FEARING THE WESTERN MUSLIM FOREIGN FIGHTER

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FIGHTING THE DEFENSIVE JIHAD AND TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN THE WEST

Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn

Universiteit Utrecht

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Internationale Betrekkingen in Historisch Perspectief, Universiteit Utrecht.

Supervisor: Dr. M.L.L. Segers

ABSTRACT

This thesis started with the observation that many Western countries are worried about the high number of Western Muslim foreign fighters currently fighting in Syria. The concern is that these fighters might return radicalised and battle-hardened and decide to mount a terrorist attack. The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent these fighters have indeed been directly involved in jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in Europe in the past. Instead of presenting a threat assessment of the risk posed by the current fighters, this thesis thus investigated historical examples of Western Muslim foreign fighting.

The first approach examined the presence of foreign fighters in the most serious terrorist attacks and plots in Europe between 1994 and 2013 by means of compiling a database. The second approach focused on foreign fighters in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia. This resulted in a typology of foreign fighters based on their post-conflict behaviour, consisting of five types: the martyr, the veteran, the recruiter, the reintegrated fighter and the terrorist.

These results showed that the threat posed by Western Muslim foreign fighters in terms of direct involvement in terrorist attacks and plots in Europe has been rather low and certainly lower than what is now being portrayed. However, this study also pointed at some important exceptions and, unfortunately, it only takes one foreign fighter to launch a deadly attack. Thus, this thesis should not be regarded as a prediction of the future threat posed by Muslims fighting in Syria.

The main contribution of this thesis has been academic: it challenged existing figures on foreign fighters and tried to address the current lack of knowledge. Still, a more nuanced and evidence-based view of the Western Muslim foreign fighters in the past could also be helpful to better understand the current risk posed by Western Muslims fighting in Syria and perhaps serve as a starting point to look at possible strategies of how (not) to counter this issue.

CONTENT

GLOSSARY

There are a handful of important terms and concepts in Arabic with regard to foreign fighting. They have not always been translated although they are always accompanied by an explanation. Here is the list of the most important ones for the reader who wants to get familiar with these terms before proceeding.

Bayat	–	oath of allegiance
Fatwa	–	Islamic religious ruling issued by a recognised religious authority
Hadith	–	report of the prophet's sayings/deeds
Hajj	–	pilgrimage to Mecca
Hakimiya	–	the sovereignty of Allah
Jahiliya	–	state of ignorance
Jihad	–	effort, struggle; refers to both a spiritual struggle but is also interpreted by some as a violent struggle to defend Islam
Kafir	–	infidel
Muhajirun	–	emigrant
Mujahid	–	holy warrior
Murtadeen	–	apostate
Shahid	–	literally 'witness' but referring to martyr
Takfir	–	excommunication, the practice of declaring a Muslim an infidel
Ummah	–	the community of believers

LIST OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

Birth of Mohammed	- ± 570
Qutb writes Milestones	- 1964
Iranian Revolution	- 1979
Soviet invasion of Afghanistan	- 1979
Grand Mosque Seizure in Mecca	- 1979
Mubarak becomes President	- 1981
Assassination of Sadat	- 1981
Azzam establishes Afghan Service Bureau (MAK)	- 1984
Founding of Al Qaeda	- 1988
Assassination of Azzam	- 1989
Bin Laden moves to Sudan	- 1992
Establishment of foreign fighters unit in Bosnia	- 1993
Black Hawk Down	- 1993
World Trade Center Bombing	- 1993
Srbrenica massacre	- 1995
NATO Operation Deliberate Force	- 1995
Dayton Agreement	- 1995
Russians capture Grozny	- 1995
Bin Laden returns to Afghanistan	- 1996
Attacks on 9/11	- 2001
Invasion of Afghanistan	- 2001
Invasion of Iraq	- 2003
Madrid Bombings	- 2004
London Bombings	- 2005
Ethiopia enters Somalia	- 2006
Uprisings in the Arab World	- 2010
Death of Osama bin Laden	- 2011
Death of Anwar al-Awlaki	- 2011
Western foreign fighters go to Syria	- 2012
Boston Marathon Bombings	- 2013
Woolwich attacks	- 2013

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Who is concerned and why?

In March 2013, the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) announced a sudden change in its terrorism threat level. The outcome of the 'all source threat assessments' (Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland or DTN) had led the NCTV to consistently adopt a 'limited' threat level since November 2009.[1] In its 32nd threat assessment (DTN 32), this pattern was broken when the level was raised to 'substantial', the second highest level of four.[2] What incited the NCTV to take this step and conclude that 'there is a realistic possibility that an attack will take place in the Netherlands'?[3] Since the assassination of Theo van Gogh in 2004 by the jihadist-inspired Mohammed Bouyeri, the Netherlands had not been confronted with terrorist incidents.[4] The observation of the NCTV that there is a realistic possibility that an attack will take place therefore probably came as a (worrying) surprise to many. According to the NCTV, three developments could explain its decision: an increase in the number of jihadists travelling to Syria, signs of Islamist radicalisation among young people in the Netherlands and the developments in North Africa and the Middle East related to the Arab uprisings that started in 2010.[5]

This first development has received most attention from the media, government agencies and (terrorism) experts in the past months. In the DTN 32, it was stated that dozens of people from the Netherlands are travelling to Syria to fight the jihad. Due to the great number of these 'jihadtravellers', as they are also called, it is increasingly difficult for the Dutch intelligence and security services to monitor and assess the threat they pose to Dutch society.[6] Therefore, in the DTN 32, the threat is labelled the 'unknown threat'. This 'unknown threat' is translated into a number of scenarios. It is feared that these jihadtravellers could 'harm Western interests in the areas in which they operate (...) gain expertise and combat experience (...) could encourage sympathisers in their country of residence to join them and may help them to do so', and 'when they return home they could use their ideological zeal and combat experience to inspire others to

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[1] These threat levels are primarily intended to inform key actors involved in Dutch counterterrorism policymaking. See P.H.A.M. Abels. 'Dreigingsbeeld terrorisme Nederland: nut en noodzaak van een 'all-source threat assessment' bij terrorismebestrijding', in Erwin Muller, Uri Rosenthal and Rob de Wijk (ed.). *Terrorisme: Studies over terrorisme en terrorismebestrijding*, Kluwer: Deventer, 2008, pp.535-544, p.537.
[2] In ascending order, the four levels are minimal, limited, substantial and critical. See National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism. Ministry of Security and Justice. *Summary DTN 32*, March 13, 2013, http://english.nctv.nl/publications-products/Terrorist-Threat-Assessment-Netherlands/index.aspx.
[3] National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism. *Summary DTN 32*.
[4] This reflects the general opinion on terrorism in the Netherlands although some argue that the attack on the Dutch royal family during Queensday in 2009 by Karst T. should be seen as terrorism.
[5] National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism. *Summary DTN 32*.
[6] Ibidem. In the Netherlands, this is the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD).

become radicalised and wage jihad abroad'.[7] While these scenarios primarily refer to the danger these jihadtravellers pose abroad, the Netherlands will not be exempt from this danger. The last, and most important scenario described in the report, is that of jihadtravellers eventually 'mount[ing] an attack in the Netherlands, either on their own initiative or on behalf of the jihadist group they have joined'.[8] Although it is added that not all the returning jihadists will become a threat to Dutch society, it is indisputable – in the eyes of the NTCV - that this development is a cause for concern. This concern needs to be reflected in an elevated threat level.

1.2 International phenomenon

This rise in jihadtravellers leaving for Syria is not only a Dutch phenomenon. In a report of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation written by Aaron Y. Zelin in December 2013, it is estimated that since late 2011 between 396 and 1,937 Western Europeans have joined the rebels in Syria.[9] Zelin uses the term 'foreign fighter' to describe those who joined an insurgency. In this thesis, a foreign fighter is defined in accordance to the definition used by David Malet: a foreign fighter is an individual from outside the conflict zone who fights in a conflict while he does not have a direct stake in the conflict outcome nor is he being paid for it.[10]

The main European countries from which the fighters originate are France (up to 412), the United Kingdom (up to 366), Belgium (up to 296), Germany (up to 240) and the Netherlands (up to 152).[11] The estimated total of foreign fighters in Syria is almost 11,000 of which the Europeans are only a small minority. Still, these numbers of European fighters are unprecedented, making it possibly the largest Western foreign fighter mobilisation ever seen.[12] This is certainly perceived as a threatening development. In the Netherlands, this 'unknown threat' was troubling enough to incite the NCTV to raise the threat level.

But is this threat really unknown and how new is this development anyway? The presence of foreign fighters in conflicts is no novel phenomenon. One scholar who conducted extensive research on the history of foreign fighters is David Malet.[13] Malet describes how foreign fighter movements were formed in conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), when around thirty-five thousand foreign fighters travelled to Spain to join the International Brigades fighting

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[7] National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism. *Summary DTN 32*.
[8] Ibidem.
[9] Aaron Y. Zelin. *ICSR Insight: Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria; Steep Rise Among Western Europeans*, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, December 17, 2013, http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans/.
[10] David Malet. *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[11] Zelin. *ICSR Insight.*
[12] Thomas Hegghammer. 'The number of foreign fighters from Europe in Syria is historically unprecedented. Who should be worried', *The Washington Post,* November 27, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2013/11/27/number-of-foreign-fighters-from-europe-in-syria-is-historically-unprecedented-who-should-be-worried/.
[13] David Malet published some of his data on his website, see David Malet. *The Foreign Fighter Project,* online database, http://davidmalet.com/The_Foreign_Fighter_Project.php, accessed on May 3rd, 2013.

the Nationalists led by General Francisco Franco.[14] In the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, around five thousand foreign fighters joined the Israeli side as 'Machal' - the Hebrew acronym for Volunteers from Outside Israel – while the Arab Liberation Army, composed of around six thousand Arab foreign fighters, fought on the side of Palestine.[15] In 1975, UNITA was helped by around one thousand anti-communist foreign fighters in its fight against the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MLPA).[16] The largest-scale mobilisation of foreign fighters was triggered when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Malet estimated that no less than ninety thousand *mujahideen*, or 'holy warriors', were engaged in the battle against the Soviet forces.[17] These examples prove the presence of foreign fighters in conflicts to be neither new nor an exclusively Islamic phenomenon.

Although it is important to remember that foreign fighters are not always Muslim, the focus of this thesis will be on this group. More specifically, this thesis will look at the threat emanating from Western Muslim foreign fighters. The current concern about foreign fighters in Syria has to do with the purported link to the (violent) jihad.[18] It is this link that concerns Western countries when they have learned a considerable amount of Muslims are currently foreign fighters in Syria.

Therefore, the research question of this thesis is: to what extent have Western Muslim foreign fighters been directly involved in jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in Europe between 1979 and April 2013? However, it must be immediately noted that this thesis cannot provide a risk assessment of the threat posed by Western Muslim foreign fighters who are currently fighting in Syria. Rather, it tries to provide an academic study based on historical research which could be of help when assessing the current threat. This latter task should remain the domain of organisations that possess both the expertise and the means to do so, such as the NCTV or intelligence services.

The main aim of this thesis is to historicise and contextualise the Western Muslim foreign fighter who is currently regarded to be a possible threat. This focus on the possible threat is driven by a need of various governmental actors to make concrete plans how to tackle this unwanted development. However, while this focus is understandable, it is perhaps by looking at the past that we can get some guidance on how to interpret this phenomenon.

This thesis will take the current fear expressed by Western governments in general, and that of the Netherlands and the NCTV in particular, as a starting point. Given that (Muslim) foreign fighters have fought in many conflicts in the past, one would expect the issue of Western Muslim foreign fighters to have already been explored and researched by various authors. The next chapter

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[14] Malet, *The Foreign Fighter Project*.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Ibidem.
[17] Ibidem.
[18] It must be immediately noted that the great majority of Muslims does not adhere to the notion of the violent jihad. More on this link in later chapters.

will discuss why existing works cannot satisfactorily explain the issue, primarily due to the definitions used that distort the phenomenon to be investigated, namely Western Muslim foreign fighters. The next chapter will contain an overview of the current literature and the definitions used, thus establishing the theoretical framework. Before proceeding, it will first be explained how the research question will be answered.

1.3 Operationalisation

The research question consists of a number of elements that need further explanation. These elements are 1) Western Muslim foreign fighters, 2) direct involvement in jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks, 3) Europe, 4) between 1979 and 2012. Finally, the research question includes 'to what extent', which implies there is some way to measure this. This section will also explain how this will be attempted.

The first element, Western Muslim foreign fighters, has already been defined in the introduction. A foreign fighter is, in accordance to the definition by Malet, an individual from outside the conflict zone who fights in a conflict while he does not have a direct stake in the conflict outcome nor is he being paid for it.[19] While the first and the last part of this definition seem straightforward (an individual from outside the conflict zone who cannot be a mercenary), the middle part is somewhat ambiguous. What exactly is meant by a 'no direct stake'? Once a foreign fighter has decided to join a conflict, it is hard to maintain that he has no direct interest in the conflict outcome. It might be helpful to clarify 'no direct stake' by defining what would count as a direct stake.

Perhaps a direct stake could best be seen as follows: an individual has a direct stake in the conflict outcome if the individual's status quo will be changed by the outcome, regardless of the decision whether or not to fight. This excludes individuals who join the fight only to defend personal interests. Still, this term remains somewhat vague, especially when taking into account that many Western Muslim foreign fighters decide to join the fight because they feel the *ummah* – the community of believers – is existentially threatened.[20] The second part of this element, 'Western', is easier to define: it means individuals coming from Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, although the main focus will be on individuals from Europe and the United States. This choice is mainly pragmatic: most sources report about those individuals because of their high numbers. Later chapters will give a more precise definition of which individuals in those countries can be counted as 'Western'.

The second element refers to 'directly involved in jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks and plots'. The debate about what constitutes terrorism and what not has resulted in many publications without arriving at a generally accepted definition. One of the attempts to arrive a generally

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[19] David Malet. *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[20] More on this in later chapters.

accepted definition has been pursued by Alex Schmid. In 2011, after collecting no less than 260 different definitions of terrorism and conducting many consultations among academics and other professionals, Schmid published his 'Revised Academic Consensus Definition', consisting of twelve elements.[21] There is no space to discuss all these elements in this thesis. However, it must be acknowledged that terrorism really is a contested concept.

The definition of jihadist-inspired terrorism that will be used in this thesis is based on the work of Edwin Bakker, who in 2006 published the book *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad: an exploratory study*.[22] In this book, Bakker uses the definition of terrorism as formulated by the Council of the European Union:

> intentional acts that were committed with the aim of seriously intimidating a population, or unduly compelling a Government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation.[23]

Jihadist-inspired terrorism, then, is 'the product of a combination of Islamist ideology and the idea of the jihad'.[24] This refers to the 'lesser jihad', that 'sanctions the use of violence against an unjust ruler, whether Muslim or not, and can become the means to mobilize that political and social struggle'.[25] Jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks are committed by individuals who claim this is 'in furtherance of the goals of Islam'.[26] Direct involvement, in this case, is meant to exclude individuals who finance or facilitate terrorist activity. It only focuses on individuals who are directly involved in terrorist attacks; in other words, the ones who pull the trigger or detonate the bomb.

The third element of the research question refers to Europe. While this thesis started with the observation that the Dutch threat level has been elevated, this problem is certainly not limited to the Netherlands but is mainly a European (and partly American) issue. This becomes even more apparent when looking at the Schengen Area that guarantees free movement of persons between most European countries.[27] Thus, in theory, returned European foreign fighters can freely travel in the Schengen Area, making a high number of fighters from a particular country a potential threat to

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[21] Alex Schmid.'The Definition of Terrorism', in Alex Schmid, *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research,* London: Routledge, 2011, pp.39-99.
[22] 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: Den Haag, 2006.
[23] Bakker. *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe*, p.2. See Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on combating terrorism, (2002/475/JHA).
[24] Idem, p.1.
[25] Idem, p.2.
[26] Idem, p.2.
[27] The Schengen Area consists of all the members of the European Union with the exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland and includes the non-EU members of Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. For more info, see European commission. *Schengen Area*, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/, accessed on January 2, 2014.

all its members. In this thesis, Europe is defined as the 28 member states of the European Union plus the three non-EU Schengen Area members Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. The decision to only investigate Europe instead of looking at the entire West is caused by the limited means that are available: as will be explained, an important part of this thesis will look at terrorist plots and attacks in Europe since 1994. To be able to use existing works and to compare the results, this thesis will use the same geographical demarcation. In later sections, it will be explained what the consequences of the exclusion of especially the United States are.

The fourth element refers to the time period that will be investigated: 1979 – April 2013. The year of 1979 is the starting point of the analysis because that was when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, signalling the beginning one of the largest-scale, and possibly the most famous mobilisation of foreign fighters. The Soviet-Afghan War was in many respects the beginning of (Western) Muslim foreign fighting that we are still confronted with nowadays. However, while this thesis consists of two approaches that will be further explained in the next section, only one of those approaches will investigate the foreign fighters in the Soviet-Afghan War. The first approach that will look at the so-called 'foreign fighter: terrorist ratio' will focus on the period 1994 – 2012. Thus, for the period 1979 – 1994, no figures will be presented. However, as the second approach will analyse foreign fighters in three conflicts and will result in a typology, foreign fighters in Afghanistan have been included. Afghanistan was in many ways the birth of (Western) Muslim foreign fighting and, as has been argued by many scholars, also that of jihadist-inspired terrorism.[28] It can be argued that it is impossible – or at least extremely difficult – to understand Muslim foreign fighting without knowing what has happened in Afghanistan. Thus, this conflict will also be analysed in this thesis. April 2013 demarcates the end of the time period that will be investigated. The database on jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in the West ends after April 2013 (including the Woolwich Attacks) because is it difficult to gather reliable information about attacks and plots in the past months.

This leaves us with the question how we can measure this. 'To what extent' implies there is a way to truly measure and quantify this. Before explaining how this will (not) be done, this question should be put in the right context. An answer to the question to what extent these individuals have been involved in terrorist attacks in the past, is supposed to be valuable to say something about the future. It is related to what can be called a 'security risk'. To understand how we perceive risks, threats and threat assessments, we have to look at theories about a so-called 'risk society'. These theories were developed in the last decade of the twentieth century led by works of

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[28] See for instance Edwin Bakker and Leen de Boer. *The evolution of Al-Qaedism: Ideology, terrorists, and appeal*, Clingendael Security Paper no.4. (2007) Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael; Fawaz A. Gerges. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Jason Burke. *Al-Qaeda*, London: Penguin Books, 2007 [revised edition]; Marc Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens.[29] These sociologists describe how societies have become preoccupied with risks that are inevitably and irrevocably unleashed because of modernisation, for instance in the form of technological advances that can turn into a threat. This idea has been criticised by another sociologist, Frank Furedi, who claims that current societies are rather characterised by a 'culture of fear'.[30] Furedi argues that the climate of fear is more the outcome of how we perceive and handle risks instead of some inherent change in the real risks we are facing today, compared to some decades ago. He adds to this that:

> (o)ne of the defining features of our times is that anxiety about the unknown appears to have a greater significance than the fear of known threats. Politicians and campaigners often hint darkly about the grave challenge posed by threats that are perilous precisely because they are unknown. These are threats to which as yet we can give no name and whose trajectory cannot be calculated.[31]

This shift from 'probabilistic' to 'possibilistic' risk management, as it is called by Furedi, is not hard to find in the current discourse on Western Muslim foreign fighters. It points to the possibility that these foreign fighters return radicalised and battle-hardened and could use their experience and (radical) networks to launch an attack. While this current concern seems to fit the idea of a 'culture of fear', we cannot simply perceive the current situation as nothing more than an embodiment of a culture of fear. Returned foreign fighters at times indeed posed a threat to their country.[32] Nonetheless, it is clear that the threat level has been elevated as a reflection of what might happen rather than as a result of real signs of terrorist activity.[33] Instead of focusing on the discourse on Western Muslim foreign fighters and the risk society or culture of fear, this thesis takes this concern or fear as a starting point. This does not mean that this concern is not essentially a collective construction, but it simply means that it will not be studied.[34]

As explained in the previous section, what will be attempted in this thesis is providing a solid basis to assess the current threat. This will be done by looking at what is seen as a 'security risk' in the scenarios described in the DTN 32: it is the risk that returned Western Muslim foreign fighters will harm their country of origin or other Western countries. To be more specific: in this context, a security risk will only contain direct involvement in terrorist attacks and plots. This is not, however, to say that this is the only way returned foreign fighters could pose a risk. Battlefield

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[29] See Ulrich Beck. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage, 1992 and Anthony Giddens. *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
[30] Frank Furedi. *Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997.
[31] Frank Furedi. 'Precautionary Culture and the Rise of Possibilistic Risk Assessment', *Erasmus Law Review*, vol.2, no. 2 (2009), pp.197-220, p.199.
[32] More on this in later chapters.
[33] Perhaps the NCTV and AIVD have more intelligence at their disposal but do not report this to the general public. However, in that case, one would expect to read words like 'signs' or 'indication of' in the DTN 32 with regard to these returned foreign fighters, just like it is indeed reporting 'signs' of growing Islamic radicalisation in Dutch society and not a 'possibility' of growing Islamic radicalisation. This is not to say that these foreign fighters can and will pose no threat, but it suggests that the threat level is already raised prior to any real indication, making it almost look like a precautionary measure.
[34] For more information, see for instance Beatrice de Graaf. 'Het temmen van de toekomst. Van een veiligheids- naar een risicocultuur', *Tijdschrift over Cultuur & Criminaliteit,* vol. 3, no. 2 (2013), pp.155-172.

experience can have traumatising effects, leading to disorders such as PTSD or resulting in domestic violence. Both have been widely reported with regard to officially enlisted military personnel returning from deployment. However, this cannot be regarded as a threat to society 'as a whole' in the same way that terrorist attacks are. PTSD and domestic violence mainly occur in the personal sphere and can have enormous impact on families. Therefore, this will be further described in Appendix I but it will not be part of answering the research question.

That is why the research question only refers to direct involvement in jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in Europe. By looking at the past, this thesis can and will not provide clear-cut answers to how dangerous these Western foreign fighters in Syria are. No estimates will be given of the probability that a foreign fighter will be a security risk to Europe. In this thesis, there is no possibility to quantify this. Even authorities that are faced with this difficult task and have the expertise and means to do so, have to deal with certain limitations. It is impossible to fit human behaviour into a model that can predict outcomes as this assumes human behaviour is entirely rational and consists of reactions to measurable external factors. It is precisely this difficulty of predicting human behaviour that hinders probabilistic risk assessments and leaves us with no other option than also using possibilistic risk assessments to analyse potential threats.

Historical research, however, can retroactively bridge this gap: at least in theory, we are able to see what could have happened (linked to possibilistic risk assessments) and what did happen (linked to probabilistic risk assessments). Thus, investigating the risk posed by Western Muslim foreign fighters in the past – in this case defined as direct involvement in jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks and plots - can be done without solely relying on potential scenarios. At least partially, we are able to see whether or not the threat of foreign fighters launching a terrorist attack in the West materialised in the past.

This is when 'to what extent' again enters the picture. Ideally, we want to know how these cases correspond to the overall numbers of Western Muslim foreign fighters. In other words, how many of all Western Muslim foreign fighters were involved in terrorist activity in the past? This can lead to a first typology of the different types of foreign fighters based on their actions after the conflict they fought in had ended: were they involved in terrorist activity, and if not, what else did they do? This, in turn, can help us to better understand who – at least in the past – posed the largest threat and who did not. In the next section, it will be explained how these different questions will be answered.

1.3.1 Foreign fighter : terrorist ratio and the typology

Thus, this thesis will investigate the direct involvement of Western Muslim foreign fighters in jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks and plots in the past. This will be done by two 'approaches' or by answering two different questions. The aim is to formulate an answer to the question what happens with these foreign fighters after the fighting has ended. This is the moment that these fighters will

or will not become involved in terrorist attacks in the West. Do they return to their country of origin, do they continue fighting in another conflict or do they settle down somewhere else? And are they involved in any terrorist activity aimed against the West, either from within the West – the potential threat posed by returned foreign fighters – or from any place outside the West? Although the focus of this thesis is on the danger emanating from returned foreign fighters, it is important to investigate the activities of foreign fighters that do not return as well.

To understand the threat posed by foreign fighters, two questions must be answered: first of all, if we look at individuals involved in jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks and plots in Europe, how many of these individuals can be described as former foreign fighters? This question gives an indication of how foreign fighters are represented in the entire 'terrorist population'. This indication becomes more valuable if we also look at the second question. To understand the possible risk posed by foreign fighters, we must also know how these cases of foreign fighters involved in terrorist activity relate to the overall numbers of foreign fighters. In other words: how many of all the Western Muslim foreign fighters become involved in terrorist attacks and plots in Europe?

