.

This COI event continues to provide a forum for active networking (and renewed friendships/relationships) for Marshall Center alumni of the Program on Terrorism and Security Studies (PTSS) and other U.S. Regional Center alumni who are current security leaders serving in counterterrorism (CT)-related positions around the world. Participants will examine the current and emerging phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and the challenges these fighters pose when returning to their countries of origin.

About PTSS

The Program on Terrorism and Security Studies is a four-week resident program that supports the Marshall Center's increasing emphasis on transnational threats and challenges. The PTSS provides advanced professional education to those charged with understanding and then reducing the scope and capability of terrorism threats.

PTSS participants were originally from emerging democracies in Europe and Eurasia, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, and selected countries from within the Alliance's Mediterranean Dialogue. Recognizing the global nature of terrorism and its disdain for international borders, however, today's PTSS also attracts participants from all corners of the globe. The PTSS builds a network of security professionals dedicated to the mission of combating terrorism (CbT) by helping their countries to successfully cooperate in the global struggle against terrorism.

The PTSS is a functionally focused program that draws in civilian, law enforcement, and military counterterrorism professionals from around the world and improves their capacity to counter terrorism's regional and transnational implications. It engenders an "intellectual interoperability" transcending national borders and enables national security officials to cooperate at an international level to contain security threats. It aims to combat terrorism in all of its manifestations: nationally, regionally and globally.