This second question is impossible to answer because of a lack of empirical data. Rather than trying to quantify the entire foreign fighter population, this second approach will examine different conflicts in order to result in a first typology of foreign fighters based on their post-conflict actions. This typology relates to the security risk posed by these fighters after they had stopped fighting. The current concern that resulted in an elevated threat level corresponds to the scenario of foreign fighters returning home and mounting a terrorist attack. The typology tries to provide a more nuanced view by also looking at foreign fighters who did not become involved in terrorist activity in Europe.

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the three pillars and two approaches
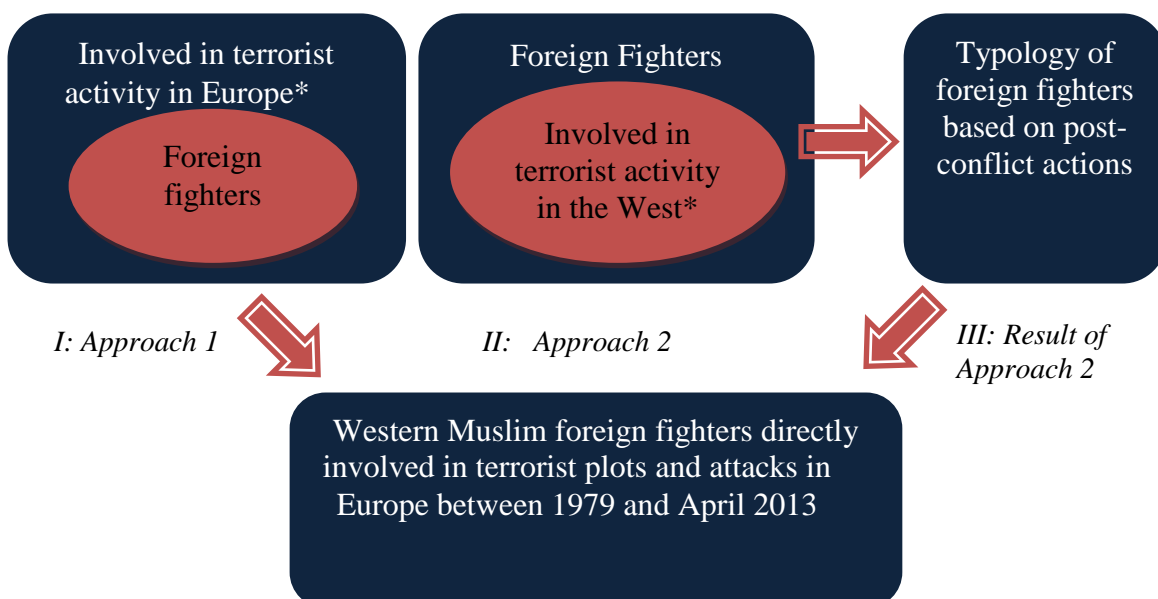
Before turning to the difference between Europe and the West that can be seen in the schematic overview of the two approaches, it will first be explained what the specific strengths and weaknesses of both approaches are. The advantage of the first approach is that there is a lot of empirical data to analyse. Terrorist attacks and serious plots tend to get a lot of (media) attention. Because this research is not based on classified information, the availability of open-access material is very helpful. Frequently, (alleged) perpetrators are arrested, sometimes leading to court proceedings that can provide information about whether or not an individual can be categorised as a returned foreign fighter.

This first approach looking at the foreign fighter: terrorist ratio is also valuable because it will challenge some of the figures that will be discussed in the literature review (see Chapter 2). This approach will challenge the findings of the Norwegian researcher Thomas Hegghammer that one out of four terrorists was a foreign fighter.[35] As will be explained in the next section, this thesis employs a definition of foreign fighters that is congruent with the one used by David Malet but differs from Hegghammer's definition. It can be argued that individuals who go abroad to merely train for terrorist activity in the West should not be called foreign fighters. In this first approach, a distinction will be made between foreign fighters and foreign trainees.[36]

Thus, this first approach will look at the ratio of Western foreign fighters involved in terrorist activity in Europe between 1994 and April 2013. Restricting it to Europe makes it possible to use existing databases and compare it to those results. The time frame of 1994-2013 partly corresponds to the time frame employed by Petter Nesser in his article 'Chronology of *Jihadism* in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks'.[37] In this thesis, a new database will be compiled that will for the largest part be based on Nesser's article and will be complemented with jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks that resulted in casualties for between 2007 and April 2013 that are not part of his time frame.

Regarding this first approach, it must again be noted that this only takes into account the 'worst case scenario', namely terrorist activity defined as direct involvement in terrorist attacks or plots.[38] It does not say much about the proportion of returned foreign fighters who suffered from psychological problems, such as PTSD. This first approach will also only look at the individuals involved in the most serious plots and attacks in Europe as defined by Nesser, which will be further explained and defined in Chapter 4. However, taking into account all of these limitations and trying to cross-reference the information as much as possible, the results can be seen as an accurate

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[35] Thomas Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 107, no. 1 (2013), pp.1-15.
[36] More details on the methodology will be presented in the Chapter 4 where the results are presented.
[37] Petter Nesser. 'Chronology of *Jihadism* in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* vol. 31, no. 10 (2008), pp.924-946
[38] Thus excluding financing terrorism or other facilitating activities that could be labelled as terrorist activities.

estimate of the percentage of (returned) Western foreign fighters in the most serious jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks Europe in between 1994 and 2013.

Calculating the percentage of returned Western Muslim foreign fighters in the most serious plots and attacks gives some indication of their representation in the entire 'terrorist population'. However, it does not say anything about the representation of terrorists in the entire 'foreign fighter population'. To understand the danger posed by Western Muslim foreign fighters, we also need to have some indication of how many of these fighters did not pose a danger in the past.

Therefore, the second approach will try to focus on that specific question. This is, after all, directly related to the research question: how large is the threat these foreign fighters have posed to Europe? Ideally, the entire European foreign fighter population would be mapped, tracing the lives of all individual foreign fighters. In reality however, the empirical data is very limited. There is no clear picture of how many individuals became foreign fighters in the first place.

Because of this lack of empirical data, the choice has been made to extend the research object not only to Europe, but also to the United States and Canada. This second approach aims to give a macro-level overview of the different types of foreign fighters, eventually resulting in a first typology. While the current threat of foreign fighters in Syria is primarily seen as a European issue, the past shows many examples of American foreign fighters as well. It is assumed that these American foreign fighters are not fundamentally different from their European counterparts: both American and European Muslims travelled to distant places to fight in a battle for the defence of their fellow Muslims. This also assumes that the threat posed by these American foreign fighters is comparable to the situation in Europe if it would be the case that many Americans are fighting in Syria as well.[39]

However, with regard to American foreign fighters, the empirical data is also limited. William Rosenau and Sara Daly recognise this, saying that:

> (p)articularly neglected has been the subject of American Muslims who traveled to "fields of jihad" in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir during the 1980s and 1990s—a significant gap in knowledge, given plausible claims that hundreds if not thousands of individuals (most, if not all, presumably Muslims) left the United States to join armed struggles abroad during this period.[40]

This significant gap in knowledge is reflected in the different estimates given by various authors, ranging from hundreds to thousands. A lack of empirical data renders it impossible to give an accurate estimate of the number of foreign fighters. In the literature review, these different

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[39] Of course this only holds if we do not look at differences in security and counterterrorism measures. That is, however, not the focus of this thesis but would rather be part of a strategy to tackle the problem.
[40] William Rosenau and Sara Daly. 'American Journeys to Jihad: U.S. Extremists During the 1980s and 1990s', *CTC Sentinel,* vol. 3, no. 8 (2010), pp.17-20, p.17.

estimates will be further clarified. However, at this stage, it is already important to note that this lack of data did not inhibit some authors from giving estimates of so-called radicalisation rates.[41]

This second approach is an attempt to combine secondary sources on Western Muslim foreign fighters into a more comprehensive, general overview of the phenomenon. The 'ideal' situation of calculating the proportion of terrorists in the entire foreign fighter population, as depicted in the schematic overview of the two approaches, cannot be executed. This thesis hopes to serve as a starting point for future research on this topic by means of discovering some general patterns. Thus, rather than giving figures on the proportion of terrorists in the foreign fighter population, this second approach will result in a first typology of different foreign fighters based on their post-conflict actions. However, it must immediately be acknowledged that this is a far from perfect effort: the categorisation depends highly on the information made available by others. Almost all works tend to focus on the outliers: the most interesting, extraordinary cases of the perhaps most dangerous individuals. To understand this phenomenon, researchers must also try to report more common cases and refrain from giving the impression that the 'exciting cases' are the norm.

As part of this second approach three conflicts will be examined that attracted Western foreign fighters in particular. The first is the Soviet-Afghan war that started in 1979 after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. This conflict is especially important because it was the first time a large number of foreign fighters came to fight in a conflict inspired by notions of a defensive jihad (more on this in Chapter 3). Although this conflict perhaps did not attract the largest number of Western foreign fighters, it highly contributed to the legacy of the mujahideen and served as an inspiration for almost all later foreign fighter mobilisations. The second conflict that will be investigated is the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, where thousands of Muslims came to the help of the 'Bosniaks' (Bosnian Muslims) who declared the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be independent in 1992. The conflict is important because it was the first time a large number of Western Muslims arrived. It has also been credited as being largely responsible for Al Qaeda's subsequent presence in Europe and the United States.[42] A final conflict that will be closely examined is Somalia. In some aspects, this conflict is different from the other two: it mainly attracted foreign fighters in the 2000s, thus in the post-9/11 context. While the public opinion in the West largely sided with the mujahideen in Afghanistan and Bosnia, this was not the case in Somalia. Nevertheless, the conflict was successful in attracting significant amounts of Western foreign fighters that sometimes made it into the upper ranks of the present organisations.

Thus, these three conflicts are situated in different regions (the wider Middle East, Europe and Africa), during different times (the 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s) and in different contexts.

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[41] Hegghammer estimates a 'one-out-of-nine-radicalization-rate', for more information see the Literature Review. Thomas Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 107, no. 1 (2013), pp.1-15.
[42] Evan Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004, p.xiii.

After analysing these conflicts, other conflicts that attracted Western foreign fighters, or surprisingly did not attract them, will be shortly addressed. Examining these conflicts makes it possible to provide a first typology of the different foreign fighters that participated in the conflict.

One final observation must be made before proceeding to the overview of the chapters. When analysing and combining different episodes of (Western) Muslim fighting into one overarching conclusion, there is the risk of perceiving the phenomenon as a static and – perhaps even more dangerous – homogenous movement. The opposite is true: ideologies are constantly changing and influenced by transforming episodes and charismatic individuals. To avoid treating the foreign fighter phenomenon as an unchanging 'entity', a short history on the development of the concept of defensive mobilisation will be presented. It is this concept that has made foreign fighting a viable and, more importantly, justifiable way of acting to some Muslims. Thus, in order to understand Muslim foreign fighting, the third chapter will present a very short history on foreign fighting across time and will specifically focus on the notion of the defensive jihad that is present in all conflicts.

In sum, this thesis will try to (academically) respond to the current concern that Western Muslim foreign fighters, especially the European Muslims fighting in Syria, will become involved in terrorist attacks and plots in the West. It will try to formulate an answer to the question to what extent these Western Muslim foreign fighters have been directly involved in terrorist plots and attacks in Europe in the past. This question will be answered by way of two approaches: one that will look at the ratio of Western Muslim foreign fighters in jihadist-inspired terrorist activity in Europe and the second that will look at foreign fighter mobilisations in the past, resulting in a first typology of Western Muslim foreign fighters. Taken together, these approaches are valuable because it gives figures on the presence of foreign fighters in terrorist attacks and plots while it also enables us to better understand the foreign fighter.

However, it can already be said that the answer to the research question cannot give a true measurement of both the number and proportion of foreign fighters directly involved in terrorist attacks in quantitative terms. This thesis will not result in a conclusion stating that x percent of all Western Muslim foreign fighters have been directly involved in terrorist attacks and plots in Europe. Fortunately, it can provide a qualitative overview that could help to answer the research question and better understand the threat posed in the past. As a result, this thesis adds to the still limited body of existing works on Western foreign fighters and tries to formulate a typology of these fighters. Together, this can hopefully contribute to a more nuanced and evidence-based view of the Western Muslim foreign fighter.

How this thesis adds to the existing works will be further explained in Chapter 2, the next chapter, in which the theoretical framework is established. Chapter 3 will look at the history of foreign fighting and development of the notion of the defensive jihad which formed the ideological foundation for subsequent foreign fighter mobilisations. In Chapter 4, the first approach of

calculating the foreign fighter ratio in terrorist activity in Europe is discussed, including the newly-formed database. Chapter 5 will focus on the overview of foreign fighter movements in the past. This will result in Chapter 6 in which a first typology of foreign fighters is presented. Finally, in Chapter 7 the research question of this thesis will be answered. Chapter 8 will discuss the findings of this thesis in relation to existing works and theories.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapter, it was explained why research into the subject of Western Muslim foreign fighters is relevant, referring to the elevated terrorism threat level in the Netherlands and the fact that it is an international phenomenon leaving many countries with a lot of unanswered questions regarding the potential risk. This resulted in the research question to what extent Western Muslim foreign fighters have been directly involved in jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in Europe between 1979 and April 2013. It then was explained how this question will be answered. In the introduction, it was also stated that there is a serious lack of knowledge about Western Muslim foreign fighters. Despite this fact, this thesis is not located in an intellectual void; it owes much to the work of various authors. It was also claimed that these existing works cannot sufficiently fill the gaps resulting from this lack of knowledge. Therefore, this chapter will consist of a short review of these works, in which it will be explained what is missing and why there is a need for new research.

2.1 Literature review

Before turning to relevant bodies of literature on foreign fighters in general and Muslim foreign fighters in particular, it is important to note a few things about general theories in the field of political science. Many theories try to explain conflict dynamics, mobilisation processes, or even dare to formulate an answer to the almost philosophical question why people turn to violence. Foreign fighters are, after all, exactly that: people who turn to violence.

When presenting an overview of these general theories, there is hardly a clear starting or ending point that could demarcate what to discuss. This is therefore by no means an effort to present a thorough overview of all theories in political science on conflict and violence. Nonetheless, some points deserve further attention. Many of the works try to answer a very basic, but difficult question that has already been mentioned: why do people choose to fight? Despite the great amount of research conducted on this question, general agreement has not been reached. Most studies have focused on a specific group, a specific time or a specific type of fighting.

One of the most famous works that has tried to give a more universal explanation for why people use political violence – already a sub-category of violence – is Ted Robert Gurr's *Why Men Rebel* (1970). In his landmark study, Gurr asserts that people turn to violence because of the so called 'frustration-aggression mechanism'.[43] This frustration-aggression mechanism is activated by what Gurr calls relative deprivation, or 'the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and 'is' of collective value dissatisfaction'.[44] Simply put, this frustration emerges when a

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[43] Ted Robert Gurr. *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton NY: Princeton University Press, 1970, pp.36-37.
[44] Gurr. *Why Men Rebel*, p.23.

person has high expectations of what he ought to have, but is somehow unable to attain it. This frustration could motivate an individual to adopt violence. According to Gurr, relative deprivation theory does not only hold for individuals but is also an explanation for group violence. When the frustration is shared by group members, this serves as a motivation to adopt collective violence. Here Gurr tries to explain how the collective action problem is solved. In a later article, Gurr himself describes the critique his theory received over the years from prominent scholars such as Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol and Sidney Tarrow who argued that explanations of (collective) violence should look at respectively political mobilization, social and political structures and mass social movements.[45] Although much can be said in favour or against Gurr's theory, it still serves as an example of a grand theory of why people choose to fight.

Many other scholars have tried to explain why individuals decide to employ violence. Some, like Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler[46], point to the importance of greed while others, such as David Keen[47], support the argument of Gurr that grievances can also play an important role. Besides the 'greed-grievances-dichotomy', some scholars point to the importance of social or psychological factors.[48] While this shows that scholars clearly differ in opinion as to what could explain the use of violence, they do have one thing in common. All these theories explain why people turn to violence in their own country, in their own conflict or as a result of their personal or group grievances or structural factors that they are directly confronted with. Not one of them explains, or has referred to the question of why people choose to fight in other conflicts; for the grievances of a different group. This is directly related to the collective action problem that has been one of the key questions in this field of study: how can you motivate people to fight and incur costs for the benefits of others while they could also have chosen to do nothing and profit from the work of others?[49]

Scholars that try to explain human behaviour from a solely rational perspective – seeing individuals as rational individuals who make some kind of cost-benefit analysis to determine which path of action best suits their goals – cannot accurately explain foreign fighting. The decision to fight in a conflict that is not yours, that does not directly threaten you and of which the outcome would not have been directly relevant to you, might look like an irrational decision. What is not

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[45] Ted Robert Gurr. 'Why Men Rebel Redux: How Valid Are Its Arguments 40 Years On?', published on *E-International Relations*, November 17, 2011 http://www.e-ir.info/2011/11/17/why-men-rebel-redux-how-valid-are-its-arguments-40-years-on/#_ftn5.
See Charles Tilly. *From Mobilization to Revolution,* Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1978; Theda Skocpol. *Social Revolutions in the Modern World,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Sidney Tarrow. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (2nd ed.).
[46] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler. 'Greed and grievance in civil war', *Oxford economic papers,* vol. 54, no.4 (2004), pp.563-595.
[47] David Keen. 'Greed and grievance in civil war', International Affairs, vol. 88, no. 4 (2012), pp.757-777.
[48] See for instance Max Abrahms who gives a psychological explanation why people become terrorists in Max Abrahms. 'What Terrorists Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy', *International Security*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2008), pp.78-105.
[49] This is also called the free rider problem. For more on collective action, see for instance Mancur Olson. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Harvard University Press, 1965.

accurately captured in these theories is the transnational nature of foreign fighting and questions (and politics) of identity. Later in this thesis, it will be explained why the Islamic notion of the *ummah* – the community (of believers) – is rather successful in transforming the idea of 'their fight' into 'our fight'. Therefore, the problem with these general, broad theories is that they do not always succeed in explaining situations that seem to deviate from the norm, such as foreign fighting.

Therefore, in the light of this thesis, scholarly work on foreign fighting in general and Muslim foreign fighting in particular is more valuable. Departing from theories that tend to describe possible losses or gains in an economic or political perspective, foreign fighting might be examined from a different perspective. In the case of Muslim foreign fighting, the reward could come in the afterlife by means of becoming *shaheed*.[50]

Foreign fighting could also be explained from a psychological perspective. It gives someone the opportunity to take on a new identity: that of the '*mujahid'*– or, in secular terms, the hero – and act in accordance to this new identity. This suggests that the step to become a foreign fighter is a very consciously taken and self-inspired one. That does not have to be the case. An alternative, but not necessarily contradictory explanation is that foreign fighters are vulnerable individuals who are lured into a conflict by slick 'social entrepreneurs'.

This brings us to the question whether they are simply 'cannon fodder' in a battle they should have never gotten involved in or glorious heroes who fight for their brothers and sisters while the world is watching how the innocent crumble? Clearly, most foreign fighters would not hesitate fitting themselves into the last category. But what does that say about their yearning to be a hero? Would they be willing to accept another chance to be a hero, one that would be staged at home? While it is impossible to give clear, definite and universal answers to these questions, we might learn something from looking at the historical evidence on foreign fighters and the conflicts they fought in.

This perspective is presented by David Malet, in his recently published book *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts*.[51] Until April 2013, academic literature on foreign fighters from a historical or comparative perspective was virtually absent. Malet's book is therefore of great importance in contextualising this phenomenon. The author shows that through the ages, in different conflicts and under different circumstances, the same recruiting strategies have been employed. The explanation of why people are recruited seems to be as simple as accurate: '(i)nsurgencies try to recruit foreign fighters by framing distant civil conflict as posing a dire threat to all members of a transnational community of which both the foreign recruits and the

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[50] An Arabic term which literally means witness but in this context is best translated as martyr. The idea of a reward in fact supports theories pointing to a rational choice.

[51] David Malet. *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

local insurgents are members'.[52] Malet looked at a variety of conflicts - fought for different goals and with different ideologies - and concluded that this mechanism explains every single case of foreign fighter mobilisation.

But what exactly is a foreign fighter? According to Malet, the term 'foreign fighter' can be used interchangeably with 'transnational insurgent': an individual outside the conflict zone who is recruited to fight while he does not have a direct stake in the conflict outcome nor is he being paid or rewarded for it (mercenary).[53] Malet refers to George Modelski (1964) to define insurgency as 'a faction in an internal war that does not control the legitimate (i.e., internationally recognized) machinery of the state and is therefore (at least initially) in the weaker position'.[54]

Important to note is that Malet hereby excludes interstate wars that have been the predominant type of conflict for centuries and reached an unprecedented scale during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) and the two world wars of the twentieth century. In the last sixty years however, the occurrence of interstate wars is decreasing. At the same time, the number of intrastate wars has increased.[55] These civil wars, as they are more commonly called, are defined by Malet in accordance to Stathis N. Kalyvas' (2006) definition: an 'armed conflict within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities'.[56] To summarise, foreign fighters participate in civil wars where they join the side of the insurgents that is, at least initially, the weaker side.

While Malet's work shows how and why foreign fighters are recruited and helps to understand the foreign fighter phenomenon in general, it does not investigate what happens with these fighters when the conflict has ended. It also does not focus on the specificities of Muslim foreign fighting and how this could possibly be a threat to the countries the fighters departed from.

Fortunately, there are some important studies that address Muslim foreign fighting. The majority of these studies, however, focuses on the presence of Arab foreign fighters, the most famous being the 'Arab-Afghans' who fought the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. In many well-known books on the evolution of jihadist-inspired terrorism, great emphasis is placed on the strategic importance of the Afghan conflict. In *Understanding Terror Networks,* Marc Sageman tries to trace the roots of the global Salafi jihad, what he defines as 'a worldwide religious revivalist movement with the goal of re-establishing past Muslim glory in a great Islamist state stretching from Morocco to the Philippines, eliminating present national boundaries'.[57] Crucial in the founding of the global jihad was the Afghan-Soviet war that attracted thousands of mujahedin of

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[52] Malet, *Foreign Fighters*, p.4.
[53] Idem, p.2. In the introduction, it was explained why a 'direct stake' is a somewhat vague term.
[54] Malet, *Foreign Fighters*, p.10.
[55] Jack S. Levy. 'International Sources of Interstate and Intrastate War', in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (ed.), *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World,* Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2007, pp.17-38, pp.18-19.
[56] Ibidem.
[57] Marc Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p.1.

which some would later be involved in the leadership of Al Qaeda. In his book, Sageman tries to explain why people join the jihad, rejecting common notions of recruitment and brainwashing. He argues that it is rather a 'three-prong process': social affiliation to the jihad, intensification of beliefs and faith that leads to the acceptance of the global Salafi jihad ideology and formal acceptance through a direct link to the jihad.[58] Sageman's main focus is put on the different social networks that can be distinguished in the global Salafi jihad, which he categorises using geographical notions. Although there are some well-known examples of Western Muslims in these networks (for instance French-Algerians in the so-called 'Maghreb cluster'), most of Sageman's research is about Arabs in these networks, especially focusing on its Egyptian roots.[59]

Another author that investigated the roots of the global Salafi jihad, focusing specifically on the founding of Al Qaeda, is Jason Burke. In his influential work, Burke describes how the Soviet-Afghan war revolutionised the concept of the jihad, saying that the 'last years of the war had seen the creation of something entirely new. The hardened Arab veterans of the war against the Soviets had evolved an ideology themselves'.[60] This history of the global Salafi jihad is also written through the lens of Arab foreign fighters.

The same holds for the book of Fawaz A. Gerges called *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* in which the author describes how the Afghan War sowed the seeds of the transnational jihad.[61] While these and other sources[62] are indispensable when trying to understand the history of jihadist-inspired terrorism, the issue of Western foreign fighters has a history of its own. So far, not that much has been written about Western foreign fighters. Partially, this is caused by the mere fact that considerably less Western Muslims fought, and are still fighting in foreign conflicts. The works of Burke, Gerges, Sageman and others correctly demonstrate that the great majority of Muslim foreign fighters come from the wider Middle East. Consequently, the impact of Western foreign fighters on conflicts is, at least in military terms, mostly negligible.[63] It is therefore not very surprising that most authors chose to study the most dominant and prevalent form of Muslim militant thinking in the global Salafi jihad and one of its appearances as terrorism.

Nevertheless, it is the concern that these small numbers of Western foreign fighters will be involved in terrorist attacks and plots at home that makes further inquiry on this topic valuable. When proceeding from general works on the development of Islamist militant thinking to works focusing on foreign fighting and Western foreign fighting in particular, one thing is immediately apparent: Muslim foreign fighting is often instantly equalled to or seen as a first step towards

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[58] Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*, p.135.
[59] Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*, p.26.
[60] Jason Burke. *Al-Qaeda,* London: Penguin Books, 2007 [revised edition], p.83.
[61] Fawaz A. Gerges. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.80.
[62] For instance, see Edwin Bakker and Leen de Boer. *The evolution of Al-Qaedism: Ideology, terrorists, and appeal*, Clingendael Security Paper no.4. (2007) Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael: Den Haag; Lorenzo Vidino. *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad*, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006.
[63] More on this in later chapters.

(jihadist-inspired) terrorism. This runs the risk of overlooking some of the complexities and differences of these terms. It is not only an analytical or scientific exercise to separate them but it also corresponds to facts 'on the ground'. This conflation of foreign fighting and jihadist-inspired terrorism is also criticised by Thomas Hegghammer, one of the leading scholars when it comes to researching foreign fighting. Hegghammer notes that

> most works on militant Islamism use generic terms such as '"jihadists" or "salafi jihadists" to describe any transnational violent Islamist, whether he or she undertakes suicide bombings in a Western capital or mortar attacks in a war zone. In reality, most foreign fighters never engaged in out-of area operations, but fought in one combat zone at the time.[64]

Hegghammer's statement raises serious doubts about the widespread notion that foreign fighters are terrorists in the making. Hegghammer stresses the idea of foreign fighters as a category distinct from insurgents and terrorists but he also states that '(t)hey [the foreign fighters] are insurgents in every respect but their passports'.[65] In the same article, however, Hegghammer says that more research into foreign fighting is necessary because 'volunteering for war is the principal stepping-stone for individual involvement in more extreme forms of militancy. For example, when Muslims in the West radicalize, they usually do not plot attacks in their home country right away, but travel to a war zone such as Iraq or Afghanistan first'.[66]

Whereas Hegghammer first claims to regard foreign fighters as a category distinct from terrorists, his last point indeed seems to support the notion that foreign fighters are terrorists in the making. The focus of Hegghammer's article however is not on the threat posed by foreign fighters but on the emergence of the Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon. The author tries to explain foreign fighter mobilisation and argues that it is a violent offshoot of Islamism, namely a populist pan-Islamism identity movement that emerged in the 1970s in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia and was fuelled by elite competition.[67] Therefore, this article is somewhat inconclusive about how we should regard foreign fighters from a security perspective, as it mainly explains how it emerged but not what its effects have been.

In February 2013, Hegghammer again touched upon the subject of foreign fighting in an article named 'Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting'.[68] At first glance, the title seems remarkable given the fact that the author criticised the use of generic terms such as jihadists in his earlier work. In his 2013-article, Hegghammer speaks of one category of 'Western jihadists' and tries to explain why

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[64] Thomas Hegghammer. 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad', *International Security*, vol. 35, no.3 (Winter 2010/2011), pp.53-94, p.58.
[65] Hegghammer. 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters', p.55.
[66] Idem, p.53.
[67] Idem, p.56, p.89.
[68] Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?', pp.1-15.

some jihadists fight abroad while others launch attacks at home.[69] In contrast to his other article, Hegghammer addresses the issue of foreign fighting from a security perspective. He asks if foreign fighters should 'be treated as lethal terrorists-in-the-making or as harmless freedom fighters' and tries to establish some empirical base to begin answering these kinds of questions.[70] This article is therefore a crucial starting point for this thesis because it tries to shed some light on the possible threat. There are, however, some important a priori assumptions and methodological choices in this article that need to be addressed.

First of all, while in 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters', Hegghammer made a case for treating foreign fighters as a distinct category from insurgents as well as terrorists, his views in 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?' seem to have changed. In this article, it is assumed that there is one category of 'Western jihadists'[71] in which two subcategories can be found: those who stay (terrorists) and those who go (foreign fighters). While both groups have the same aims (fighting the jihad), they only differ in their methods to reach these goals, what Hegghammer calls the 'theater choice'.[72] One would expect the author to openly clarify whether or not he now categorises all Muslim foreign fighters as jihadists. Although the author is outspoken in not automatically equalling foreign fighting to terrorism, he could have been more clear in arguing why he chose to use just one category of Western jihadists instead of the entirely distinct categories in his earlier work. Employing one category in which only the acts are different (domestic or foreign fighting) implies that the individuals in this category are essentially the same. So while the author claims to objectively assess the threat of foreign fighters from a security perspective, he has already verbally merged the group with terrorists. However, Hegghammer does not explain why he chose to combine the two nor did he try to formulate a definite answer to who is staying and who is going. His main aim was to account for the overall relative distribution between the two groups.

In order to do this, he made an attempt to count both domestic and foreign fighters. To count the amount of domestic fighters, he established a dataset called the 'Jihadi Plots in the West (JPW) Dataset'.[73] In this dataset, he looked at jihadist-inspired plots and perpetrators in the West between 1990 and 2010. He collected biographical information on the perpetrators and tried to find out whether or not they had foreign fighting experience. Foreign fighting was defined as 'any military activity (training or fighting), using any tactic (terrorist or guerrilla tactics), against any enemy (Western or non-Western) – so long as it occurs outside the West'.[74] This definition is very different from the one used by Malet. It is clear from this definition that Hegghammer cares most

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[69] Idem, p.1.
[70] Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?', p.1.
[71] Jihadism is defined by Hegghammer as 'violent Islamism', which is 'activism justified with primary reference to Islam', idem, p.1.
[72] Idem, p.1.
[73] Idem, p.2.
[74] Idem, p.1.

for the geographical aspect of foreign fighting. It is not very important how, why or who someone is fighting, as long as he is doing it abroad.

By qualifying training as foreign fighting, a whole new range of fighters might possibly be addressed. As Hegghammer describes, a common hypothesis is that recruits train abroad to increase their capabilities with the intent of eventually applying these skills on Western soil against Western targets: 'foreign fighters are domestic terrorists in the making'.[75] The author disagrees with this reasoning that implies that foreign training is an instrumental strategy 'in which militants forsake short-term tactical opportunities for the deferred gratification of a more destructive operation in the future'.[76] He gives several reasons why training abroad is no necessary precondition for a successful operation at home: a domestic attack does not have to be very sophisticated, certain forms of instructions are also available in the West, the instruction offered abroad is not always appropriate for operations in the West and finally, the costs of fighting abroad at least balance, if not outweigh the benefits of training.[77]

The author is indeed correct in asserting that training is no prerequisite for a terrorist attack at home. Yet, while he also acknowledges that 'foreign fighters really do make more lethal domestic operatives', he only addressed a very limited, rational interpretation of the training hypothesis. He does not refer to the idea of training as a form of mental preparation. Training can serve more purposes than solely increasing operational capabilities: it can be a way of distancing yourself from the world you will attack, or it can function as a team-building effort.

This idea is also put forward by Frank J. Cilluffo, Jeffrey B. Cozzens and Magnus Ranstorp in a report of the Homeland Security Policy Institute of the George Washington University (2010), in which the authors cite numerous examples of rudimentary training in Western nations. The 2005 London Bombers participated in rafting and paintball exercises in the United Kingdom and the members of the Virginia network who were involved with Al Qaeda and Lashkar-E-Taiba also participated in paintball games to prepare themselves.[78] These activities cannot be regarded as a form of highly advanced military training to increase operational capabilities. The importance of training besides being a tool to increase operational capabilities is further reinforced by various observations of training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where religious training is at least as important as military training.[79] Considering training as more than just a way to increase operational capabilities could perhaps help to better understand who is training, what for, and how this can still be linked to terrorist activity.

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[75] Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?', p.6.
[76] Ibidem.
[77] Idem, p.7.
[78] Frank J. Cilluffo, Jeffrey B. Cozzens and Magnus Ranstorp. *Foreign Fighters: Trends, Trajectories & Conflict Zones*, The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute, October 2010, p.11.
[79] Cilluffo et al. *Foreign Fighters*, p.11.

Another issue with Hegghammer's ideas on training is that he does not separate it from foreign fighting. His definition of foreign fighting both includes fighting in insurgencies and training in a terrorist camp. As the author himself said in 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters', there is a need to distinguish between those categories. If we want to understand the current threat emanating from Western foreign fighters, it is important to focus on exactly that and, as a starting point, distinguish it from other forms of violent activity until it is proven that these are indeed interconnected.

The need to distinguish between foreign fighters and foreign 'trainees' is not shared by many authors and often the two are combined in works on foreign fighters. One important exception is Barak Mendelsohn, who in his article 'Foreign Fighters – Recent Trends' remarks that '[u]sually the discussion of the significance of the foreign fighter problem also suffers from a tendency to bracket all foreign volunteers together'.[80] He continues saying that a foreign fighter is someone 'fighting in a local conflict that is not his own country's war' while a foreign trained fighter is 'a local who goes to another area, receives training only, and comes back to carry out attacks elsewhere, normally in his own country'.[81]

The distinction can also be found in the earlier mentioned work of Marc Sageman: *Understanding Terror Networks* (2004). As has been explained, Sageman's work has been path-breaking because of its focus on terrorist networks as social networks, arguing that for many 'global Salafi mujahedin', social bonds predated ideological commitment to the jihadi cause. When delineating his research population, Sageman states that he only includes 'Muslim terrorists who target foreign governments and their populations, the "far enemy", in pursuit of Salafi objectives, namely the establishment of an Islamist state'.[82] This leads the author to eliminate – among other groups – 'Muslims fighting for the "liberation" of Kashmir or Chechnya, for these seem to be straightforward jihads, like the former Afghan or Bosnian jihads as defined by Azzam'. Thus, when looking at 'global Salafi mujahedin', Sageman excludes foreign fighters who were fighting a 'straightforward' or defensive jihad.[83]

Sageman's argument to exclude these 'defensive jihads', from the 'global jihad' are not entirely convincing: these defensive jihads were highly successful in attracting foreign fighters who definitely propagated a global jihad because the *ummah* transcends national borders. Nevertheless, Sageman is right to point at a difference between terrorists and 'traditional' mujahideen. There is a clear difference in the target selection, the legitimisation and the modus operandi of both groups. To explain this, we can look at the work of Alex Schmid, one of the key authors when it comes to the difficult question of defining terrorism. Schmid described how the immediate targets of

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[80] Barak Mendelsohn. 'Foreign Fighters – Recent Trends', *Orbis,* vol. 55, no.2 (2011), pp.189-202, p.193.
[81] Mendelsohn. 'Foreign Fighters – Recent Trends', p.193.
[82] Sageman.*Understanding Terror Networks,* p.61.
[83] Idem, p.62.

terrorism are not the ultimate targets.[84] Killing the victims generally has no strategic value in itself: the targets are mostly chosen because of what they represent and their corresponding symbolic value. The traditional defensive jihad is more similar to an insurgency with guerrilla-like tactics. As explained by Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Mario Fumerton, an insurgency is dominated by the desire to 'gain political-military control of a population and its territory'.[85] In an insurgency, killing the enemy has an inherent strategic value because it enables fighters to make military advances which directly serve the overall goal of the entire effort. The strategy of terrorism is not fixed on this political-military control but rather aims to provoke a certain actor to realise 'a desired political change'.[86] In the context of foreign fighting, the difference is very simple: a traditional defensive jihad entails fighting an enemy that is – generally speaking - fighting back while terrorism often targets unarmed individuals who would not regard themselves to be in a fight with the perpetrators.[87]

In this thesis, this distinction will be applied, focusing solely on foreign fighters. This will be applied in the two following ways: first of all, in the chapter on the proportion of foreign fighters in terrorist activity in the West, it will be tried to separate foreign fighters from 'foreign trainees'. The second part of this research that looks at conflicts in which foreign fighters have fought will look at exactly that: foreign fighters who went to conflict zones to fight a certain enemy.

Therefore, this research will not examine what a great number of studies have already examined: terrorist training camps in post-conflict zones such as in the 'AfPak-region' and the infamous Al Qaeda training camps such as Khaldan, al-Farooq or Derunta. However, activities in these training camps are part of this research when they were an integral part of sustaining the insurgency against the enemy, such as in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. As will be shown, the training camps established by Abdullah Azzam and his affiliates were the focal point of the mujahideen's efforts. However, after 'Al Qaeda' was established[88], these training camps transformed into 'terrorist training camps' as we tend to see them nowadays. Until the US invasion

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[84] Alex Schmid.'The Definition of Terrorism', in Alex Schmid, *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research,* London: Routledge, 2011, pp.39-99, p.87.
[85] Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Mario Fumerton. 'Insurgency and Terrorism: Is there a difference?' in Caroline Holmqvist-Jonsäter and Christopher Coker (ed.), *The Character of War in the 21st Century,* London: Routledge, 2009, pp.27-41, p.28.
[86] Duyvesteyn and Fumerton. 'Insurgency and Terrorism: Is there a difference?', p.28. However, it is important to add that the authors also note that getting popular support is important in an insurgency. Killing the enemy is not always beneficial to accomplish the overall goals if the local population is alienated by – for instance – indiscriminate and brutal killings.
[87] Of course it must immediately be noted that in an insurgency, or traditional defensive jihad, the victims are not exclusively enemy combatants. As will be shown, the mujahideen were infamous for their – at times – cruel and horrific behaviour: targeting innocent civilians with disgusting methods such as decapitation, mutilation etc. As argued by Duyvesteyn and Fumerton, terrorism can be both a tactic and a strategy. Just like guerrilla warfare, terrorism can be employed as a tactic in the strategy of insurgency, which is often seen in the acts of the mujahideen in 'defensive jihads' but which is certainly not reserved to Muslim fighters only. The opposite is however impossible: guerrilla warfare has no place in the strategy of terrorism.
[88] More on this in later chapters.

of Afghanistan in 2001, these camps were of crucial importance to Al Qaeda and its 'terrorist education'. A telling example is the fact that almost all of the individuals involved in the attacks on 9/11 had – at some point – passed through training camps in Afghanistan where many of them were selected for this suicide mission.[89] One of the main aims of the US invasion of Afghanistan was to disrupt Al Qaeda's activities in these training camps.[90]

This however shows the difficulties involved in separating foreign fighters from foreign 'trainees'. At times, it is impossible to categorise known cases of foreign travellers into one of the two categories. Nevertheless, the solution is not to pile all these cases together in one category to circumvent this problem but, where possible and academically sound, put the cases into one of the two categories. Because we are not (yet) able to always differentiate between the two – and it is not very helpful that the two sometimes overlap - this does not mean we should identify everything as one category, thus failing to recognise important differences between these two appearances of militant Islamism.

2.2 Need for a new approach

Now that the definitional questions have been discussed and it has been explained why it is important to use a very narrow definition of foreign fighting as opposed to including terrorism or terrorist training, it is time to look at the results of past research into foreign fighting. As explained in the introduction, assessing the security risk entails looking at both the proportion of returned foreign fighters in the entire 'terrorist population' and the proportion of terrorists in the entire 'foreign fighter population'. To serve this second goal, ideally the entire foreign fighter population would be mapped, tracing the lives of all individual foreign fighters. In reality however, the empirical data is very limited. There is no clear picture of how many individuals became foreign fighters in the first place. William Rosenau and Sara Daly observe that probably hundreds, if not thousands of American Muslims fought in conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s but that this subject has not been properly studied.[91]

This significant gap in knowledge is reflected in the estimates given by different authors, ranging from hundreds to thousands. One scholar who tried to address this lack of understanding is investigative journalist John M. Berger. In his book *Jihad Joe: Americans who go to war in the name of Islam* (2011) he estimated that at least 1,400 Americans participated in some form of jihad

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[89] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004. See Chapter 7: The Attack Looms, pp.215-253.
[90] And in that sense, the invasion can be regarded a success as almost all Al Qaeda training camps have been destroyed. However, Al Qaeda has proved to be highly adaptive and flexible and has now transformed in what some say to be an 'idea or a concept than an organization'. See Bruce Hoffman. 'The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* vol. 27, no. 6 (2004), pp.549-560, p.552.
[91] Rosenau and Daly. 'American Journeys to Jihad', p.17.

over the last thirty years.[92] His book is the most in-depth description of the American jihadist phenomenon, giving a glimpse into their stories. The focus of the book is on American jihadists in general but not specifically on returned foreign fighters.

For the European situation, it is again Thomas Hegghammer who provides some estimates of the size of the foreign fighter movements. Regarding the European foreign fighters in the 1990s, the author gives a conservative estimate of around two hundred individuals.[93] This estimate is based upon different reports that range from 1,000-2,000 individuals to several hundred or more specifically several hundred Europeans in Bosnia alone or four hundred French in Afghanistan and fifty in Bosnia. Therefore, his estimate of two hundred European foreign fighters in 1990s is surprising. In the 2000s, his estimate is five hundred based on observations of at least a hundred in Iraq, two hundred in Afghanistan/Pakistan, ten in Yemen and hundred-fifty in Somalia.[94] For Australia, he found only two observations from the 2000s with regard to Australians in Somalia (around twenty-five). Somalia also hosted around twenty people from Canada in the 2000s.[95] Hegghammer's total estimate of Western foreign fighters between 1990 an 2011 is 945.

On top of this total estimate of European foreign fighters, Hegghammer also compiled a database of terrorist plots in the West and calculated the proportion of foreign fighters, as has been explained in the previous section. Hegghammer concludes that 107 of these 945 foreign fighters were involved in terrorist activity upon returning. This leads Hegghammer to say that there is a 'one-in-nine-radicalization rate that would make foreign fighter experience one of the strongest predictors of individual involvement in domestic operations that we know'.[96]

However, there are important reasons why this cannot be extrapolated to the research question of this thesis: the direct involvement of Western Muslim foreign fighters in jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in Europe. The first problem is related to the total number of foreign fighters. As acknowledged by Hegghammer himself, the conservative estimate of 945 is probably a very conservative estimate, given the variety in observations. A higher total amount of 'foreign fighters' would automatically lead to a lower 'radicalization rate'. Consistently rounding down the total number of foreign fighters thus boosts radicalisation rate, distorting how we perceive foreign fighters. This becomes even more apparent when realising that Hegghammer not only includes foreign fighters but also those who went to training camps. Given this inclusion, his number of 945 is even less plausible, when it is for instance estimated that between 1,500 and

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[92] J.M. Berger. *Jihad Joe: Americans who go to war in the name of Islam*, Dulles: Potomac Book, Inc., 2011, pp.xi. Berger performed about one hundred interviews with a variety of actors: Muslims radicals, former jihadists and Al-Qaeda members, current and former intelligence, law enforcement, military and diplomatic officials, academics and relatives and associates of former jihadists.
[93] Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?', p.5.
[94] Ibidem.
[95] Ibidem.
[96] Idem, p.10.

4,000 Britons have trained in terrorist camps.[97] Although these numbers might in turn be a classical example of overestimating the numbers of UK residents who trained in terrorist camps, it shows that the number of 945 might not be the best starting point to calculate radicalisation rates.

Besides presenting figures on the radicalisation rate of foreign fighters, Hegghammer also provides figures on the proportion of foreign fighters in terrorist attacks in the West. The database compiled by Hegghammer (the JPW Dataset) includes a total number of 401 plotters. As has already been mentioned, Hegghammer counted 107 former foreign fighters in this group, leading to a 'terrorist ratio' of almost 27 percent.[98]

Concerning this number, only one of the two problems that were mentioned with regard to the calculation of the radicalisation rate applies. The total number of foreign fighters (945) is not fixed and not directly linked to the number of 'terrorist foreign fighters' (107). In other words, the number of 945 can be adjusted without changing the number of 107, resulting in a higher or lower radicalisation rate. An incorrect total of foreign fighters therefore directly distorts the radicalisation rate.

The total number of plotters (401) is not fixed either, but it is directly linked to the number of 'terrorist foreign fighters'. If more plotters would be investigated, there is chance (which can be expected to be close to his rate of 1 out of 4) that more 'terrorist foreign fighters' would be included. If the bar of inclusion was placed higher and less than 401 plotters were included, it can be expected that a number of these 107 'terrorist foreign fighters' would be in this group of excluded plotter. In other words, Hegghammer's ratio of around 1 out of 4 (107 out of 401) is more plausible, because the number of plotters was high enough. It can reasonably be expected that any coincidence in observations has been countered.

However, there still is the same problem regarding the definition of foreign fighters because 'foreign trainees' were included as well. A last issue with Hegghammer's database has to do with his definition of 'Western'. This is however more a choice of the author and not a fundamental problem of the calculation.

To conclude, there are enough reasons to build a new database to re-calculate Hegghammer's terrorist ratio of 1 out of 4. In Chapter 4, this database will be discussed. Regarding Hegghammer's radicalisation rate of 1 out of 9, Chapter 5 will try to provide more insight into post-conflict actions of foreign fighters, resulting in a first typology in Chapter 6. However, it is important to already note that no 'radicalisation rate' can be presented. There is not enough empirical data available to calculate such a rate.

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[97] Ben Leapman. '4,000 in UK trained at terror camps', *The Telegraph,* July 15, 2007, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1557505/4000-in-UK-trained-at-terror-camps.html.
[98] Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?', p.3.

2.3 Motivation: does it matter?

One final issue needs to be discussed before proceeding to the two approaches: the question of the motivation of foreign fighters. When looking at the danger posed by Western foreign fighters, there is one question that immediately comes to mind: what are they fighting for, or rephrased, why do they fight? It is hoped that by answering this question, some thoughtful remarks can be made about the behaviour that can be expected from returned foreign fighters. There are, however, at least three problems that arise when answering this question.

First of all, there is a lack of reliable empirical data. To get a clear picture of the motivation that drives these people to answer the call to arms would ideally mean that (former) foreign fighters are interviewed by researchers. The best way to develop insight into personal motivations is simply asking the subject you are interested in. For obvious reasons, this is not easy regarding foreign fighters. If prior to departure individuals would publicly announce they are planning to fight, they risk the chance of being stopped or detained. As can be seen in the current case of young Western Muslims who join the struggle in Syria, the government, police, social workers and other actors are trying to stop this from happening. Intelligence services such as the Dutch AIVD are monitoring the situation and aim to disrupt outgoing jihadists to prevent that they actually leave.[99] In November 2012, the Dutch National Crime Squad arrested three men who were planning to travel to Syria for jihadist purposes.[100] These exceptional cases can provide us with valuable information if we at least know how to interpret possible testimonies. The current focus of the authorities is to stop potential foreign fighters. A lot of recruitment activities and pre-departure preparations therefore take place in relative secrecy to avoid the risk of crossing legal boundaries or being stopped by the authorities or family and friends. In the past months, it became clear that many young people who travelled to Syria did so without noticing their parents.[101] The lack of this type of empirical data frustrates research.

The second problem that arises when answering why foreign fighters fight, has to do with the reliability of testimonies. Even when there are sources on the motivation of foreign fighters, how can we validate these claims? If a foreign fighter testifies about his motivation to fight, he could easily alter the story. Especially when these claims are made upon being arrested while trying to leave the country or being charged with illegal or terrorist activity upon returning, this can be expected. Out of loyalty or fear, a foreign fighter could downplay the role recruiters played in his decision to leave. He might also want to sustain the 'humanitarian' aspect of fighting against

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[99] AIVD. *AIVD-informatie leidt tot aanhouding drie terrorismeverdachten'*, https://www.aivd.nl/actueel/nieuws-persberichten/@2958/aanhouding-drie/, accessed on June 14, 2013.
[100] Openbaar Ministerie. *Drie 'uitreizigers' verdacht van terrorisme aangehouden*, November 30, 2012 http://www.om.nl/actueel/nieuws-persberichten/@159862/drie-uitreizigers/.
[101] 'Ouders Syriëstrijders dringen bij overheid aan op maatregelen*', De Morgen* May 30, 2013, http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1643100/2013/05/30/Ouders-Syriestrijders-dringen-bij-overheid-aan-op-maatregelen.dhtml. Of course, there are always exceptions and some people publicly told about their motivation to become a foreign fighter.

injustice and brutality to be perceived as altruistic, which could serve to minimise a possible penalty. It is not uncommon that a presumed foreign fighter himself denies that he was involved in any fighting at all but instead claims he was only offering humanitarian aid.[102] A second, simpler mechanism that gives reason to doubt the validity of motivation claims is memory distortion. A lot can change after weeks, months or even years of fighting. An observation by Berger regarding American Muslims who fight abroad is that not all of them leave radicalised. Some might be looking for an adventure or a way to escape normal life. But while fighting, they can come into contact with radicalised hard-liners and see their fighting as an inherently ideologically motivated activity.[103] When looking back, they might overestimate the importance of ideological motives in their decision to leave. This does not have to be a deliberate strategy to deceive others.

The motivations could also be a facade for the foreign fighter himself. A foreign fighter might see himself as a self-sacrificing hero fighting against injustice and protecting innocent people, his own community, religion or ethnic group against a grave threat. This is far more attractive than the alternative: seeing yourself as someone who is trying to find his place in the world, who is looking for social ties or who is insecure about his identity, or, who is simply looking for an adventure because he was bored. It is of course nothing more than a simplification to say that foreign fighters are either adventure-seekers or self-sacrificing heroes, but it nevertheless shows that there is a variety of labels that could and are being used. Foreign fighters themselves might seek – and so to say apply - the label they prefer while their 'true' motives might be different.

At the same time, it must also be noted that in many conflicts, foreign fighters are being recruited by what could be called 'social' or 'ideological entrepreneurs'. These recruiters try to convey a message to a certain pool of potential foreign fighters. As described by Malet, the message is often carefully chosen and adapted to be the most appropriate for its target public.[104] When these recruiters are successful, it means that potential foreign fighters are convinced by their message and internalise it, at which point it has come to serve as a justification to go abroad and fight for the stated cause. Naturally, some conflicts do not need a lot of framing to be turned into an appropriate call to arms while others need a bit more. As will be explained in the next chapter, the concept of defensive mobilisation is very important when understanding Muslim foreign fighter prevalence. Without going into more depth on the recruitment message, it must be understood that it could serve as a tool used by radical Islamists with connections to organisations such as Al Qaeda.

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[102]'Syriëganger wil weer normaal leven', *NOS,* May 25, 2013, http://nos.nl/artikel/510816-syrieganger-wil-weer-normaal-leven.html and Janny Groen. *Opnieuw Nederlandse Syriëganger gedood,* September 20, 2013, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/13828/Burgeroorlog-in-Syrie/article/detail/3512995/2013/09/20/Opnieuw-Nederlandse-Syrieganger-gedood.dhtml. The disguise of humanitarian aid is well-known and was for instance used in the United States by groups recruiting for the jihad in Afghanistan; see *United States of America v. Enaam M. Arnaout*. United States District Court Northern District of Illinois Eastern Division. Case #: 02 CR 892, p.18.
[103] Berger. *Jihad Joe,* p.200.
[104] Malet. *Foreign Fighters,* p.5.

The third and last problem concerning the motivation is not related to formulating the answer, but the value of the answer when found. If the main issue is – as researched in this thesis – whether or not foreign fighters will become directly involved in terrorist attacks and plots upon returning, does it really matter why they went in the first place? There is reason to question the value of motivation as a reliable predictor of this risk. What is the influence of initial motivation compared to the influence of experiences while being a foreign fighter – think of possible traumas, contacts made with extremist groups and combat experience – upon a foreign fighter's decision what to do once the conflict has ended? It is possible that a foreign fighter left without any notion of ever posing a threat to the home country; he might have even despised it. When fighting, however, he could have been radicalised through fighting experiences and contacts with terrorist groups, returning with a drastically different opinion. Another possibility, however, is that a foreign fighter becomes disillusioned with the cause and fighting, and will try to convince others to refrain from going.

Thus, it is hard to arrive at a general conclusion on the value of (initial) motivation to become a foreign fighter as a predictor of future behaviour. Apart from the practical challenges in uncovering the 'true' motivation, a more fundamental problem arises when looking at the value of the motivation. The answer probably lies somewhere in the middle: initial motivation has some impact on future behaviour because it reflects certain norms and values. However, through the fighting experience – including all the possible contacts and sometimes religious indoctrination – these set of norms and values can change drastically. Therefore, in this thesis, some attention will be paid to the initial motivation of fighters but this must always be considered with extreme cautiousness.

CHAPTER 3: FROM THE CRUSADES TO THE MUJAHIDEEN

As explained in the introduction, the history of foreign fighters can certainly not be reduced to the history of Muslim fighters. To be precise, the history of foreign fighters is in many respects an instrument to understand pre-modern nation building in Europe. Before the Peace Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, there was not a 'world system' of sovereign states we know nowadays.[105] Because there was no nation-state, there were strictly speaking no nationals either. Europe in the Middle Ages was mostly characterised by the notion of *Christendom* or the *Corpus Christianum¸* the Christian body or the community of believers and, in that sense, the equivalent of the Muslim *ummah*. However, a unified Christendom never existed because power was heavily decentralised.[106] Power struggles between empires, popes, monarchs and dukes were a defining feature of this period.

According to Malet, there were many examples of what he calls 'multinational forces' in Medieval Europe. One example is the Varangian Guard, 'an elite corps of Scandinavians and other foreigners in close attendance on the Byzantine emperor' who were actually mercenaries.[107] Probably the most well-known examples could be found during the time of the Crusades: The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon (Knights Templar) and the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (Knights of Malta) were famous military orders that fought alongside the Pope to reclaim the Holy Land of Israel. During the Hundred Years War (1337 – 1453), the Treaty of Bretigny of 1360 resulted in the formation of an army of thousands of otherwise unemployed English, French and Spanish soldiers called the Great Company that plundered across France and the Holy Roman Empire, sometimes hired to settle inter-noble rivalries.[108]

These examples all point to the significance of foreign mercenaries in the Middle Ages. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 things started to change. The arrival of the nation-state had a profound impact on the way countries fought wars. States began to realise that large, standing national armies could be more effective and disciplined than mercenary forces. This saw its apogee during the Napoleonic Wars (1803 – 1815) – unprecedented in scale - which led to a great reduction in transnational military forces.[109] On the other side of the ocean, several groups started to fight Spanish rule in America. Starting in 1817, as many as between five and seven thousand

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[105] The term 'world system' is actually misleading as the Westphalian order was initially only limited to the European continent. See Daniel Philpott. *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations*, Princeton University Press, 2001.
[106] With the important exception of attempts of Charles the Great to centralise power.
[107] Malet. *Foreign Fighters,* p.34.
[108] Ibidem.
[109] Ibidem, p.35.

British soldiers joined independent forces in South America.[110] According to D.A.G. Waddell, this systematic recruitment was initiated by the Venezuelan independence leader Simón Bolívar, much to the distress of the British who were determined to keep good relations with both Spain and Spanish America.[111] While the initial strategy of the British was to do as little as possible, recruitment kept on gaining momentum and consequently the pressure to take legal measures also grew. Interestingly, Waddell notes that the British Foreign Secretary realised that this pressure would 'only expose the inadequacy of the existing laws'.[112] The laws 'prohibited service with a 'foreign prince, state or potentate', and the Law Officers did not think that the insurgents fitted this description'.[113] It is remarkable to see that almost two hundred years later the same problem emerges when those willing to prosecute foreign fighters in Syria regularly find the law inadequate to deal with it.[114] It took the British two years – after great pressure from the Spanish – to adopt a new law that would also penalise fighting for an unacknowledged regime.[115]

This section could continue with many more examples on foreign fighting in past conflicts but that would serve no further purpose. The previous examples show that foreign fighting and the concept of defensive mobilisation that will be discussed in the next section did not magically sprout from Islam, but had a long history before Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam revolutionised it, resulting in the widespread but wrong idea that foreign fighting is mainly something reserved to Muslims.

3.1 Islam and the concept of defensive mobilisation

To understand the roads that lead young Muslims to fight and die on the battlefields in different parts of the world, we must understand the changes in ideology that paved their way. Although the concept of jihad has a long history in Islam, it was revolutionised by the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb. Rather than adhering to the classical Islamic interpretation of jihad as a collective duty (*fard kifaya*) and as form of a 'defensive war', he saw it as an eternal armed struggle against both internal and external enemies who usurped God's sovereignty.[116] According to Qutb, Muslim rulers could be

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[110] Malet. *Foreign Fighters,* p.35; D.A.G. Waddell. 'British Neutrality and Spanish-American Independence: The Problem of Foreign Enlistment', *Journal of Latin American Studies* vol. 19 no. 1 (1987), pp.1-18, p.2.
[111] Waddell. 'British Neutrality and Spanish-American Independence', p.1.
After the Napoleonic Wars, the adage of 'balance the power' was seen the solution to prevent new wars. For the British, the re-emergence of French dominance was to be averted at all costs. For this 'European collective security system' to be successful, the Spanish should not be alienated, especially as it had proven itself to be an important ally against Napoleon. At the same time, Britain did not want to openly support the Spanish either, because of its commercial links with the emerging states in America.
[112] Idem, p.7.
[113] Ibidem.
[114] In the Netherlands, for instance, it is prohibited to join a 'foreign military force that is involved in encounters against the Kingdom or a member of an alliance'. This is not applicable when fighters join a rebel movement in a civil war. See Rijkswet op het Nederlanderschap [Law on Dutch Citizenship], article 15a
http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0003738/geldigheidsdatum_15-08-2013, accessed and valid on August 15, 2013.
[115] According to the author, it was however not due to this law but to the fact that Bolívar succeeded in liberating New Granada in 1819 that recruitment finally ceased, See,Waddell. 'British Neutrality and Spanish-American Independence', p.16.
[116] Gerges. *The Far Enemy*, p.4.

held responsible for the state of '*jahiliya*' (ignorance of divine authority) that was omnipresent. Muslims were obliged to fight the apostate leaders to re-establish '*hakimiya*' (the sovereignty of Allah).[117] Qutb most influential publication was *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (in English: Milestones, 1964), which he wrote while imprisoned by the Egyptian authorities. In this book, Qutb articulated the need to revive the power of the Islam and the *ummah*. His book is based on the idea that '(i)t is necessary that this vanguard [the ones who should take the lead in re-establishing *hakimiya*] should know the landmarks and the milestones of the road toward this goal so that they may recognize the starting place, the nature, the responsibilities and the ultimate purpose of this long journey'.[118] The heroism of Qutb was unprecedented, especially after he was hanged by the Egyptian authorities in 1966 for plotting the assassination of Gamel Abdel Nasser.[119]

According to Gerges, Qutb was the founder of the ideological changes in the jihad but he was not the person who translated these new beliefs into operational practices. This was done by Mohammed Abd al-Salam Faraj. Just as Qutb, he saw the jihad as an individual obligation (*fard ayn*). But he went one step further, saying that jihad does not need to take place in a context of Islamic authority but it could also be designed to establish an Islamic state.[120] Faraj's words were especially aimed at the apostate Muslims rulers which he said to have been 'brought up at the tables of colonialism, no matter whether of the crusading, the communist, or the Zionist variety. They are Muslim only in name, even if they pray, fast and pretend that they are Muslims'.[121] On many occasions, Faraj stressed the need to target the 'near enemy' first – the apostate (Muslim) rulers – because they were the obstacles hindering the formation of Islamic states with Islamic jurisprudence.[122] Like his predecessor, Faraj was executed for plotting the assassination of an Egyptian head of state. This time the target was Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 who had signed the famous peace treaty with Israel.[123] What both figures introduced was the practice of *takfir*: declaring a Muslim to be a *kaffir,* an unbeliever.

While both Qutb and Faraj were important in instigating what some authors call the 'Islamic revival', it was not until the 1980s that collective mobilisation for the jihad would take place. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 proved to be the ideal moment to translate these changing notions into practice.

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[117] Idem, p.5.
[118] Sayyid Qutb. *Milestones*, Chapter: Introduction, as published on
http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/milestones/Introduction.htm, accessed on December 5th, 2013.
[119] Gerges. *The Far Enemy*, p.4.
[120] Idem, p.10.
[121] Ibidem.
[122] Idem, p.11.
[123] Idem, p.9.

3.2 Join the caravan – Afghanistan and beyond

The first episode of large-scale Muslim foreign fighter mobilisation under the banner of defensive mobilisation started in the 1980s after the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan.[124] In the decades before the invasion, the Afghan king had often tried to modernise the country. He looked to both the United States and the Soviet Union for inspiring examples but was mostly attracted by the latter. When the cousin of the king proclaimed himself to be President of Afghanistan in 1973, signalling the end of the monarchy, the modernisation efforts were continued. These efforts, however, led to growing Islamic opposition.

Worried by this growing Islamist sound, which particularly resonated on the other side of the Durand Line – Pakistan – where the Islamists were welcomed by President Ali Bhutto, the communists in Afghanistan decided to take matter into their own hands and overthrew President Mohammed Daoud.[125] Opponents of the new communist government led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) soon openly rebelled against the communist rule. This in turn incited the PDPA to ask the Soviet Union to consolidate its leadership. The Soviet Union chose to assassinate the distrusted President Hafizullah Amin and install a more reliable partner: Babrak Karmal.[126]

While Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev thought this intervention in Afghanistan would only be of a short nature to help the new leadership retaking control, things spiralled out of control for the Soviet leadership itself. Within a very short time, the conflict transformed into a battle between the mujahideen forces and the Soviet Union. The key person in this Soviet-Afghan war was not Osama bin Laden but his spiritual father, the Palestinian Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. In 1984, Azzam set up the Maktab al-Khadamat (MAK, the Afghan Services) that was responsible for coordinating all the money, men and weapons in the struggle against the Soviets.[127] Teaming up with his pupil Bin Laden, Azzam mobilised tens of thousands foreign fighters that flocked to the conflict during the 1980s.

At that time, no one expected these 'Arab-Afghans', as they were called in the Western world, to have such an enormous legacy. As shown by various authors, the impact of foreign fighters on the outcome of the conflict was limited.[128] In the first years of the conflict, hardly any foreign fighters came to help their Afghan brothers. Evan Kohlmann points to a meagre thirty-five volunteers that were based in Azzam's guest house prior to 1985.[129] It was only after Azzam joined forces with the indigenous 'Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen' that foreign recruits had access

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[124] This was not the first time Muslims fought in other conflicts, think of the Arab Liberation Army, composed of around six thousand Arab foreign fighters, who fought on the side of Palestine in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. It was however the first time foreign fighters explicitly fought the defensive jihad for the *ummah*.
[125] Malet. *Foreign Fighters,* p.160.
[126] Idem, p.161.
[127] Bakker and De Boer. *The evolution of Al-Qaedism,* p.9.
[128] Evan Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004; Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Gerges. *The Far Enemey*; Burke. *Al Qaeda*.
[129] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.6.

to special jihad training camps and that recruitment really thrived.[130] With financial support of Bin Laden, different services were established for the fighters and their families, such as mosques, schools, newspapers and help for refugees and injured foreign fighters.[131] It can be argued that the MAK took over a great number of services normally supplied by a state according to social contract theory.

The mixing of the Arab-Afghans and Afghan fighters did not always go well. According to Kohlmann, many of these foreign fighters were upper-middle class Arabs that knew more about engineering and business than fighting. He says 'these ragtag guerrillas were often a liability to both themselves and any Afghan mujahideen unit willing to fight alongside them. The native Afghan 'holy warriors' were typically very suspicious of their new Arab allies, regarding these foreigners as 'Gucci soldiers'.[132] This mutual suspicion often impeded effective cooperation between the groups.

According to Marc Sageman, it was not only mutual suspicion but even mutual antagonism that could be observed between the 'Afghan mujahideen and the expatriates, whom the Afghans called *Ikwanis* (Arabic for "brothers" as in the Muslim Brothers organization) or *Wahhabis* (a pejorative term from their perspective)'.[133] The story of the foreign mujahideen in Afghanistan can be summarised as follows: they were a relatively small number of fighters who did not play any real significant role in the conflict but whose presence still led to an enduring narrative of the bravery and strength of the holy warriors supported by Allah. The Soviet-Afghan war was in that sense heavily responsible for the attractiveness of the global Salafi jihad. According to Sageman, these Arab-Afghans were able to 'hijack the Afghan mujahedin victory for its own ends'.[134]

The reason why so many foreigners suddenly came to Afghanistan can be partly found in the zealous recruitment efforts of Azzam. Already in 1979, Azzam published his *fatwa* (religious ruling) called *Defence of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after faith.* These ideas were further articulated in his work *Join the Caravan* (1987), in which Azzam underlined the idea that the jihad is an individual obligation and that 'everyone not performing jihad today is forsaking a duty, just like the one who eats during the days of Ramadhan without excuse or the rich person who withholds the Zakat from his wealth. Nay, the state of the person who abandons jihad is more severe'.[135] The jihad as an obligation to every Muslim was just one of no less than sixteen reasons Azzam supplied for fighting the jihad. These general reasons for fighting the jihad also included the prospect of martyrdom and the 'High Station in Paradise'. As is written in the *hadith* (a report of

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[130] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.7.
[131] Bakker and De Boer. *The evolution of Al-Qaedism,* p.9.
[132] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe,* p.8.
[133] Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*, p.57.
[134] Idem, p.59.
[135] Abdullah Azzam. *Join the Caravan*, 1987, p.11.

the prophet's sayings and/or deeds) a martyr will receive seven special favours from the divine authority, such as being:

> forgiven with the first spurt of his blood, He sees his place in Paradise, He is clothed with the garment of Faith, He is wed with seventy-two wives from the beautiful Houris of Paradise, He is saved from the punishment of the grave and he is protected from the Great Terror on Qiyamah [The Day of Judgement], On his head is placed a crown of dignity, the jewel of which is better than the world an all it contains [and finally] He is granted intercession for seventy people of his household.[136]

Whereas these were general reasons to fight the jihad, in the second part of his work, 'Oh Islam!', Azzam described the dire situation in Afghanistan that had some clear implications for all Muslims. He said that since the start of the 'illustrious revolution against the Communist invasion (…) the Muslims in Afghanistan have endured as much as mortals can endure in the course or protecting their religions, honor and children'. The Muslims however, Azzam continued, have let down the Afghans because they have not heeded their calls: '(i)n the ears of the Muslims is a silence, rather than the cries of anguish, the screams of virgins, the wails of orphans and the sighs of old men. Many well-off people have deemed it sufficient to send some of the scraps from their tables and crumbs of their food'.[137]

By saying this, Azzam tried to play into the feeling of guilt of Muslims around the world for their lack of action to come to the help of their brothers and sisters. Even though Azzam acknowledged that some people found a justification not to fight in the fact that the Afghans were not seen as having an acceptable level of Islamic training, this should be put aside because it is obligatory to perform jihad 'even with an extremely sinful army'.[138] Furthermore, he reminded the readers of the following:

> the jurists have documented that the lands of the Muslims are like a single land, so that whichever region of the Muslims' territory is exposed to danger, it is necessary that the whole body of the Islamic Ummah rally together to protect this organ which is exposed to the onslaught of the microbe. What is the matter with the scholars that they do not arouse the youths for jihad, especially since arousal is compulsory?[139]

Here Azzam stressed the transnational nature of the *ummah,* with all Muslims being part of the same body, thus successfully transforming a distant fight into a fight that should concern all Muslims. Azzam concluded his work, after some practical advices to (prospective) mujahideen, with a very simple line: '(t)he Jihad is in need of money, and men are in need of Jihad'.[140] This

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[136] Azzam. *Join the Caravan*, pp.15-16.
[137] Idem, p.20.
[138] Idem, p.21.
[139] Idem, p.23.
[140] Idem, p.33.

accurately captures the symbiotic nature of the jihad: a true Muslim is obliged to take part in it but he is also greatly rewarded for it. It is both a plight and a pleasure.

The prospect of being killed while fighting had no deterrent effect on the fighters. On the contrary, as described by Kohlmann, fighters who 'remained alive felt 'cheated' and sought ever more desperately to achieve martyrdom in the name of Islam'.[141] This feeling has been echoed many times by jihadists who claim that they love death more than their enemies love life. This symbiotic nature of the jihad was no invention of Azzam. What can be ascribed to him is that he expanded the jihad in geographical sense. All of a sudden, every Muslim in every part of the world had the individual obligation to fight anywhere where Muslims were oppressed. And perhaps even more important, every Muslim should be thankful for having the opportunity to do so.

One final thing must be said about the defensive jihad before proceeding to the next chapter. The defensive jihad as propagated by Azzam was truly global in the sense that it was a matter of concern to all Muslims, regardless of their nationality, and it asked every Muslim (if possible) to answer this individual obligation to defend the *ummah*. However, this notion of defensive jihad only asked to come to the rescue of those who were directly oppressed or threatened. Azzam did not incite people to attack infidels at home: the focus of the mujahideen's effort had to be on liberating former Muslim countries of which the most important would be Palestine. Azzam disapproved of the notion of *takfir* and Faraj's ideas of overthrowing apostate Muslim leaders such as Mubarak in Egypt.[142] This idea would however increasingly take root in the Arab-Afghan community with its most important proponent being the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri. When Azzam was killed in 1989, the emerging Al Qaeda movement would irrevocably move into al-Zawahiri's direction of the global Salafi jihad at the expense of the traditional, defensive jihad imagined by Azzam. Bin Laden, initially hesitant, soon decided to follow suit.[143]

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[141] Kohlmann. 'Al -Qaida's Jihad in Europe', p.8.
[142] Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks,* p.36.
[143] Idem, p.37.

CHAPTER 4: APPROACH I - FOREIGN FIGHTER: TERRORIST RATIO

Now that literature and current insights on Western Muslim foreign fighters and the development of the notion of a defensive jihad have been presented, it is time to look at the 'foreign fighter : terrorist ratio' calculated by Hegghammer to develop a better understanding of the proportion of former foreign fighters in the 'terrorist population'. As explained in the introduction, this thesis consists of two approaches. This chapter constitutes the first approach while the next chapter will form the second approach.

As this approach calculates the foreign fighter : terrorist ratio, it could be called 'quantitative'. In the book *Making History Count: A Primer in Quantitative Research Methods for Historians* (2002), Charles H. Feinstein and Mark Thomas explain how calculations could help to support historical research. As explained by the authors, even simple calculations are called 'statistical research methods', although this does not mean that it is very sophisticated. The 'terrorist : foreign fighter ratio' in this thesis is an example of 'descriptive statistics': it gives simple summaries of the data. It tries to quantify the presence of a certain *variable* (previous foreign fighting activity) in the *sample* of jihadist-inspired terrorist activity in Europe. When doing statistical research, especially if it is desired to apply a regression analysis, such a non-numerical (or qualitative) variable would be replaced by a 'dummy variable' with the presence of previous foreign fighting activity getting assigned the numerical value of 1 and no presence of previous foreign fighting activity getting assigned the numerical value of 0.[144] However, the aim of this first approach is simply to calculate the foreign fighter : terrorist ratio and in order to do so, sophisticated statistical research methods are not needed.

Drawing conclusions from this sample, what can be called 'inductive statistics' that hold true for the entire population is difficult. In this case, the population would contain all jihadist-inspired terrorists in Europe, and not all foreign fighters, because the sample is a selection of a number of jihadist-inspired terrorist plots in which previous foreign fighting activity is a variable. As explained by Feinstein and Thomas, this is only possible if we know how the sample relates to the population. The authors name three key questions when answering this: '(a) Is the sample (...) representative of the *full set of records* [cases] that was originally created? (b) Is the sample drawn from the records representative of the *information in those records?* (c) Is the information in those records representative of a *wider population* than that covered by the records?'. As will be explained in the next section, it has been tried to address these issues but a number of problems remain. Again, the main aim is not to statistically test the correlation between foreign fighting and

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[144] Charles H. Feinstein and Mark Thomas. *Making History Count: A Primer in Quantitative Research Methods for Historians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.11.

terrorist activity but simply observe the frequency of previous foreign fighting activity in terrorist activity in Europe. Still, this sample has been carefully chosen and can be considered representative of the most serious jihadist-inspired plots in Europe since 1994.

Therefore, while the results should first and foremost be considered true for the sample that has been examined, this sample is still useful when answering the research question that looks at foreign fighters involved in terrorist activity in Europe. As already explained in the introduction, this approach can only partly answer that question. To explain this in statistical terms before again proceeding to non-statistical terminology: while the plots included in this database are a useful representation of serious jihadist-inspired terrorist plots in Europe since 1994 (the limitations will be discussed in the next section), the foreign fighters included in this database are certainly no representative sample of the entire foreign fighter population. The foreign fighters in this database were not carefully chosen – they were not chosen at all as the sample consisted of jihadist plots with foreign fighting as a variable – and their number is nowhere close to that of all foreign fighters. Because a lack of data obstructs quantifying the number of foreign fighters involved in terrorist activity in the foreign fighter population (or a representative sample), the next chapter and second approach will look at Western foreign fighters in a number of conflicts to arrive at a typology of foreign fighters based on their post-conflict actions. The remainder of this chapter will explain how the database has been built and will analyse some of the main facts that can be observed.

4.1 Overview of existing databases

To calculate the ratio of foreign fighters in the terrorist population, the initial plan was to use one of the existing databases to instantly calculate how many of the individuals involved in serious plots and attacks in the West could be considered former foreign fighters. Some influential studies have been published on jihadist-inspired terrorism in the West, such as the work of Edwin Bakker, Frazer Egerton, Lorenzo Vidino and Petter Nesser.[145] Some of these authors have compiled databases on terrorist activity in the West (Bakker 2006, Nesser 2008, Egerton 2011). In most of these databases, foreign fighting was not systematically investigated, as it was not very important for their respective research purposes.

As explained in the literature review, one author who did try to analyse the foreign fighter ratio in terrorist plots in the West is Thomas Hegghammer. Hegghammer built a dataset on Islamist

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[145] See 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: Den Haag, 2006; Frazer Egerton. *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Petter Nesser. 'Chronology of *Jihadism* in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* vol. 31, no. 10 (2008), pp.924-946; Petter Nesser.'Ideologies of Jihad in Europe', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 23, no.2 (2011), pp.173-200; Petter Nesser. 'Jihadism in Western Europe after the Invasion of Iraq: Tracing Motivational Influences from the Iraq War on Jihadist Terrorism in Western Europe', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* vol.29, no. 4 (2006), pp.323-342; Lorenzo Vidino. *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad*, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006; Lorenzo Vidino. 'Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon?', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* vol. 32, no. 1 (2009), pp.1-17.

terrorist plots in the West between 1990 and 2010 and gathered information on how many of the plotters had foreign fighting experience. He found that of the 401 plotters, at least 107 were previously foreign fighters.[146] This means around a quarter of the 'terrorist population' could be categorised as returned foreign fighters. The main problem with Hegghammer's approach, as explained earlier, is his inclusion of foreign training as a form of foreign fighting.

Another issue with Hegghammer's database is his definition of Western. One example that illustrates both this and the training problem is that of the Strasbourg plotters. In Hegghammer's dataset, the four individuals – Salim Boukhari, Fouhad Sabour, Aeroubi Beandali and Lamine Marouni – were all categorised as foreign fighters. Three of them were actually Algerian immigrants and one was Algerian-French, making it very questionable to call them Western. Every definition of 'Western' is subjective as it pertains to more than just the nationality written down in someone's passport but pretends to give some indication of certain norms, values or a shared, collective identity. In this thesis, echoing the elevated threat level, the focus is on the danger posed by foreign fighters who return to 'their' country and attack it. It is linked to the notion of a 'homegrown threat', a threat emanating from within, although possibly catalysed by experiences abroad.

Therefore, there must be some criteria to demarcate who should be regarded as 'Western' and who should be regarded an 'imported' threat. In this thesis, the criteria that have been applied are the following: being a citizen of a Western country by birth, having moved to a Western country before the age of fifteen or having lived for at least ten years in a Western country prior to any terrorist activity. It must be immediately acknowledged that one can disagree with these criteria and argue that the age limit of fifteen should be twelve or eighteen, or that having lived for ten years in a Western country does not mean that someone is Westernised. The opposite is true as well: a born and raised Dutch citizen who does not feel any connection to 'Western values' could be considerd less 'Western' than an immigrant who has just arrived but fully recognises these.[147] These are all valid remarks and the criteria should be open to debate. However, the main aim of these criteria is to distinguish between the threat coming from 'within' and the so-called 'imported' threat and this is a first attempt to do so.

Because of the limitations of existing databases, a new database was built. It tried to overcome the current problems by a) incorporating plots and attacks prior to 9/11 as well, b)

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[146] Hegghammer. 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?', p.3.
[147] Terms like 'Western', 'Westernised' and 'Western values' should normally be applied with extreme cautiousness. One can even argue that there is no such thing as 'Western' or 'Western values'. In this thesis, however, that debate is not further discussed because it is not relevant to answer the research question. Debates about the assimilation and integration of immigrants are not part of this thesis. The aim is to understand the risk coming from Western foreign fighters, where Western is rather a qualification to point to 'those coming from within' rather than a threat coming from those who adhere to so-called 'Western values'. The criteria are therefore aimed at delineating what can be called 'within' and should not be regarded as pretending to say anything about cultural values, assimilation and other debates about (im)migrants or cultures.

distinguish between training and foreign fighting if possible, c) set criteria for being categorised as Western.

4.2 Plot selection

The next step was to decide which plots should be included. This was, however, not as straightforward as one might think. The databases differed in scope (only Europe or also North-America) and the named individuals in the plots did not always correspond. One example is the so called 'Chechen network'. In Hegghammer's database, it is reported that the French Menad Benchellali was a foreign fighter in Chechnya but the brother Mourad Benchelalli who received terrorist training from Menad in Afghanistan and is suspected to have fought the US and Allied Forces, is not included. Mourad Benchellali is included in the database of Bakker and the case is reported in Wikileaks' Guantánamo Files.[148] But when looking at why Mourad was arrested, it is less clear if he should be included in a database such as the one compiled in this thesis. As indicated in the Wikileaks-file, Mourad went to a training camp in Afghanistan, after which he travelled to Pakistan where he was arrested and sent to Guantanamo Naval Bay in Cuba in January 2002. In 2004, he was transferred to French custody, being sentenced in 2006 to one year in prison for 'criminal association with a terrorist enterprise'.[149] In 2009, his terror convictions were overturned on the ground that 'information gathered by French intelligence officials in interrogations at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, violated French rules for permissible evidence, and that there was no other proof of wrongdoing'.[150] In 2010, the Court of Cassation ordered a re-trial of Mourad Benchellali and four other former Guantanamo Bay detainees.[151] This example illustrates certain difficulties.

First of all, it is unknown if Mourad Benchallali can be called a foreign fighter or that his activities were limited to visiting a training camp. Although the Wikileaks-file suggests the American authorities thought it to be very likely he had fought the US and Allied Forces, it was never proven; Benchellali himself denies the claims. Secondly, there seems to be no convincing evidence pointing to involvement in terrorist activity in the West, reinforced by his acquittal in 2009. Therefore, a case like Mourad Benchellali is not added to the database in this thesis. Despite the fact that he was convicted for terrorist related activity – which explains why he was included in the database of Bakker – he was never part of any attack or serious plot against the West.

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[148] Wikileaks. *The Guantanamo Files*, *Mourad Benchellali*, http://wikileaks.org/gitmo/prisoner/161.html, file dated March 2004, uploaded in 2011.
[149] Jamey Keaten. 'Paris Court Acquits Former Guantanamo Detainees', *Huffington Post,* February 24, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/24/paris-court-acquits-forme_n_169433.html.
[150] Steven Erlanger. 'Terror Convictions Overturned in France', *New York Times*, July 24, 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/25/world/europe/25france.html?_r=1.
[151] Nicolas Vaux-Montagny. 'France orders 5 Gitmo detainees inmates back to court', *Associated Press,* February 17, 2010, http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fhostednews%2Fap%2Farticle%2FALeqM5glw9fmMmPBK6o3H7k_lzmjIR4rBwD9DU5QC00&date=2010-02-17.

This example shows that it is impossible to automatically include all individuals (correctly) mentioned in other databases because the criteria for inclusion are dependent on the corresponding research aim. Because this thesis is concerned with the direct involvement of Western Muslim foreign fighters in terrorist attacks and plots in Europe, preferably only the individuals who were responsible for the greatest damage or who were involved in the most serious and advanced plots should be included. But again, choosing the plots that were of the greatest risk to society is an inherently subjective exercise. The most common method to calculate risks that is often used in disaster management studies is the equation: 'risk = probability * impact'.[152] In the existing databases, the authors do not always explain why they chose to include or exclude certain plots, making it impossible to others to decide whether or not these plots would be suitable for a different research aim.

In order to avoid this, it was tried to make the database in this thesis as transparent as possible. This can hopefully enable researchers to judge the selection of the plots. The initial plan was twofold: first of all, to include all plots in which the threat truly materialised: the plots were executed.[153] On top of the executed attacks, the aim was to include attacks with the highest estimated risk (probability multiplied by impact). There are many examples of plots in which individuals intended to cause mass destruction but were never able to reach a sophisticated planning stage. Therefore, the plot was never a real threat except in the mind of the plotters themselves, thus resulting in a very low 'probability', which can be defined in this context as the probability of being successfully executed.

However, it is an impossible exercise to judge which plots should be included because of a high 'risk' factor. As explained above, the databases included different plots and individuals. It is also very hard to quantify values that should be ascribed to the two factors of impact and probability. Of course it is possible to make some broad ranges for both factors, including the (expected) number of fatalities and the planning phase of the attack.

More pressing, however, was a more fundamental problem: there is no way to be certain that the plots with the highest risk factor were actually included. Although successfully executed attacks can be expected to make headlines, this does not always hold true for foiled plots. Government and intelligence agencies sometimes try to withhold news about foiled terrorist plots. Various reasons could explain this, ranging from intelligence advantages to the desire to avoid public unrest. Therefore – unfortunately – the idea of compiling a database consisting of plots with

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[152] This method of calculating risks is also implemented by various government authorities, such as is done in the National Risk Assessment in the Netherlands. Rijksoverheid, *Nationale Risicobeoordeling 2011,* http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2012/08/15/nationale-risicobeoordeling-2011.html.

[153] It must be noted that executed attacks do not automatically have the highest 'risk' factor. The impact could be much smaller than that of a non-executed attack, leading to a lower risk factor. To always include executed attacks is a personal choice as a result of the research question. It is based on the assumption that a successfully executed attack, even with a relatively low impact in terms of the number killed/injured, is more important than a potentially very lethal attack (high impact) that was never executed/reached a sophisticated planning phase because a concrete attack will strongly influence societies and its perception of foreign fighters.

the highest risk factor was abandoned, although that would be ideal for answering the research question.

Because compiling a database is a subjective exercise unless you try to include all plots, it was chosen not to develop a personal plot selection with the risk of choosing plots that are convenient for this research purpose because they either confirm or deny a foreign fighter link. In order to avoid this, an existing overview was used. In his article 'Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks', Petter Nesser provided an overview of the most important terrorist incidents in Europe since 1994. What makes this database particularly suitable for this thesis is the fact that the author divided the plots into three categories. His criteria for defining a case as category 1 were: 'the existence of hard evidence that a terrorist attack was planned, prepared, or launched; that an attack struck a specific target or that a target or a type of target had been identified by terrorists; and finally, that clearly identifiable *jihadis* were behind the planning and the attacks'.[154] If the incidents were of a more dubious character with less concrete information, it was labelled as a Category 2 incident. If the information was very limited and vague, it was labelled as Category 3.

His categories seem to relate to the idea of a risk factor. Category 1 incidents refer to executed attacks or plots that reached a sophisticated planning phase. But again, due to a lack of (reliable) information, cases with high risk factors might have been placed in Category 2 or 3. These Category 1 plots were combined with the databases of Bakker and Egerton, who not only included a list of plots but also of the main perpetrators. Because Nesser's database only consisted of plots and attacks up to 2007, five post-2007 executed attacks were added that resulted in fatalities or injuries: The 2010 Stockholm suicide bombing (killing the perpetrator and wounding two), the attempted murder of a British Member of Parliament in 2010 (wounding one), the 2011 Frankfurt airport shooting (killing two), the 2012 Toulouse shooting (killing seven and wounding five) and the 2013 Woolwich attack (killing one).

After including all the plots and the main perpetrators, it was possible to calculate how many of the plotters could be categorised as former foreign fighters. However, it must again be said that this research does not pretend to give any conclusive, complete figures about the proportion of foreign fighters in the entire 'terrorist population'. Some choices had to be made, making the plots and plotters included in this database also just a small selection of the entire 'terrorist population'. The most important limitation of this database is that it only contains terrorist attacks and plots in Europe and does not include some of the most important terrorist attacks in the West, such as the 1993 World Trade Center Bombing or the attacks on 9/11.[155] That is why it has been decided to solely focus on Europe in the research question.

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[154] Nesser.'Chronology of *Jihadism* in Western Europe 1994-2007', p.926.
[155] Nesser uses the terms 'Europe' and 'Western Europe' interchangeably, without clarifying which countries fall into this category. It is likely that Nesser used the same definition as Bakker (2006) because he refers to this work. Bakker defines

However, by using the plots and plotters of other databases, being as transparent as possible about the criteria and critically re-examining all the information used in other databases, this research tried to be as neutral as possible.[156] Therefore, the results can perhaps be extrapolated to larger numbers.

4.3 The results

The database consists of a sample of 26 plots, with a total of 123 individuals (see Appendix II). There was only one plot that was difficult to categorise: the first plot, the GIA Air France hijacking of 1994. This plot was directed by the leader of the GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé) in Algeria, Djamel Zitouni and was aimed to influence the attitude of France in the Civil War, which ravaged Algeria. While Zitouni and his co-conspirators were members of this militant Islamic guerrilla movement, they cannot be categorised as foreign fighters. They were Algerian nationals taking part in a national struggle who tried to influence a crucial external actor (France). However, because this plot targeted France and had an Islamic agenda (turning Algeria into an Islamic state), it was still included.

Of these 123 individuals in the database, just over half (68 or 55.3%) could be categorised as Western, using the above criteria mentioned of: being a citizen of a Western country by birth, having moved to a Western country before the age of fifteen or having lived for at least ten years in a Western country prior to any terrorist activity.[157]

This shows that the plots are more or less equally originating inside Western countries ('homegrown') as they are originating 'outside'. Most of the individuals at some point moved to Western countries but in many cases this was only a couple of years prior to the plot. This can rather be qualified as an imported threat than a true 'homegrown threat'.[158] The main question is how many of these 123 individuals can be categorised as a Western foreign fighters. Employing the definition used by Hegghammer that includes both foreign fighters (those who fight in conflict zone) but also foreign 'trainees' (those who train at a terrorist training camp), we find a number of

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Europe as 'the 25 EU member states, countries in the Balkan region and Western European states that are not member of the Union', see Bakker. Jihadi Terrorist in Europe, p.7.

[156] Although almost all the 'Category 1' plots of Nesser were included, I chose to exclude two plots and include one. The first excluded plot is the arrest of two French-Algerians by the French police in January 2004 that were claimed to plan to use ricin. These individuals are reported to be relatives of Menad Benchelalli of the Chechen Network but the identities are not revealed. Another excluded plot is the arrest of five persons in Rovigo, Italy because the police found bombs during a regular raid looking for illegal immigrants. Maps of NATO bases and central London were found, but no real plot was discovered. One plot that I chose to include was the arrest of Kamel Bourgass in the United Kingdom, who possessed poison recipes and bombmaking instructions. During a police raid, Bourgass killed one police officer. Although Nesser has some doubts about the plot, calling it a Category 2 plot while saying it is difficult to assess the 'realities of this particular case', the plot is included in the databases of both Bakker and Egerton. Because Bourgass was responsible for the killing of a police officer, I chose to include the plot.

[157] Western countries: the 28 EU member states, Western European states that are not member of the EU, the United States, Canada and Australia.

[158] Of course, these non-Western fighters were also a threat to Western countries. However, this thesis specifically looks at Western Muslim foreign fighters and the threat coming from 'within', although possibly catalysed by experiences abroad. Therefore, the calculations also specifically focus on Western fighters, without saying that non-Western fighters are unimportant.

32 highly probable cases of a foreign trip, one suspected case and two individuals who tried to join a militant group but failed to do so and returned home.

If we count this probable case as confirmed, we see that 33 out of 123 (26.8%) of all the individuals can be categorised as Western foreign fighters according to Hegghammer's definition.[159] This means that more than a quarter of terrorists involved in the most important terrorist plots in the West can be categorised as Westerners who were abroad either for terrorist training or fighting. However, if we look at the distribution between fighting and training, we see that 11 of them (33.3%) were foreign fighters who joined an insurgency in a conflict zone while 22 (66.7%) were foreign fighters who went to a training camp. These individuals almost exclusively went to training camps run by Al Qaeda, mainly in Pakistan or Afghanistan, or are confirmed to have met with high-ranking Al Qaeda figures while abroad. Thus, according to the definition of foreign fighting used in this thesis, only 11 out of 123 (8.9%) individuals can be categorised as Western foreign fighters.

There are some other ways of looking at this data that could be useful. It is for instance possible to count the number of plots that were related to foreign fighting. In 13 of the 26 plots (50%), there was at least one individual who went abroad to either fight or train. Separating the two, in 5 of those 13 (38.5%), this was because at least one individual joined an insurgency while in the other 8 (61.5%) it was because at least one individual went to a training camp. So 5 of the 26 plots (19.2%) had at least one individual involved who can be defined as a Western foreign fighter. 8 of the 26 plots (30.8%) had a link to a Western individual who went to a terrorist training camp.

4.3.1 Two corrections

When looking at all the individuals, two important possible distortions must be acknowledged. The first is related to the 2004 Madrid Bombings which were the most lethal jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks in Europe, resulting in the death of almost 200 persons. The 2004 Madrid Bombings (plot 13) accounted for almost a quarter of the individuals in the database (27 out of 133).[160] As explained by Javier Jordan, Fernando M. Mañas and Nicola Horsburgh,

> none of the operational leaders or members of the network had passed through a foreign training camp, nor fought for the Jihad abroad (as in Afghanistan, Bosnia, or Chechnya). Apart from the Algerian Allekama Lamari (imprisoned in Spain in 1997 for his links to the GIA), none of them could be considered as Jihad veterans, with a long and committed militancy to the cause.[161]

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[159] Note that the 32 only related to Western cases.
[160] These 27 were already a selection of the most important individuals involved.
[161] Jordan, Javier, Fernando M. Mañas and Nicola Horsburgh. 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Grassroot Jihadist Networks: The Madrid Bombings', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2008), pp.17-39, p.21.

This should not be regarded as an insignificant observation, especially when taking into consideration that it was the most lethal plot in Europe. Still, due to the high number of plotters, this plot highly influences the overall numbers. Thus, excluding this plot for a second calculation might improve the reliability of the figures.

A second plot that disproportionally influences the overall figures is the so-called Chechen Network (plot 9). This plot is perhaps the best example of the risk that Western foreign fighters become involved in terrorist activity at home. All the members of this Chechen Network, five Algerians who went to France at a young age, one member born in France and one Algerian member, fought with Chechen rebels. More precisely, they went to the Pankisi Gorge area in Georgia that borders Chechnya. During this time, plans were made to bomb the Russian embassy in Paris. While this plot is a perfect example of how Western foreign fighters could pose a threat to their country of origin, it also disproportionally influences the overall numbers. This plot accounts for more than half of the entire number of Western foreign fighters in the database (6 of 11 or 54.5%). Therefore, excluding this plot for a second calculation might also improve the reliability of the numbers.

The database includes 90 individuals when excluding the Madrid and Chechen plots. Of these individuals, 27 individuals (30%) were Western foreign fighters or 'trainees'. This number is somewhat higher than 26.8% if both plots are included. However, if we distinguish between foreign fighting and foreign training, we see that 22 (81.5%) of these 27 went to terrorist training camps while only five (18.5%) can be categorised as real foreign fighters. Thus, only five out of ninety individuals (5.6%) involved in the most important terrorist plots in the West (with the exclusion of the two plots), can be categorised as Western foreign fighters.

However, the exclusion of these plots is exactly what has been warned for in this same chapter: it is a subjective exercise. Thus, the database with the exclusion of these plots should not be regarded as the true representation of all jihadist-inspired terrorist activity in Europe. With just 26 plots, it remains difficult to speak of general patterns and observations. This database can however be seen as a good representation of the most lethal attacks in Europe since 1994 as it tried to include all these attacks. In that sense, these two plots seem to have disproportionally influenced the database: the Madrid bombings highly decreased the proportion of foreign fighters whereas the Chechen Network highly increased it. Therefore, it has been chosen to calculate the proportion both with and without those two plots.

4.3.2 The lethal plots

A final calculation will look at the relation between lethal plots and foreign fighting or training. Of the plots in this database, 10 resulted in injuries or fatalities other than the perpetrators.[162] These plots were executed by 61 individuals. Of these 61 individuals, seven were Western foreign fighters or trainees (11.5%). This percentage is considerably lower than the 26.8% of Western foreign fighters and trainees in all the plots (33 out of 123).

This suggests that Western foreign fighters (and trainees) do not make more lethal operatives than non-foreign fighters. The plots that resulted in deaths or injuries can be seen as the ones with the highest security risk. Western foreign fighters and trainees were less well-presented in these plots than in the plots that did not result in casualties. However, among these plots is an example reminding us of the danger of a link to foreign training: two of the four London Bombers, Mohammed Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, trained in Pakistan prior to the attacks. After the Madrid Bombings, the London Bombings was the most lethal jihadist plot in Europe (killing 52 and wounding more than 700). While this plot clearly had a foreign link, both of these men cannot be categorised as foreign fighters but rather as foreign trainees. If we distinguish between foreign fighters and foreign trainees in all these ten plots, we see that all of these seven individuals went to training camps and none of them actually participated in traditional insurgencies. Thus, not a single case of 'foreign fighting' as defined in this thesis has been found in the most lethal attacks in Europe since 1994. However, it might perhaps be pure coincidence, but two of these ten attacks - more specifically, two out the eight lethal attacks - contained an individual who tried to join an insurgency, foreign fighting *pur sang*, but failed to do so (Michael Adebolajo of the Woolwich Attack and Samir Azzouz of the Hofstadgroep).

Again, it must be noted that these findings should not be seen as the result of a quantitative approach using sophisticated statistical research methods to arrive at results that can be called statistically significant. This approach calculated the ratio of former foreign fighters involved in the most serious jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in Europe since 1994. In that sense, it is helpful when answering the research question that looks at direct involvement of Western Muslim foreign fighters in these attacks. The next chapter will investigate the presence of Western Muslim foreign fighters in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia.

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[162] Please note that 10 out of 26 is not a reflection of the overall rate of jihadist plots that are successfully executed and result in casualties. Because the database only contained plots until 2007, I included five post-2007 plots that resulted in deaths or injuries. On the other hand, this does mean that the database contains at least the most dangerous/lethal plots that can be seen as the ones with the highest security risk.

CHAPTER 5: APPROACH 2 - FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN PAST CONFLICTS

As has been shown in the literature review, there is a profound lack of empirical data on foreign fighters. The estimates given by different authors are not congruent and past attempts to calculate so-called 'radicalisation rates', the proportion of foreign fighters who become terrorists, can be rendered questionable. A new attempt to calculate the 'radicalisation rate' would not add much to these previous attempts because it would largely depend on the same (secondary) sources.

Rather, this part of the thesis is a first attempt to give a qualitative overview of Western Muslim foreign fighters and some of the conflicts they fought in. This will be done by focusing on a number of questions: why did they fight (the cause and mobilisation), what did they do (the fighting itself) and more importantly, what happened to these fighters afterwards (the aftermath)? By looking at the different conflicts they fought in, it is possible to construct a first typology of Western Muslim foreign fighters (Chapter 6). This typology can guide us in how to look at the foreign fighters and hopefully contribute to a more nuanced view.

As explained in the theoretical framework, foreign fighting is narrowed down to fighting in conflict zones. In Chapter 3, it was explained how the foundation for the defensive jihad was laid by Abdullah Azzam. In this chapter, some of the main places where this notion of defensive jihad took root will be examined. This chapter will start where Chapter 3 ended, namely in Afghanistan. Although the conflict in Afghanistan did not attract a high number of Western Muslim foreign fighters, it has been both the spiritual and operational basis for later foreign fighter movements that did attract large numbers of Western Muslims. Understanding what happened in Afghanistan is crucial for understanding what happened in Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia, or in today's Syria.

There have been many conflicts that attracted foreign fighters and instead of presenting anecdotal evidence on foreign fighters in all these different conflicts, three conflicts will be more thoroughly explored, namely Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia. The decision to discuss these foreign fighter movements in chronological order is based on the assumption that every conflict attracted a slightly different type of Western Muslim foreign fighters.

The ideology surrounding the jihad has been constantly evolving (and still is) and every new foreign fighter movement was built on what can be called the legacy of the previous movement. Therefore, no movement had the same ideological or historical starting point. This is further intensified by changing attitudes regarding foreign fighters and the conflicts they fought in. During the Soviet-Afghan War, Muslim foreign fighters fighting the Soviets were generally seen as

heroes fighting an evil force whereas foreign fighters who wanted to join the Somali Al-Shabaab fighting for an Islamic state could expect to be prosecuted right from the start.[163]

5.1 Afghanistan

In Chapter 3, it was explained how Abdullah Azzam formed the ideological framework supporting the notion of a defensive jihad. This section will look at how his message resonated across the world and how Afghanistan was transformed into a place where long-lasting networks were formed; networks we are still confronted with thirty years later.

5.1.1 The Soviet occupation

Most of the works on foreign fighters focus solely on Azzam and his Makhtab-e-Khidamat Al-Mujahideen (MAK), the Mujahideen Services Offices. An example is the book of Evan Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (2004) in which he explains that Azzam sought to mobilise great numbers of Arab fighters. Although Azzam was indeed the key figure in attracting thousands of foreign fighters, he was not the first one to welcome foreigners into his ranks. According to Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, years before Azzam issued his famous *fatwa* called *Defence of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after faith* (1979), another network already made direct calls for foreign fighters to come to Afghanistan.[164] This was the Haqqani-network: an Islamist insurgent group led by Jalalaluddin Haqqani which declared the jihad against the Afghan regime in July 1973 after the coup by Daoud.[165] When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, this network was the first to ask foreign fighters to come and 'would remain throughout the 1980s the only group consistently willing to welcome large numbers of non-Afghan volunteer fighters into their ranks'.[166]

While the authors acknowledge the importance of Abdullah Azzam in mobilising great numbers of volunteers, the Haqqani-network started welcoming foreign fighters at least five years before Azzam and it was the Haqqanis therefore 'more than any other Afghan mujahidin group who shaped the militant evolution of the Afghan Arab phenomenon in the first place, transforming *muhajirin* into *mujahidin¸* emigrants into holy warriors'.[167] In the first six years after the Soviet invasion, there were only thirty-five foreign fighters surrounding Azzam in his Mujahideen Offices in Peshawar, Pakistan, without any sophisticated organisational structure.[168]

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[163] Cilluffo et al. *Foreign Fighters*, p.6.
[164] Vahid Brown and Don Rassler. *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2001*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[165] Brown and Rassler. *Fountainhead of Jihad*, p.84.
[166] Idem, p.104.
[167] Ibidem.
[168] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.6.

One of the first foreign fighters to join the Haqqani-network was Mustafa Hamid – better known as Abu'l-Walid al-Masri – an Egyptian journalist who was recruited in a mosque in Abu Dhabi in 1979 after members of network showed him photos from the war.[169] Al-Masri became one of the key figures in the upcoming global jihadist movement: after fighting alongside the Haqqanis, he became involved with Al Qaeda, where he eventually led the famous al-Farook training camp and was said to be one of the most important figures in convincing Bin Laden to make the United States one of its main targets.[170] The case of Abu'l-Walid al-Masri is not exceptional at all. Many of the first Arabs who arrived and joined the Haqqani-network later held important positions in Al Qaeda-affiliated organisations. Some important examples are Abu Hafs al-Masri who would become head of Al Qaeda's military committee and Abu 'Ubayda al-Bashiri (Ali Amin al-Rashidi) who would become its first military leader.[171]

While the authors are correct in asserting that Azzam was neither the only nor the first one to recruit foreign fighters, he was without doubt the most important person. In 1984, Azzam moved from Islamabad to Peshawar, where he opened the MAK offices.[172] In 1985, foreign fighters gradually started to arrive. As will be shown, Azzam specifically tried to attract American Muslims by setting up offices in cities as far away as Brooklyn, New York.

Not all arrivals were hardened jihadists. Burke notes that some 'rich Gulf kids' only came during summer time to fight for a couple of weeks, if they would see any fighting at all, to return home after summer.[173] Most of the volunteers who arrived had no fighting experience at all and therefore first had to be trained in order to be of any worth in battle. However, in the early years, there were no special training camps for foreign fighters. Thus, most fighters had to be trained by local Afghan groups such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami or together with Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, leading the Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan.[174] This finally changed in 1987 when Azzam and Bin Laden set up a training camp exclusively for foreign fighters near the Afghan city of Khost and called it al-Masada (the lion's den).[175]

The importance of the mujahideen in terms of their military accomplishments was negligible except for a handful of battles that contributed to the mujahideen's legacy and led to the incorrect but widespread idea that it were the foreign mujahideen who destroyed the Soviet enemy.

5.1.2 Recruitment

An example showing how people were recruited to fight in Afghanistan was provided by Essam Al-Ridi who referred to the charismatic nature of Abdullah Azzam. Al-Ridi, an Egyptian national

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[169] Brown and Rassler. *Fountainhead of Jihad,* p.110.
[170] Ibidem.
[171] Idem, p.112-113.
[172] Burke. *Al-Qaeda*, p.73.
[173] Idem, p.76.
[174] Idem, p.77.
[175] Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks,* p.35.

who had lived in Kuwait and studied in Pakistan, moved to the United States to work as a flight instructor. In 2001, he was called in as a witness to testify against Osama bin Laden and others in response to the U.S. Embassy bombings of 1998.[176] When heard in court, Ridi indicated that he met Azzam during the Muslim American Youth Association (MAYA) Convention in 1982 or 1983.[177] When being asked what Azzam spoke about during this conference, Ridi's answer left no doubt: 'He spoke about the jihad in Afghanistan (...) He indicated to Muslims attending the convention, and of course Muslims worldwide, that it is an obligation upon Muslims to help in any way they could help the Afghan jihad.'[178]

When asked by the Attorney whether this call was 'fardh al ayn' (an individual obligation) or 'fardh al khafiya' (a collective obligation), Ridi told that Azzam called it the former: 'it's an obligation upon all Muslims if the immediate circuit of the immediate country that have [sic] been oppressed cannot really defend itself'.[179] Not long afterwards, Ridi moved with his family to Peshawar, Pakistan where he was hosted in Azzam's house. Instead of fighting, Ridi's skills as a flight instructor were used to supply the mujahideen with 'scuba diving equipment, range finders, night vision goggles and night vision scopes'.[180]

5.1.3 Western fighters?

The conflict in Afghanistan was the first episode in recent history to attract a great number of Muslim foreign fighters under the banner of a defensive jihad. As explained, most of these foreign fighters were Arabs, who themselves were only a small minority compared to the local Afghan fighters. Now the question arises whether Afghanistan was already able to attract Western Muslims. Before answering this question, it is important to note that the conflict in Afghanistan predated the birth of Al Qaeda and other global jihadist movements. The networks of radical Islamists that had been growing in the years after Afghanistan - for instance around the Finsbury Mosque in London, the Al Bakr mosque in Madrid or the Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan – were in those days not very present in Europe. Another important fact is that the conflict in Afghanistan not only predated the birth of radical networks in the West, but was also at a time when terrorist attacks against the West by jihadist groups were still a scenario of the future.[181] As explained by

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[176] USA v Usama bin Laden, 14 February 2001 Source: Digital file from the Court Reporters Office, Southern District of New York; (212) 805-0300, published on http://cryptome.org/usa-v-ubl-05.htm.
Al-Ridi had been a close affiliate of Bin Laden while fighting in Afghanistan but left Al Qaeda after 1987 because he became disillusioned with the cause. Hence his position as an important witness in the case against Bin Laden et. al
[177] USA v Usama bin Laden, p.544.
To be precise: Al-Ridi had met Azzam before while he was studying in Karachi, Pakistan.
[178] Idem, pp.544-545.
[179] Idem, p.545.
[180] Idem, p.549.
[181] The West had been confronted with terrorist attacks, especially the 1960s and 1970s, but these were mainly instigated by Left-wing movements such as the Rote Armee Fraktion or (secular) nationalist-separatist groups such as the Irish Republican Army or groups struggling for the independence of Palestine, such as the Black September Organization. For

Berger, in the early days of the jihadist movement, it was therefore possible 'to be a jihadist and still a "good" American'.[182] In the context of the Cold War this is not surprising whereas nowadays, after the attacks on 9/11, this would be unthinkable. Although Afghanistan was a real jihadist hotbed in the 1990s and many Western Muslims went to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region to train, there are almost no reported cases of Europeans fighting the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.

There are, however, a number of well-documented cases of Americans fighting alongside the mujahideen in the 1980s. Berger documented more than 240 American 'citizen jihadists' but notes that a far greater number of cases that have probably never been made public. He thinks that at least 1,400 Americans have taken part in 'some form of military jihad over the last 30 years'.[183] This figure is shared by William Rosenau and Sary Daly who conclude that 'hundreds if not thousands of individuals (...) left the United States to join armed struggles abroad during [the 1980s and 1990s]'.[184] Regarding Americans fighting against the Soviet occupation, Berger gives a conservative estimate of 150 individuals, but he thinks this number might be higher.[185]

A key role was played by a number of Muslim humanitarian organisations and, for instance, the Muslim World League and Muslim students associations which informed American Muslims about the problems faced by the *ummah*. The example of Essam al-Ridi confirms this pattern: he was inspired by a guest lecture of Azzam in the early 1980s. In the United States, Azzam established a number of centres aimed at recruiting Americans for the jihad, such as the Al Kifah Refugee Services Center in Brooklyn and later also in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Tucson.[186] Especially important was the Al-Farook Mosque in Brooklyn from which a number of Americans departed to Afghanistan.[187] This mosque was also the place where Ramzi Yousef – who had trained in Pakistan in the late 1980s - recruited his accomplices for the 1993 World Trade Center Bombing. Here he also met Omar Abdel Rahman – the Egyptian "Blind Shaykh" – and the place was also frequently visited by his uncle Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the later mastermind of the 9/11 attacks.[188]

The evidence on American foreign fighters is mainly anecdotal and biographical and is most extensively documented by J.M. Berger. Rosenau and Daly also describe one famous case of an American mujahid: Clement Rodney Hampton-El, a convert who fought alongside the Hezb-i-Islami of Heymatyar in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Wounded and with the nickname "Dr. Rashid", he returned to the United States where he also joined the al-Kifah Center in Brooklyn where he

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more information, see David C. Rapoport. 'Four Waves or Rebel Terror and September 11', *Antropoethics*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2002).
[182] Berger.*Jihad Joe,* p.203.
[183] Idem, p.xi.
[184] Rosenau and Daly. 'American Journeys to Jihad', p.17.
[185] Berger. *Jihad Joe,* p.8.
[186] Ibidem.
[187] Burke. *Al-Qaeda*, p.101.
[188] Idem, p.102; Berger, *Jihad Joe,* p.9.

recruited other Americans to fight in Bosnia. In 1996, he was convicted for plotting terrorist attacks against New York together with Omar Abdel Rahman.[189]

5.1.4 The aftermath

What happened to these foreign fighters after the last Soviet officer returned to the Soviet Union in February 1989? According to Azzam's rhetoric on the defensive jihad, it was time to go home: the oppressor had been defeated. Reality, however, showed a far more mixed and highly complicated picture. First of all, while the withdrawal of the Soviet Union signalled the end of the Soviet-Afghan war, it was not the end of the fighting itself. Although it was expected that the withdrawal would soon also lead to the fall of the Soviet supported Najibullah regime, it was only in 1992 that Kabul fell into the hands of different mujahideen groups.[190] According to Malet, the ten years that followed did not result in a decline in transnational insurgent activity. On the contrary, around 6,000 new foreign fighters arrived between 1987 and 1993, more than twice the number that fought the Soviets.[191] However, according to Burke, the jihad was over for Bin Laden in the first months of 1990, mainly caused by splits in the mujahideen movement about what would be the new course of action.[192] The face of the jihad also changed with the assassination of Azzam in 1989.

On the one hand, these post-Soviet years were characterised by disputes and very different ideas about the (legitimate and desired) goals, strategies and tactics within the Arab-Afghan mujahideen movement. On the other hand, these years would also be remembered for the birth of what became known as 'Al Qaeda'. Burke explains that Al Qaeda - meaning 'the base' - was envisioned by Abdullah Azzam not as a real organisation, but more as a vanguard, a base consisting of individuals who would lead the fight for the revival of the Islamic world.[193] Bin Laden, however, saw it as an opportunity to establish a militant group that would overcome all internal divisions. The formation of this Al Qaeda, this base, was not much more than a number of individuals who swore *bayat* – the oath of allegiance – to the person of Bin Laden.[194]

So the end of the Soviet invasion coincided with and partly caused the determination of a number of foreign fighters to establish a base from which to continue activities, although it was not clear what this would imply. This only applied to a small number of trusted individuals who were close to Bin Laden and his affiliates and certainly not to the majority of fighters. A significant number of foreign fighters returned home: some were satisfied with the result while others were disillusioned because of the increased in-fighting and divisions in the first years of the civil war. However, also many stayed: some because they wanted to continue the jihad while others simply stayed because they could not return home. Many were afraid to be arrested, incarcerated or

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[189] Rosenau and Daly. 'American Journeys to Jihad', p.18.
[190] Malet. *Foreign Fighters,* p.182.
[191] Idem, p.183.
[192] Burke. *Al-Qaeda*, p.82.
[193] Idem, p.3.
[194] Burke. *Al-Qaeda,* p.4.

executed by their governments.[195] According to Burke, not many of them were actually fighting in the years after 1989: only 250 foreign fighters helped to capture the city of Khost in the important battle of 1991. Many fighters wanted to continue the jihad somewhere else or were involved in plots against a new enemy: the United States.[196]

Berger indeed reports a number of cases of Afghanistan veterans involved in radical or even terrorist activity in and against the United States. Most of these returned fighters featured in the book of Berger played a role in recruiting new fighters. It is important to note that Berger only reports about a small number of returned Afghan veterans: while conducting research for his book, Berger looked at thirty cases of Americans who went to Afghanistan while he estimates that at least hundred-fifty went there.[197] Of these thirty cases, only a small number are reported to have returned to the United States. Thus, the reported cases are probably not a good reflection of the 'average' American Muslim foreign fighter: the cases that are well-documented are probably the most extraordinary ones because there is perhaps not a lot to write about foreign fighters who went home and continued their pre-departure life. This is not to say that Berger deliberately distorted the picture: most of his data comes from court proceedings and interviews with officials, experts and jihadists. These will mostly be focused on the most dangerous or persuasive cases.

These cases do exist: an example is the earlier mentioned Clement Hampton-El who was one of the key figures of the 1993 World Trade Center Bombing. Another example is Wadih El Hage, a Lebanese convert who moved to the United States. El Hage went to Afghanistan on numerous occasions although, according to Berger, he never fought because of a deformed arm. In 2001, he was convicted for his role in the 1998 United States Embassy Bombings.[198] A final example is that of Daniel Boyd, a convert from North Carolina who spent about three years in Afghanistan. When he returned, Berger notes that 'outwardly he seemed to resume a normal life (but) he was quietly raising a family inculcated with his strict, militaristic reading of Islam, stocking his home with weapons and ammunition for what he saw as his inevitable return to jihad'.[199] Berger turned out to be correct: in 2012, Boyd was convicted for recruiting both his sons to fight the jihad and for conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists and conspiracy to commit murder, maiming and kidnapping overseas.[200]

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[195] Idem, p.103.
[196] Ibidem.
[197] Berger. *Jihad Joe,* p.8.
[198] United States of America v. Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, Mohamed Rashed Daoud Al-'Owhali, Wadih El Hage, 01-1535-cr(L), November 24, 2008, http://www.asser.nl/upload/documents/DomCLIC/Docs/NLP/US/Appeal_verdict_24-11-2008.pdf.
[199] Berger. *Jihad Joe,* p.22.
[200] U.S. Attorney's Office – Eastern District of North Caroline. *North Carolina Resident Daniel Patrick Boyd Sentenced for Terrorism Violations,* http://www.fbi.gov/charlotte/press-releases/2012/north-carolina-resident-daniel-patrick-boyd-sentenced-for-terrorism-violations, August 24, 2012.

While these examples prove that a number of foreign fighters from Afghanistan indeed returned and, in some cases, posed a threat to their country, perhaps the most dangerous individuals stayed in Afghanistan or continued their fight elsewhere, mostly in Bosnia.

5.2 Bosnia

The events in Bosnia, or to be more precise, in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina which came into existence in March 1992 after a referendum confirmed its independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, can only be understood by starting, again, in Afghanistan. Evan Kohlmann, the most important author regarding the mujahideen in Bosnia, claimed in 2004 that Bosnia is the key to understand the current jihadist movement. He explained that the reason why Al Qaeda gained so much foot in Europe and the United States can be found in Bosnia. Bosnia is the place where 'the cream of the Arab-Afghans tested their battle skills in the post-Soviet era and mobilized a new generation of hardened guerrilla zealots with only two unswerving priorities: armed combat and Islamic fundamentalism'.[201]

5.2.1 A gift from heaven

After Afghanistan, many veterans were looking for a new theatre to fight the jihad. Many of them thought Bosnia to be a suitable location. This was also the first time a large amount of Western mujahideen participated in a conflict although their number remained extremely low compared to other foreign fighters that came to Bosnia. Thus, analysing the importance of Western foreign fighters in Bosnia can only be done by analysing the total foreign fighter presence.

Kohlmann's book shows how the Bosnian mujahideen movement was founded on the legacy and experience of the jihad in Afghanistan. Without Afghanistan, the mujahideen movement in Bosnia might have never reached its size and importance. However, without Bosnia, the future of jihadist-inspired terrorism might, in turn, have been very bleak compared to what it was able to reach in the ten subsequent years. The war in Bosnia was in many aspects a godsend to the jihadist movement. In the final years of the war in Afghanistan, the mujahideen were increasingly paralysed by internal struggles. The leaders of different Afghan factions got into severe struggles and after the Soviet Union was defeated these groups started killing each other, leaving as much as 40,000 people dead according to some estimates.[202]

But also within the Arab-Afghan movement, which never was a real unified movement, disputes about the future of the jihad sowed division. Exemplary of this was the ever-growing rift between Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abdullah Azzam. After the Soviets had left Afghanistan, the

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[201] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, Idem, p.xiii.
[202] Mohammed M. Hafez. 'Jihad after Iraq: lessons from the Arab Afghans', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* vol. 32, no.2 (2009), pp.73-94, p.83.

raison d'être of the mujahideen movement was at stake: should it disband, should it move to other places where Muslims were being attacked or should it direct its efforts at a worldwide jihad? Azzam's focus was clearly on the traditional, defensive jihad. His aim was to establish a base (in Arabic: *al-qaeda*) from which to launch a liberation struggle to free the 'periphery of the Muslim world, such as the Philippines, central Asia, Kashmir, and of course, Palestine'.[203] Al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden and their affiliates, on the other hand, wanted to turn the jihad into a truly global activity.[204]

As explained by Gerges, the Egyptians led by al-Zawahiri – the current leader of Al Qaeda – played a pivotal role in the founding of the jihadist movement.[205] Even when in Afghanistan, they were dreaming of overthrowing the secular regime of Hosni Mubarak, an example of what they saw as an apostate leader. Azzam fiercely disagreed with this idea which had been propagated by Faraj and the practice of *takfir* – declaring another Muslim a *kafir*, unbeliever – saying that a Muslim government should not be targeted.[206] In 1989, Azzam was killed in Peshawar, Pakistan, and although his murder remains unsolved, various authors point to possible involvement of Egyptian jihadists in the plot.[207]

On top of these internal struggles, the external support for the mujahideen in Afghanistan was clearly deteriorating. In the beginning of 1993, the Pakistani government ordered all foreign fighters to leave the country and to close all the offices and training camps.[208] According to Kohlmann '[t]hese displaced men faced a serious problem, because return to their countries of origin meant certain arrest, torture, and likely death'.[209]

The struggle in Bosnia formed a new rallying point for the mujahideen. The situation in Bosnia was another clear-cut example of a defensive jihad. The following statement of Abu Abdel Aziz 'Barbaros' – also known as Abdel Rahman al Dosari – an Afghanistan veteran and one of the key commanders of the mujahideen in Bosnia exemplifies the importance of Bosnia. When interviewed by Tawfiq Tabib of the (Islamist) newsletter *Al-Sirat Al-Mustaqeem* (The Straight Path)*,* Barbaros explained how the mujahideen came to Bosnia:

> Then the conquest of Kabul came, and we thanked Allah, praised be He. The joy of Jihad overwhelmed our hearts. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "The highest peak of Islam is Jihad." We were looking for Jihad (after Afghanistan). We found it in the Philippines, and in Kashmir. Only fifteen days lapsed (after the conquest of Kabul) and the crisis of Bosnia begun. This confirmed the saying of the Prophet (of Islam), peace and blessings be upon him, who said, "Indeed Jihad will continue till the day of Judgment." A new Jihad started in Bosnia, (we moved there), and we are with it, if Allah wills.[210]

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[203] Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*, p.36.
[204] UNITED STATES OF AMERICA v. ENAAM M. Arnaout, Government's Evidentiary Proffer Supporting The Admissibility Of Coconspirator Statements, No. 02 CR 892.
[205] Gerges. *The Far Enemy,* pp.87-89.
[206] Sageman.*Understanding Terror Networks,* p.36.
[207] Idem, p.37; Gerges. *The Far Enemy,* p.137.
[208] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.16.
[209] Ibidem.
[210] Tawfiq Tabib. 'Interview with Sheikh al-Mujahideen Abu Abdel Aziz', *Al-Sirat Al-Mustaqeem* (The Straight Path), August 1994, reprinted at http://caravansofmartyrs.atspace.com/html/Abu_Abdel-Aziz.htm.

This statement of Barbaros confirms the idea that the conflict in Bosnia came at the right time for the mujahideen in Afghanistan.

Clearly, a significant amount of the foreign fighters in Afghanistan had no intention whatsoever to return to their country of origin. Many fighters, such as Aziz, claimed their life had changed drastically after they encountered the path of jihad. It is not easy and perhaps not desirable to leave this path. As shown by Kohlmann, there are practical reasons for this, such as the problems foreign fighters face when they want to return to their country. Aziz' words, however, showed that many of the mujahideen were actually looking for jihad.

The situation in Bosnia fitted all the requirements of a defensive jihad that could solve ideological disputes and could help to restore the image of the mujahideen which had been tarnished by the chaos in Afghanistan. In the interview, Aziz agreed that '(w)hat is happening (today) in Kabul is erroneous'. Notwithstanding, the practice and necessity of jihad was beyond any doubts. Aziz explained he went to Bosnia himself to see what was really happening there. When there, he saw how Muslims were persecuted only because of their religion, saying that 'the Christians took advantage of the fact that the Muslims were defenceless with no arms. They recalled their age-old hatred'.[211]

The ideological framing of the conflict in Bosnia can be seen in an interview of Kohlmann with Abu Hamza al-Masri, the famous Egyptian-born cleric who has become one of the most radical clerics in the United Kingdom connected to the Finsbury Mosque in 'Londonistan' upon returning from Afghanistan.[212] Al-Masri explained how Bosnia was – in the eyes of many Muslims – an indisputable example of a struggle between good and evil:

> People are dedicated to the [religion] . . . They went to Afghanistan to defend their brothers and sisters. So, they find Afghanistan now, the destruction of war and Muslims fighting against each other. (...) they want to [struggle against] something that is indisputable, which is non-Muslims raping, killing, and maiming Muslims.[213]

This notion of a defensive jihad or a struggle between good and evil that was seen in Afghanistan, now applied to Bosnia and would remain so in future conflicts such as Syria. This type of conflicts forms the ideal rallying point for (future) mujahideen; it is highly effective in attracting foreign volunteers who want to die for the good cause. So far, however, the emphasis has been placed on the leading figures in the mujahideen movements. These individuals were certainly aware of the recruitment potential of the conflict in Bosnia and, more worrisome, the potential function of the conflict as a base to launch attacks against infidels outside the conflict zone: the

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[211] Tabib. 'Interview with Sheikh al-Mujahideen Abu Abdel Aziz'.
[212] Londonistan refers to London as a center of radical Islamic activity in Europe. London hosted (and still hosts) a number of individuals who Mohammed Hafez calls 'facilitators' of the global jihad, see Hafez, 'Jihad after Iraq: lessons from the Arab Afghans'.
[213] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.27.

Americans and Europeans. The mujahideen and Al Qaeda leadership made a very calculated decision to move to Bosnia and had more plans than just liberating the 'Bosniaks' (the Bosnian Muslims).

5.2.2 El Mujahid

The number of foreign fighters who came to Bosnia is estimated to be as much as 5,000.[214] The first fighters who arrived mainly joined the Bosnian civil defense forces. Although they were very enthusiastic and motivated to fight, they generally lacked any significant military experience and were therefore not very successful.[215] Kohlmann depicts these first arrivals as essentially driven by chivalrous notions of helping the oppressed. This stands in strong contrast with the second wave of arrivals: the Arab-Afghan commanders who entered the country in 1992. These 'young men, galvanized by hateful religious and political ideologies, were determined to turn the global tide against the 'infidel' regimes'.[216]

Starting the jihad in Bosnia and attracting thousands of mujahideen was an essential strategy of Al Qaeda that originated everywhere but in Bosnia itself. Al Qaeda, exiled in the Sudan after the Pakistani government ceased its support in 1992, sent several members on exploration missions to Bosnia to see if it could have some strategic importance. And it surely did. Abu Abdel Aziz Barbaros, also known as Abdel Rahman al Dosari, who would become one of the most important military commanders in Bosnia, had a plan with Bosnia: he explained that Al Qaeda could establish a base in Bosnia for operations in Europe against its real enemy: the United States.[217] This view was shared by many in Al Qaeda, including Bin Laden, who were increasingly focusing their attention to the United States as the real enemy.[218]

After Bosnia was deemed suitable, jihad camps were set up in Zenica and Mehurici. The foreign fighters were incorporated into the regular Bosnian army as a separate battalion linked to the seventh battalion of the Bosnian Armed Forces. This unit "El Mudžahid" or El Mujahid became known for its ruthless behaviour such as demolishing Catholic churches and committing indiscriminate killings. At one point, in 1993, the mujahideen encountered a school where 231 Croat civilian refugees were hiding. If the local Bosnian army guards had not interfered, the fighters would have killed all of these civilians it had taken hostage without any reason.[219]

Tensions between the local Muslim population and the mujahideen also increased: as in Afghanistan, the mujahideen abhorred the local Muslim population who they thought to be impious Muslims. While initially, the Bosniaks were happy with the support of their Muslim brothers, this

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[214] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe,* p.xii.
[215] Idem, p.16.
[216] Ibidem.
[217] United States of America V. Enaam M. Arnaout, Government's Evidentiary Proffer Supporting the Admissibility of Coconspirator Statements, No. 02 CR 892, p.24.
[218] United States of America V. Enaam M. Arnaout, Government's Evidentiary Proffer Supporting the Admissibility of Coconspirator Statements. p.25.
[219] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.85.

soon began to change. In 1993, the Bosnian army tried to ban all the reckless behaviour displayed by the mujahideen. The latter continued looting and were responsible for many horrendous atrocities, such as the decapitation and mutilation of both soldiers and civilians.[220] A deputy commander of the Bosnian Army, Colonel Stjepan Siber, told the Western press that:

> It was a mistake to let [the *mujahideen*] in here. No one asked them to come. They commit most of the atrocities and work against the interests of the Muslim people. They have been killing, looting and stealing. They are not under the control of the Bosnian army and they must go. We hope that in the next few days President Izetbegovic will order them out.[221]

However, the mujahideen had no intention whatsoever to leave the country. As in Afghanistan, their battlefield accomplishments stood in stark contrast to their reputation and the attention they were able to generate. It was not until 1995 that these foreign fighters actually won any significant victories. These few important battles nonetheless contributed to their legacy.[222] The Dayton Agreement which officially ended the conflict did not signal the end of the mujahideen's violence. When it started to become clear that the war was going to end, some of the mujahideen leaders were working on plans to attack NATO forces that would be sent to Bosnia to enforce peace.[223] In October 1995, a suicide bomber destroyed the police headquarters in the Croatian port town of Rijeka in retaliation to the arrest of Abu Talal, one of al-Gama al-Islamiyya's leaders, by the Croatian authorities.[224] The perpetrator with a Canadian passport, John Fawzan, thereby got the 'dubious distinction of carrying out the first successful suicide operation in Europe on behalf of an Islamist organisation'.[225]

    The court proceedings of Enaam Arnaout, a key person in the logistical and organisational aspects of supporting the mujahideen's struggle, give a lot of insight into the process of establishing mujahideen bases in Bosnia. Already during the war in Afghanistan, financial and logistical assistance was given to the fighters by organisations that were disguised under the cover of humanitarian aid. In 1987, the *Lajnat Al-Birr Al-Islamiah* (Islamic Benevolence Committee or LIB) was founded in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to raise funds for the mujahideen, help them with their immigration status and provide cover to travel.[226] In 1993, Arnaout became director of the renamed LIB - the now called "Benevolence International Foundation" (BIF) – and opened offices in Pakistan, Azerbaijan and Bosnia-Herzegovina.[227] Prior to obtaining this position, Arnaout had been director of communications in the Al Masada mujahideen camp in Afghanistan and had been

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[220] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.86.
[221] Idem, p.90.
[222] Idem, p.125.
[223] Idem, p.153.
[224] Idem, p.152.
[225] Michael Taarnby Jensen. *Jihad in Denmark: An Overview and Anaysis of Jihadi Activity in Denmark 1990-2006¸* Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Working Paper no 2006/35, p.18.
[226] United States of America v. Enaam M. Arnout, No. 02 CR 892, United States District Court Northen District of Illinois – Eastern Divison, p.3.
[227] Idem, p.4.

responsible for purchasing rockets and other types of ammunition that had to be distributed to different mujahideen camps, some operated by the organisation Hezb-e Islami of Hekmatyar and some by Bin Laden and Azzam.[228]

While the LIB and later BIF always claimed to be an organisation purely established to help civilians, its main activities were clearly benefiting Al Qaeda. For instance, BIF opened offices in Chechnya around 1995 to support the mujahideen. During this time, it frequently collected money to buy winter shoes for the civilian population, while in reality this money was spent on anti-mine boots for the mujahideen.[229]

5.2.3 Western fighters – the importance of firebrand clerics

The great majority of foreign fighters arriving in Bosnia was of Arab origin. Of this group, the Arab-Afghans had a very important role to play as seasoned fighters. But the conflict was able to attract foreign fighters from other parts of the world as well. Some of these were young Western boys with no prior fighting experience at all. How did they end up in Bosnia? There seem to be two types of Western foreign fighters: the first were 'self-made' foreign fighters who were outraged by the images and stories of the conflict and found a way to come into contact with the right persons to go to Bosnia. The other type of foreign fighter had already been part or became part of a radical Islamist group in the country where he, often together with friends, was stimulated or recruited to fight. The second type of foreign fighters seemed to have dominated the conflict in Bosnia.

Especially important in this regard were firebrand clerics throughout Europe. Marc Sageman names a number of mosques that were focal points of this support for the jihad: The London-based Finsbury Park and the Baker Street mosques led by Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada, the 'Islamic Cultural Center [sic]' in Milan led by Anwar Shaban, the Abu Bakr mosque under Imam Eddin Barakat Yarkas in Madrid, the al-Dawah mosque in Roubaix (France), the Assuna Annabawiyah mosque in Montreal and the Al-Faruq mosque in Brooklyn.[230] He then explains how these mosques formed ideal places for young Muslims to meet and be introduced to the global Salafi jihad scene. Sageman explains how social bonds play a leading role in facilitating radicalisation.[231]

5.2.3.1 The Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan

A key recruiting centre for the jihad in Bosnia was the Islamic Cultural Institute (ICI) in Milan. According to Lorenzo Vidino, only London's Finsbury Park mosque can claim to be as important

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[228] United States of America v. Enaam M. Arnout, No. 02 CR 892, United States District Court Northen District of Illinois – Eastern Divison, p.5.
[229] United States of America V. Enaam M. Arnaout, Government's Evidentiary Proffer Supporting the Admissibility of Coconspirator Statements, No. 02 CR 892, p.26.
[230] Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks,* p.114.
[231] Idem, p.120.

for Islamic radicalism in Europe.[232] The ICI, founded in 1989, was known to Italian intelligence agencies because it also functioned as the European headquarters of the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya which tried to overthrow the Egyptian government.[233]

The importance of this centre in the Bosnian jihad can mainly be attributed to its charismatic imam: Anwar Shabaan. Shabaan became the commander of the Mujahideen Battalion and was together with Aziz responsible for much of the organisation of foreign fighters. According to Kohlmann, Shabaan was 'personally responsible for arranging the training of hundreds (potentially thousands) of Al-Qaida recruits from Europe'.[234] Shabaan did not limit his recruitment efforts to Bosnia but also sent people to Afghanistan: one well-known example is L'Houssaine Kherchtou, a Moroccan immigrant who fought in Afghanistan and joined Al Qaeda. Kherchtou later testified in the same court as Essam al-Ridi against Osama bin Laden. He explained how Shabaan arranged a visa for him and a friend to travel to Pakistan.[235] In Milan, radical sermons incited young people to travel to Bosnia. The mosque transformed from mainly an Egyptian dominated network to a truly international centre through the arrival of militants from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.[236] The centre also had close ties to the network of Abu Doha in London.

5.2.3.2 Madrid – Soldiers of Allah

Another important recruiting centre in Europe was Madrid. In 1994, a group called "Soldiers of Allah" was formed, operating from the Abu Bakr mosque in Madrid. This group had contacts with the Algerian groups Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) and Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), Hamas, Al Qaeda and other radical organisations.[237] One of the tasks of the group was to care for wounded mujahideen and provide them sanctuary in rural Spain. In 1995, the Soldiers of Allah were led by the Spanish-Syrian Imam Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas, better known as Abu Dahdah. Dahdah recruited several Muslims to fight in Bosnia, where they were brought into contact with Mustafa Setmarian Nasar, better known as Abu Musab al-Suri.[238] Al-Suri was a Spanish-Syrian just like Dahdah and an Afghanistan veteran who later published a 1600-pages long work called 'Call to Global Islamic Resistance'.[239] Al-Suri has been typified by M.W. Zackie as 'al-Qaida's leading theoretician and strategic thinker; he is particularly credited for being its post 9/11 principal architect' because he propagated a more individualised, less-sophisticated form of jihad.[240] Dahdah

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[232] Vidino. *Al Qaeda in Europe*, p.217.
[233] Ibidem.
[234] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.21.
[235] USA v Usama bin Laden, 21 February 2001 Source: Digital file from the Court Reporters Office, Southern District of New York; (212) 805-0300, http://cryptome.org/usa-v-ubl-dt.htm.
[236] Vidino. *Al Qaeda in Europe,* p.219
[237] Rohan Gunaratna. *Spain: An Al Qaeda Hub?* UNISCI Discussion Paper, May 2004, p.2.
[238] Gunaratna. *Spain: An Al Qaeda Hub?,* p.3.
[239] M.W. Zackie. 'An Analysis of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's "Call to Global Islamic Resistance"', *Journal of Strategic Security* vol. 6, no.1 (2013), pp.1-18, p.1.
[240] Zackie. 'An Analysis of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's "Call to Global Islamic Resistance"', p.1.

also frequently spoke to Omar Mahmoud Othman, better known as Abu Qatada, who is often seen as Al Qaeda's 'spiritual ambassador to Europe'.[241] It has been said that Dahdah met Abu Qatada no less than seventeen times in five years.[242] He travelled around many European countries and was appreciated by the Al Qaeda leadership, including Bin Laden, who gave him more than 17,000 euro for his activities in Madrid.[243] It was only in 2001 that the members of the Abu Dahdah network, including the man himself, were arrested. An interesting fact as reported by Javier Jordan and Nicole Horsburgh is that the network of Abu Dahdah tried to arrange residence permits for former mujahideen by employing them at a construction company. Dahdah, well-informed of all the immigration legislation, tried to help those who needed a new life.[244] While the Abu Dahdah network disintegrated after a wave of arrests in 2001, some of its members such as Amer Azizi and Said Berraj were involved in the 2004 Madrid Bombings.[245] It is important to note, however, that these members of the new Madrid cell, which came into existence after 2001, had no personal link to the jihad in Bosnia.

5.2.3.3 London

A last key centre that needs to be mentioned is London. London was home to two very important charismatic individuals: Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza al-Masri. The Jordanian Abu Qatada, born Omar Mahmoud Othman, applied for asylum in the United Kingdom in 1993. He had close contacts with Abu Musab al-Suri and gave lectures at home. He was, however, most famous for his sermons at The Four Feather Youth Club, better known as the Baker Street Mosque.[246] Although Qatada himself denied any links to Al Qaeda, he is often called the spiritual counsellor of Mohammed Atta and it has been proven that he had extensive links to Afghan veterans and helped recruiting for the jihad.[247] Qatada would also become known for his links to many militants residing in Britain, such as Djamel Beghal, Nizar Trabelsi, Kamel Daoudi and Zacharias Moussaoui.[248]

More important than Abu Qatada for the fight in Bosnia was Abu Hamza al-Masri who was born in Egypt and arrived in London in 1979. During his *Hajj* (pilgrimage) in 1987, he met Azzam, and a few years later he moved to Afghanistan. There he was allegedly a bomb maker in the Derunta camp, where he lost both his hands and an eye, hence his nickname "Captain Hook".[249] Initially starting as a pupil of Abu Qatada, al-Masri soon formed the Supporters of Shariah (SoS)

[241] Vidino. *Al Qaeda in Europe*, p.138.
[242] Javier Jordan and Nicola Horsburgh. 'Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol.28, no. 3 (2005), pp.169-191, p.176.
[243] Gunaratna. *Spain: An Al Qaeda Hub?*, p.3.
[244] Jordan and Horsburgh. 'Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain', p.178.
[245] Idem, p.183.
[246] Petter Nesser. 'Ideologies of Jihad in Europe', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 23, no.2 (2011), pp.173-200, p.191.
[247] Gerges. *The Far Enemy*, p.223.
[248] Egerton. *Jihad in Europe¸* p.150.
[249] Nesser. 'Ideologies of Jihad in Europe', *Terrorism and Political Violence,* p.192.

which now has many branches across Europe. In 1995, he travelled to Bosnia. Upon returning, he became the imam of the Finsbury Park Mosque, where he also aligned himself with the Algerian GIA.[250] He has been arrested on multiple occasions and has been convicted for soliciting to murder, incitement of racial hatred and possessing a terrorist encyclopaedia.[251] The Finsbury Park Mosque, like the one on Baker Street, has a number of infamous visitors, including Richard Reid, Zacarias Moussaoui, Kamel Bourgass, Feroz Abbas, Abu Doha, Rabah Kadre, Djamel Beghal and Nizar Trabelsi.[252] Al-Masri has been a ferocious supporter of the violent jihad. His sermons consistently called upon Muslims to fight the jihad, in Kashmir, Chechnya, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia or even in their own countries.[253]

According to 'Omar Nasiri', the pseudonym used by a Moroccan-Belgian former jihadist who claimed to have been in Al Qaeda training camps while he was simultaneously functioning as a spy for the French secret service (Direction Genérale de la Sécurite Extérieure, DGSE), it has been estimated that as much as fifty men from the Finsbury mosque died in conflicts abroad. Nasiri claims that '(i)ndividuals were sent to Afghanistan with plane tickets, money, and letters of introduction from Abu Hamza'.[254] One example given is Jerome Courtailler who would later become involved in the Beghal network.

Although London was already a key centre of militant activity in Europe, both clerics became most notorious for their activities after the conflict in Bosnia had ended, and probably mainly inspired a post-Bosnia generation of militants.

5.2.4 And then?

When the Dayton Agreement was signed and frontline combat had ended in September 1995, the question surfaced what to do with all these foreign fighters who were still present. The fighters were very hostile towards the Western peacekeepers who had arrived.[255] The Dayton Agreement in fact mandated all foreign fighters to leave Bosnia within thirty days after the UN troops had arrived. There were at least hundreds – estimates range from 400 to 3,000 – mujahideen present around Zenica. To circumvent this issue, the Bosnian government decided to issue thousands of passports, birth certificates and other documents that provided the Bosnian nationality to these foreign fighters so they were able to stay.[256]

At this point, the foreign fighters could choose what to do. According to Kohlmann, many foreign fighters left Bosnia once the fighting ceased, including a number of British, but there were also a number of 'die-hards' who felt betrayed by the Dayton Accord and wanted to continue

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[250] Idem, p.192.
[251] Egerton. *Jihad in Europe*, p.145.
[252] Idem, p.145.
[253] Idem, p.147.
[254] Omar Nasiri. *Inside the Global Jihad: How I Infiltrated Al Qaeda and Was Abandoned by Western Intelligence*, London: Hurst & Company, 2006. p.xviii.
[255] Kohlmann. *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, p.158.
[256] Idem, p.163.

fighting the jihad.[257] An example was the 18 years-old British honours student Sayyad al-Falastine who refused to leave and was angry at the stance taken by some of the mujahideen. He asked: '(w)hy are we all lost? Look at the [infidels]. Are they thinking of us and then they are laughing because they have their own state. But look at us, the Muslims, we do not even have a state yet but we continue to laugh!'.[258] A few weeks later, he died in a failed suicide attack aimed at a Croatian target.

The exact number of foreign fighters present in Bosnia remains hard to assess. According to Karmen Erjavec, Bosnian sources reported the presence of three thousand foreign combatants in Bosnia.[259] It is estimated that around one thousand - around a third - remained in Bosnia after the war.[260] However, in the years after the conflict and especially after the attacks on 9/11, the pressure on the Bosnian authorities to expatriate these fighters increased. Bosnia would be regarded as a springboard for terrorist activities in the West.[261]

After the attacks on 9/11, a crackdown on militant activity was seen throughout Europe. In Bosnia, this led the Bosnian government to revoke a number of citizenships that it had offered to former mujahideen: a hundred citizenships were revoked in October 2001 and another 41 in 2002. But the hardest blow came in 2005 when the Bosnian Herzegovina State Commission for the Revision of Decisions on Naturalization of Foreign Citizens decided to revoke more than a thousand citizenships.[262] Although this action was not said to be linked to any demographic factor, most individuals were Muslims of Arab or Arab African origin.[263]

As happened after Afghanistan, some of the foreign fighters who went to Bosnia later became implicated in terrorist activity in the West. Perhaps the most well-known case is Andrew Rowe, a British-Jamaican who fought in Bosnia. Bosnia was not the only place where Rowe fought: he is suspected to have travelled to Afghanistan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco.[264] Rowe was arrested in 2003 on the French side of the Channel tunnel with traces of high explosives in his socks. He was sentenced to a 15 year jail sentence after police found a guide on firing battlefield weapons and videos of 9/11 and Osama bin Laden in his apartment.[265] Police also investigated his links to the French Lionel Dumont.

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[257] Idem, p.165.

[258] Ibidem.

[259] Karmen Erjavec. 'The "Bosnian war on terrorism"', *Journal of Language and Politics,* vol. 8, no.1 (2009), pp.5-27, pp.7-8.

[260] Erjavec. 'The "Bosnian war on terrorism"', pp.7-8; Jennifer Mustapha. 'The Mujahideen in Bosnia: the foreign fighter as cosmopolitan citizen and/or terrorist', *Citizenship Studies* (2013), pp.1-14. Mustapha Speaks of numbers between 600 and 3,000.

[261] Erjavec. 'The "Bosnian war on terrorism"', p.8.

[262] Ibidem.

[263] Mustapha. 'The Mujahideen in Bosnia', p.8.

[264] Egerton. *Jihad in the West,* p.121.

[265] Hugh Muir. 'British Muslim convert jailed for terrorism offences', September 24, 2005, http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/24/terrorism.politics.

Dumont, a convert like Rowe, also went to Bosnia to fight. Just like Rowe, Dumont did not immediately return home but met with Islamist radicals in at least ten countries.[266] With the help of another Bosnia fighter, Christophe Caze, also a French convert, they set up the so-called Roubaix Gang. The other members of the network were Algerians who had convinced Dumont and Caze of the necessity to attack French targets because of the events in Algeria. In 1996, the members of the group placed a car-bomb near the meeting place of the G7 (Group of Seven industrialised nations) but the police disabled it and arrested the members.[267]

The great majority of foreign fighters however probably did not return home to take part in a terrorist attack. As described by Erjavec and Mustapha, almost a third of the foreign fighters stayed in Bosnia after the Dayton Agreement as naturalised Bosnian citizens. An example is given by Berger. Abdullah Ali, born as Clevin Holt, an African American raised in Washington DC, was actually not only a Bosnia veteran but he was also one of the Americans who fought in Afghanistan in 1980. After his experience in Afghanistan, Ali returned to the United States where he led a ordinary life. When he saw the atrocities in Bosnia, more than ten years later, he decided to leave again and help. Ali explained that 'I'm not a terrorist, I'm not an aggressor, I'm not a war junkie. I didn't think I was coming here like the savior of the world. I just wanted to be part of what was taking place here, and to show that they were not alone. And for them to know that they weren't forgotten'.[268] Despite other statements, which pointed more towards a personal desire for violence, Ali settled down in Bosnia after the Dayton Agreement where he now lives with his family while he still frequently visits the United States.[269]

While the story of Ali is a bit atypical, Berger explained that the Western attitude towards the conflict in Bosnia actually 'opened up the pool of recruits to a much wider range of American Muslims, some of whom did not share the rabid anti-Americanism of ideologues such as Omar Abdel Rahman. They saw no conflict between being an American and helping Bosnian Muslims'.[270] Another example of an American who eventually settled down in Bosnia is Ismail Royer, a convert just like Ali. Royer claimed to have never seen any atrocities being committed in Bosnia, a testimony that is not very plausible. Years later, in 2001, Royer was the civil rights coordinator for the Council on American-Islamic Relations. After the attacks on 9/11, Royer immediately issued a press release condemning the terrorist attacks.[271]

However, Berger also showed some examples of Americans who were indeed implicated in terrorist activity. Telling in this sense is the example of Christopher Paul, another convert, who would become known as 'Abdul Malek Kenyatta'. After travelling to Pakistan where he met

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[266] Egerton. *Jihad in the West,* p.121.
[267] Nessser. 'Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994-2007', p.929.
[268] Berger. *Jihad Joe,* p.89.
[269] Idem, p.90.
[270] Ibidem.
[271] Idem, p.130.

several Al Qaeda members, Kenyatta fought in Bosnia. In 2008, he was convicted for providing explosives training to a terrorist network in Germany 'in order to assist them in preparing to conduct attacks using explosives on targets in Europe and in the United States'.[272]

Again, this shows a mixed picture. The main difference with Afghanistan is that a lot of the Arab-Afghans would continue to fight in Bosnia, while it seems that most Bosnia veterans ceased fighting. At that time, there was no new conflict with the same ingredients as Bosnia and Afghanistan: the ideological ingredients to fulfil the requirements of the defensive jihad but also the international allure of a conflict that could attract foreigners. The images of the oppressed in Afghanistan and Bosnia reached into the living rooms of Muslims across the world and was therefore more alive to them than other conflicts.

However, another factor that should not be overlooked is the willingness of the local population and fighters to be assisted by outsiders. The conflict in Chechnya that started in 1994 was only able to attract the most dedicated jihadists: partly because it was a less popular destination but also because foreign fighters were refused access. As written in the 9/11 Commission Report, a number of the 9/11 Saudi hijackers tried to enter Chechnya but were not allowed into the country because the local fighters did not want inexperienced fighters who they deemed unable to adapt to the harsh local circumstances.[273]

Thus, the next chapter will not examine the situation in Chechnya but will look at a conflict in which some foreign fighters were able to get very important positions: Somalia.

5.3 Somalia

While the conflicts in Afghanistan and Bosnia had counted on a global audience watching the events unravel on a daily basis, being in the international spotlights has been no prerequisite to attract a significant amount of foreign fighters. One country to which hundreds of Americans and Europeans flocked was war-torn Somalia. This country has been described by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross as having suffered from colonialism, dictatorship, famine, civil war, piracy, regional fragmentation and, finally, global jihadism with its most recent proponent: Al Shabaab.[274] Al Shabaab, or 'The Youth', is a close affiliate of Al Qaeda, having vowed allegiance to Bin Laden and, more recently, Ayman al-Zawahiri.[275] When the dictatorial regime of Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991, the country slipped into total chaos and has not fully recovered since. The

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[272] USA v. Christopher Paul, The United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio: Eastern Division. 2:07cr:87, Indictment, April 11, 2007, http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/585.pdf/.
[273] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004, p.233.
[274] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross. 'The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab: Dimensions of Jihad', *Middle East Quarterly,* vol.XVI, no.4 (2009), pp.25-36, p.25.
[275] David Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', *Orbis* vol. 55, no. 2 (2011), pp.203-215, p.207; 'Al-Shabaab Joining al-Qaeda, monitor group says', *CNN,* http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/09/world/africa/somalia-shabaab-qaeda/, February 10, 2012.

post-Barre period can best be described as a power vacuum, in which various groups tried to consolidate power without much success.[276]

Some of these groups had an Islamist agenda, aiming to implement Sharia law and turning the country into an Islamic state. This view was articulated by al Ittihad al Islami (Islamic Union, AIAI), whose leader Shayk Hassan Aweys was contacted by Al Qaeda's military wing commander Abu Hafs al Masri in 1993.[277] According to Vidino, Pantucci and Kohlmann, Al Qaeda subsequently trained a number of Somalis although this view is disputed by other scholars.[278] Nevertheless, it seems without doubt that there was indeed some sort of relationship between Al Qaeda and Islamist-oriented groups in Somalia. This view is shared by David Shinn who states that Abu Hafs created a team of Al Qaeda veterans to conduct operations, establishing three training camps in Somalia.[279] Al Qaeda thought this 'failed state' to be the perfect recruitment ground for local Somalis to fight the international peacekeeping forces that were arriving in 1992. However, according to Shinn, Al Qaeda terribly overestimated this potential. It was unfamiliar with Somalia's clan structure, frustrating efforts to form a unified coalition. Therefore, these attempts largely failed.[280] Almost ten years later, in 2000, the AIAI splintered into different groups, of which the most important would be the Islamic Court Union (ICU), composed of different militia and clerics whose aim was to end the chaos and diminish the power of local warlords while implementing a strict form of Sharia law.[281] Ethiopia, concerned by the rise to power of the ICU which was threatening the legitimacy of the Transitional Federal Government (TGF) - backed by the United Nations, the African Union and the Arab League - decided to intervene in 2006.[282]

Not surprisingly, the Ethiopian intervention reinvoked notions of the defensive jihad and formed another rallying cry for mujahideen to fight the infidels. Within days, Al-Qaeda indeed issued a response to these events. Al-Zawahiri was unambiguous in his interpretation:

> My Muslim brothers everywhere (...) While I am addressing you today, the crusader invading Ethiopian forces are violating the Islamic land of dear Somalia. (…) Here, I am urging the Islamic nation in Somalia to be steadfast in this new crusader battlefield, which America, its allies, and the United Nations are waging against Islam and Muslims.[283]

The conflict was certainly framed as a battle between Islam and its enemies whose main priority was to destroy the ummah. In Somalia, the Ethiopian troops quickly succeeded in removing the ICU from power. Shaykh Ahmed, the head of the ICU and at that time the Somali President, called

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[276] See Gartenstein-Ross. 'The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab'; Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia'.
[277] Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci and Evan Kohlmann. 'Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict', *African Security*, vol. 3, no.4 (2010), pp.216-238, p.218.
[278] Vidino et al. 'Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa', p.219.
[279] Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', p.205.
[280] Vidino et al. 'Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa'. p.220.
[281] Ibidem.
[282] Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', p.206.
[283] 'Excerpts: 'Al Qaeda' call to Somalis', *BBC News,* http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6233799.stm, January 5, 2007.

for an insurgency. In the following months, Al Shabaab emerged as the most violent split-off from the ICU.[284] Al Shabaab differed from its predecessor in its global outlook. While the ICU had always been preoccupied with establishing an Islamic state in Somalia, Al Shabaab's priorities reached farther, unambiguously endorsing the global jihad of Al Qaeda.

5.3.1 Western fighters – the United States and Canada

Al Shabaab has been highly successful in attracting foreign fighters from all over the world. In one particular aspect, these fighters are somewhat different from the foreign fighters in Bosnia and Afghanistan. Many foreign fighters who joined Al Shabaab were in fact members of the Somali Diaspora in the West. According to Vidino et al. the first wave of foreign fighters who went to Somalia after the Ethiopian invasion was mainly driven by '"traditional" nationalistic motives'.[285] According to Shinn, Al Shabaab is organised in three layers: the top leadership (qiyadah), the foreign fighters (muhajirin) and the local Somali fighters.[286] Foreign fighters hold important leadership positions in the organisation. Although Shinn's article was written only two years ago (2011), a great number of those fighters reported by the author have recently been killed.

Remarkably, many of them were killed by other Al Shabaab members. Ibrahim Jama "Al Afghani", a Somali who fought in Afghanistan, was killed in June 2013. Al Afghani succeeded Moktar Ali Zubeyr – better known as "Godane" - as top commander of Al Shabaab in December 2010 but was allegedly killed by him because he had criticised his leadership.[287] Another high-ranking figure in the organisation was Omar Hammami, also known as Abu Mansur al-Amriki. Hammami was killed in September 2013 by Al Shabaab members. His death came as no surprise because Hammami had been a vivid Twitter-user, 'tweeting' about internal rivalries in the organisation. In April 2013, he tweeted about an assassination attempt while he was sitting in a tea shop: 'Just been shot in the neck by shabab assassin. not critical yet'.[288] For months the entire world was able to follow Hammami and read about his struggles with Godane and the Al Shabaab-leadership. Hammami, a Syrian-American Christian convert from Alabama, was without doubt the most notorious Western foreign fighter, mainly because of his frequent appearances in the virtual world.

Although Hammami's (online) behaviour increasingly irritated many within Al Shabaab, he had also been a strategic asset for the organisation for years. Hammami, who converted to Islam

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[284] Gartenstein-Ross. 'The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab', p.25.

[285] It is estimated that there around one million Somalis living outside Somalia. See: 'Somalia's global diaspora', *Al Jazeera*, accessed on January 6th, 2014, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/somalias-global-diaspora-0022000; Vidino et al.'Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa', p.228.

[286] Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', p.209.

[287] 'Somali Shebab extremists kill two of their own chiefs: spokesman', *AFP*, June 29, 2013, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gM9Wk4gV0HvUOoCIOwzLKJ2PGXdA?docId=CNG.3d37aa6 0e57810b34cd41d8c96b39aff.4d1&hl=en.

[288] Twitter account, 'Abu American' https://twitter.com/abumamerican, April 25, 2013.
His Twitter-account has been verified as true by various scholars and journalists, including J.M. Berger. See J.M. Berger, 'Omar and Me: My strange, frustrating relationship with an American terrorist', *Foreign Policy,* September 18, 2013.

during high school, studied at the University of Southern Alabama. When graduated, he married a Somali woman and moved to Canada where he became increasingly occupied with more radical interpretations of Islam.[289] In the documentary "American Jihadi: Abu Mansour" in the TV-show Vanguard, journalist Christof Putzel interviews Hammami's high school friend Bernie Culveyhouse, who was inspired by Hammami to also convert to Islam.[290] Culveyhouse described how he and Hammami were radicalising, eventually moving to Egypt because they felt even the Somali-Canadian community in Toronto was not following the true path of Islam. Hammami's wife described how he suddenly left to Somalia, leaving her in Egypt. Together with Culveyhouse, Hammami's wife implies that he radicalised on the internet, where he was frequently posting in jihadist forums.

When in Somalia, Hammami instantly climbed the ranks in Al-Shabaab. This was reflected in a number of videos posted by the organisation featuring Hammami addressing Western fighters. Other videos of Al Shabaab showed English subtitles, leaving no doubt about its target audience. According to Christof Putzel, since Hammami first appeared on videos, more than thirty young men have left Minneapolis and Toronto to fight with Al Shabaab. Minneapolis, hosting the largest Somali community of the United States, saw around 20 men leaving in 2009.[291] According to a news article in the New York Times, most of these men were Somali refugees. While 'religious devotion may have predisposed them to sympathize with the Islamist cause in Somalia, it took a major geopolitical event to spur them to join what they saw as a legitimate resistance movement', the article reported.[292] When the Ethiopian forces left Somalia in 2009, this meant to some that the reason to continue fighting was no longer valid. Several of them returned to the United States and some who tried to do so were killed by Al Shabaab.[293]

One example from Toronto illustrates this possibility of foreign fighters growing disillusioned with the cause. Moe Abdullah Mohammed, a Somali who moved to Canada in 1989 and joined Al Shabaab after the Ethiopian invasion, was interviewed by Putzel. He claims his motivation was purely to fight off the invading troops. When the Ethiopian forces left in January 2009, Mohammed claims to have left the country within 24 hours, saying that 'My war is over. I took up this gun and I took up this fight to get the Ethiopians out. Now they left the land, and my war is over, it is time for me to go home and take care of my wife and my son; I have never spent one night with him'. Mohammed is now the founder of "Generation Islam", an organisation that tries to deradicalise young people in Canada, who he feels are being recruited and brainwashed by radical Islamists. Another example of six men leaving from Toronto shows the danger of joining Al

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[289] Vidino et al. 'Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa', p.220.
[290] Christof Putzel.Vanguard, *American Jihadi: Abu Mansour,* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lecMcLIY6Ds.
[291] Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', p.209; Andrea Elliott. 'A Call to Jihad, Answered in America', *New York Times,* July 11, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/12/us/12somalis.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all&.
[292] Elliott. 'A Call to Jihad, Answered in America'.
[293] Putzel. *American Jihadi.*

Shabaab. Of these six Somali-Canadians who left in 2009, four are dead and the other two are reported to have left Al Shabaab because they realised 'what they were doing was wrong' (as reported by a Toronto imam).[294]

Although these accounts are almost impossible to verify and confirm, it seems safe to say that many foreign fighters who returned (to the United States and Canada) had grown disillusioned with the cause and were not involved in terrorist attacks in their country. However, the ones who did not grow disillusioned – such as Omar Hammami – stayed in Somalia where they were involved in terrorist attacks and were able to attract new recruits. Joining Al Shabaab seemed to be an insecure fate, especially because the organisation itself assassinated unwanted members such as Hammami. Many were also killed during battle, such as Ruben Shumpert, another American convert, who died in an air strike in 2008.[295]

The struggle of Al Shabaab in Somalia was, in contrast to the fight in Bosnia and Afghanistan, immediately labelled as terrorism and thus captured fighters were prosecuted. An example is the case of Daniel Maldonado, an American convert who together with Hammami joined Al Shabaab but who was captured by Kenyan authorities in 2007 and was convicted for training with a terrorist group.[296] Two other Americans, Mohamed Alessa and Carlos Almonte, were arrested at JFK Airport, allegedly on their way to Somalia.[297]

5.3.2 Western fighters – Europe

Although so far it might look like the United States and Canada dominated the influx of Western foreign fighters in Somalia, or have reported it most extensively, there are also numerous examples of Western foreign fighters coming from Europe (and Australia). Most of them come from the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, with a few cases reported in the Netherlands and Germany as well.[298] It is estimated that the United Kingdom has produced no less than one hundred foreign fighters in Somalia. As reported by Michael Taarnby, '(i)n spite of the substantial numbers offered by a presumably knowledgeable source, the MI5, there is surprisingly little information available through open sources on the identities of these foreign fighters'.[299] The head of this MI5, the British Security Service, Jonathan Evans had warned in 2010 for the growing threat coming from these foreign fighters in Somalia. According to Evans, Somalia had become a more serious base for potential attacks to the UK than Yemen.[300]

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[294] Stewart Bell. 'They realized what they were doing was wrong': Two Canadians quit extremist group Al-Shabab, imam says', *National Post,* September 12, 2013, http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/09/12/al-shabab/.
[295] Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', p.212.
[296] Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', p.212.
[297] Cilluffo et al. *Foreign Fighters*, p.6.
[298] Michael Taarnby and Lars Hallundbaek. 'Al Shabaab: The Internationalization of Militant Islamism in Somalia and the Implications for Radicalisation Processes in Europe', Danish Ministry of Justice, 2010, p.39.
[299] Taarnby and Hallundbaek. 'Al Shabaab', p.40.
[300] Richard Norton-Taylor. 'MI5 chief warns of terror threat from Britons trained in Somalia', *The Guardian,* September 17, 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/sep/17/mi5-chief-somalia-terro-threat.

In 2013, this fear seems to have been confirmed. In April, two men stabbed a British soldier to death in the streets of London, proclaiming that their act was an 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' because 'Muslims are dying by British soldiers every day', referring to the presence of British troops in Afghanistan.[301] In 2010, one of the perpetrators had tried to go to Somalia to join Al Shabaab. Despite his efforts, he never reached the group but was arrested by the Kenyan authorities and deported to Britain.[302] Although this is just a single case, it is an example of a frustrated attempt to become foreign fighter that eventually resulted in this individual perpetrating an attack at home.[303]

The second event this year confirming the danger of Al Shabaab occurred in Kenya in September, when a still unknown number of members attacked a shopping mall in the capital Nairobi, killing 67 people in an 80-hour siege. Al Shabaab's spokesman for military operations, Sheikh Abulaziz Abu Muscab, said this was a retaliatory attack for the deployment of Kenyan troops in Somalia in October 2011.[304] The attack, which led to the death of a number of Western tourists, revitalized the interest in a British female foreign fighter suspected to have joined Al Shabaab: Samantha Lethwaite. Lethwaite is also known as the 'White Widow' because of her marriage to Germaine Lindsay, one of the 2005 London Bombers. Interpol has recently issued an arrest warrant for charges of being in possession of explosives and conspiracy to commit a felony in 2011.[305] Lethwaite's role in the Westgate attacks is however unknown and conclusive evidence on her exact link to Al Shabaab still has to emerge.

As in Bosnia, firebrand clerics played an important role in inciting foreign fighters to join the fight. In the United Kingdom, Michael Taarnby and Lars Hallundbaek point to the role of Anjem Choudary. Choudary is the leader of the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah organisation which is the successor to the banned al-Muhajiroun organisation led by the infamous Omar Bakri Mohammed.[306] In 2006, Choudary posted a statement on a forum telling his followers to go to Somalia. His statements clearly echo the calls to arms as heard in Afghanistan and Bosnia:

> Today the zeal of Islam is being reverberated all over the world and our courageous brothers and sisters in Somalia have asked the Muslims all over the world to support them (…) The obligation of

[301] Gordon Rayner and Steven Swinford. 'Woolwich attack: terrorist proclaimed 'an eye for an eye' after attack', *The Telegraph*, May 22, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10073910/Woolwich-attack-terrorist-proclaimed-an-eye-for-an-eye-after-attack.html.
[302] Dominic Casciani. 'Woolwich: How did Michael Adebolajo become a killer', http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25424290, *BBC*, December 19, 2013.
[303] This is not the only example of a failed attempt to become a foreign fighter that was followed by involvement in terrorist attacks/plots at home. See for instance the case of Samir Azzouz, member of the Dutch 'Hofstad Group' who failed to join the mujahideen in Chechnya in Lorenzo Vidino, 'The Hofstad group: The New Face of Terrorist Networks in Europe', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 30, no.7 (2007), pp.579-592.
[304] Hamza Mohamed. 'Q&A: Al-Shabab defends Nairobi attacks', *Al Jazeera*, September 25, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/09/2013923628350977.html.
[305] Interpol. 'INTERPOL issues Red Notice for arrest of Samantha Lethwaite at Kenya's request', September 26, 2013, http://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News-media-releases/2013/PR120.
[306] Taarnby and Hallundbaek. 'Al Shabaab', p.40 ; 'New group replaces al-Muhajiroun', *BBC,* November 18, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4449714.stm.

supporting the Jihad all over the world (including Somalia) is Fard Ayn (an individual obligation). (…) no Muslim (man or woman) has an excuse of doing nothing at all.[307]

Unfortunately, while it is clear that many Britons have left for Somalia to join Al Shabaab, the evidence on the fate of those fighters is mostly anecdotal. A number of individuals received considerable attention, such as the late Ahmed Hussein Ahmed, also known as Abu Ayoub al-Muhajir, who killed twenty Ethiopian soldiers in a suicide attack.[308]

Sweden and Denmark are two other Western countries with a high number of foreign fighters in Somalia. Both countries have a Diaspora community that is very active in supporting the Islamist cause in Somalia. It is estimated that twenty Swedes have joined Al Shabaab, of which five have been killed and ten are still active, although the actual number might be higher.[309] Like Choudary in the United Kingdom, recruitment in Sweden seemed to revolve around an (Somali-Swedish) imam. Fouad Mohamed Qalaf, also known as Fouad Shongole, is an Afghanistan veteran who lived in Sweden since 1994 where he preached the jihad in a mosque near Stockholm. In 2006, he moved to Somalia, where he climbed the ranks just like Omar Hammami did.[310] Another key recruiting center in Sweden was situated in the Bellevue mosque in Göteborg. According to Vidino et al., this mosque has been frequently visited by Al Shabaab leaders. Two notorious visitors were the Danish Mohammed Gelle, who tried to kill the cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, and Abdulrahman Ahmed Haji, an Al Shabaab suicide bomber.[311] There are also some reported cases of foreign fighters departing from the Netherlands and Australia.[312]

In contrast to the American and Canadian cases, not that much is known about returned European foreign fighters who joined Al Shabaab.

5.3.3 The internet

Al Shabaab's recruitment in the West is an interesting case study. Besides traditional recruitment revolving around certain mosques and individuals, the organisation clearly aimed (and still aims) to attract Western foreign fighters by means of online videos. The internet is increasingly used as a medium to spread jihadist ideology and recruit new fighters. The main centres of activity are internet forums where martyrdom notices are posted and where members discuss the jihad, the struggle of the mujahideen and other topics with like-minded people. According to Anne Stenersen, in a 2008-article, it is going much too far to assert that the internet has turned into a virtual training camp, but it is 'best viewed as a resource bank for self-radicalized and autonomous cells'.[313] But, as

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[307] Taarnby and Hallundbaek. 'Al Shabaab', p.40.
[308] Ibidem.
[309] Idem, p.42.
[310] Shinn. 'Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia', p.209.
[311] Vidino et al. 'Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa', p.227.
[312] See Vidino, Taarnby and Shinn.
[313] Anne Stenersen. 'Internet: A Virtual Training Camp?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 20, no.2. (2008), pp.215-233, p.231.

shown by Nesser, '(j)ihadis were fast to adopt the Internet as a propaganda tool for disseminating ideology, strategic literature, and tactical advice'.[314]

This strategic value of the internet has been recognised by Al Shabaab and should thus also be recognised by researchers. While watching YouTube-videos is an unconventional method of conducting research, it is crucial to understand the current developments.[315] The videos of Omar Hammami seem to have played a key role in attracting new recruits from the United States, as is also implied by Christof Putzel in his documentary. More research is needed to prove the true effect of English-speaking mujahideen trying to recruit new foreign fighters. Still, it is not far-fetched to assume that the messages of a charismatic person such as Hammami are indeed attracting new recruits. The combination of addressing young Muslims in their mother tongue while using some Arabic terms to increase the authority of the speaker might be particularly successful. These videos sometimes try to reach the youth by emulating certain cultural aspects. This can be seen in another 30-minute long video called 'Ambush at Bardale'. This video features Hammami in the frontline, first reciting from the Quran in Arabic and lecturing other Al Shabaab members in English. After that, the Al Shabaab members are shown preparing for an ambush, accompanied by a rap in English.

> Month by month, year by year, keeping them kafirs living in fear. Night by night, day by day, mujahideen spreading all over the place.(...) It all started out in Afghanistan, when we wiped the oppressor straight off the land. The Union crumbled, rumbled and tumbled, humbled of the mumbled. What made a power, withdraw and cower'.[316]

After this song, Hammami can be seen waiting with his fellow men for the Ethiopian troops to engage in battle. Afterwards, Hammami explained to the viewers what happened, saying that 'many Ethiopians were killed'. He claimed that they were with around thirty to forty people while the Ethiopians had two to three thousand soldiers. During this battle, two Al Shabaab members were reportedly killed. According to the American, '(o)ne of the things we seek for in this life of ours is to die as a martyr. So the fact that we got two martyrs is nothing more than a victory in itself'. These numbers and the explanation should be interpreted as a symbolic message rather than a truthful report of the real situation. The video mainly aimed to show the life of the mujahideen. It ended with a title on 'Join the Caravan', with another English-speaking, masked member of Al Shabaab giving a final message to the viewers:

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[314] Petter Nesser. 'How did Europe's Global Jihadis Obtain Training for their Militant Causes?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 20, no. 2 (April 2008), pp.234-256, p.250.

[315] Although some researchers might despise this method of doing research, it is – in my eyes – one of the most important ways to understand how jihadist groups think, recruit and act. This move to the internet which started more than a decade ago has transformed the potential outreach of jihadist propaganda to an unprecedented scale. At the same time, it enables researchers to study it from a (safe) distance. Although it might not yet be fully recognized as such, these videos, Facebook-pages and forum-posts are primary sources *pur sang*, giving an uncompromised and unedited glimpse into the (propaganda of the) global jihad.

[316] Al Shabaab video (Al-Kataib), *Ambush at Bardale*. For ethical and practical reasons, I will not link to this video. Please send an e-mail if you want to see the video.

Some of us, we have never imagined, that one day we would carry an AK47, not only that, carry it for the sake of Allah, to fight against the kuffars and the murtadeen [those who have become unbelievers] (...). We are here to live the life of a mujahid. So many people, when they think of life of mujahid [sic], they think, you know, living a rough life, being on the hide-out, being hungry all the time. It is not that way (...) Allah blesses the mujahideen. Sometimes we slaughter two camels, you know, huge, big camels, we are not able to finish the whole meat, sometimes we have to give it away. (...) Camel milk, all over the place (...) This is the way the mujahid lives (...) he lives a life, where if anyone was to see, they would try to take it away, but [Allah] gives it to those he loves (...) so we are calling all the brothers overseas, all the Shabaab [youth], wherever they are, to come and live the life of a mujahid. And they will see it with their own eyes, they will love it.[317]

This long fragment is valuable because it clearly shows how Al Shabaab tried to attract new fighters. First the fighter explained that anybody can be a mujahid. Then he tried to counter arguments that being a mujahid is a tough life, saying that people would actually be jealous when they see it. He then directly addressed all the brothers, the youth, to come to enjoy the life of a mujahid.

More recently, in October 2013, Al Shabaab released another video which is well-produced and narrated by someone with a clear British accent. In the video, the narrator referred to the Woolwich Attacks in London and called the attackers mujahideen.[318] The video linked almost all terrorist events and what they see as the blatant oppression of the Muslims together. It ended with a laptop showing a video of a masked Al Shabaab member against the background of a screen showing pictures of London, naming all the British martyrs. Videos are showed featuring some of these martyrs, smiling and asking fellow British citizens to come to Somalia. Then it continued with the narrator, saying that

jihad is an obligation upon every Muslim in the West. But quite understandably, it may not always be easy for every single Muslim in the West to make this momentous journey to the training camps of jihad. So if it is impossible for you to make it safely to any of the lands of jihad, use the examples of your brothers in Woolwich, Toulouse, Texas or Boston.

Finally, it showed Adam Gadahn, better known as Azzam al-Amriki, an American convert and now spokesman for Al Qaeda, in an Al Qaeda video of 2011, calling upon all Muslims to put jihad into practice. He explicitly referred to the different online manuals and encyclopaedias that could be of help to prospective terrorists.

These examples are just a few out of many and only relate to propaganda videos. They do not mention the jihadist forums and websites where much of the activity takes place. Therefore, this should not be seen as a serious attempt to understand the use of internet by jihadist groups. It does however give some impression of the efforts of Al Shabaab to recruit Western foreign fighters by means of producing videos with English speaking mujahideen. It also shows the easiness,

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[317] For ethical and practical reasons, I will not link to this video. Please send an e-mail if you want to see the video.
[318] Ibidem.

attractiveness and low threshold of this medium when trying to reach a young and worldwide audience.

5.3.4 Somalia: Afghanistan or Bosnia 2.0?

The conflict in Somalia is different from Afghanistan and Bosnia because it attracted a significant amount of members from the Somali Diaspora in Western countries. Therefore, the Islamist cause had a clearly articulated national aspect as well: defending the homeland. Recruitment was concentrated around important centers and mosques, with key individuals such as Choudary in the United Kingdom and Shongole in Sweden. However, Western foreign fighters in Somalia themselves played an important role in attracting new recruits. Especially important in this regard is the late Omar Hammami. Many videos of Al Shabaab have English subtitles or are narrated by English-speaking members, such as the latest video published in October 2013.

Evidence from the United States and Canada seems to confirm the idea that some Western foreign fighters were indeed mainly motivated by nationalist sentiments; when the Ethiopian troops left the country, so did many of the fighters. This is especially the case with regard to members of the Somali Diaspora. Some of them have returned disillusioned and successfully reintegrated into society. Other examples show that fighting with Al Shabaab is extremely dangerous and that many people did not survive. The most radical individuals however seem to be the ones who stayed in Somalia. As long as the conflict continues – and it still does – these fighters can be expected to stay there.

Another observation is that Al Shabaab – so far – does not seem to have attracted many veterans of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Bosnia. This is not surprising with regard to the members of the Somali Diaspora. A simpler explanation could be that the Afghanistan and Bosnia veterans are far too old now, at least in their forties and perhaps with a wife and children to take care of. On the other hand, not that much is known about the identities of the fighters and therefore, it could also be caused by a lack of exact figures.

However, while Al Shabaab is often associated with Al Qaeda and there are convincing arguments for this, there are also reasons to see the organisation in a different light. Internal struggles within Al Shabaab point to disagreements about whether to take the jihad 'global' (as propagated by Hammami) or to keep it local. Perhaps the conflict is mainly a regional case, attracting mainly local fighters, although some Western recruits have been able to climb up to the highest ranks of the organisation and drastically influence its course of action. Al Shabaab's videos certainly propagate this global outlook and the influx of Western foreign fighters can therefore only be expected to increase in the future, attracting – more than in the past – foreign fighters with the same global jihadist outlook.

5.4 Other conflicts

Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia are three examples of conflicts that attracted many foreign fighters. However, there are more examples of conflicts that attracted foreign fighters but these will not be addressed in this thesis. Some were left out because they were quite comparable to one of these case studies while other conflicts did not attract significant numbers of Western foreign fighters. These conflicts will now be briefly explained.

5.4.1 Chechnya

Another region, like Bosnia, that attracted hundreds of foreign fighters in the 1990s was the Chechen Republic which tried to gain independence from the Russian Federation (hereafter: Russia). The leader of what was officially called the Former Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia (hereafter: Chechyna), general Jokhar Dudeav, declared Chechnya an independent state in 1991.[319] After failed attempts to reincorporate the split-off republic into Russia, Russian president Boris Yeltsin decided to send troops to Chechnya, leading to the first Russo-Chechen War in 1994-1996 and the Second Russo-Chechen War in 1999, which ended in 2009 although skirmishes are still ongoing. While the conflict started as a mainly nationalist affair, soon fighters with a more Islamist agenda started to arrive. This was mainly centered around the Jordanian Chechen diaspora, led by Fathi Mohammed Habib – also known as Sheikh Ali Fathi al-Shishani – a Afghanistan veteran who arrived in 1993 and soon collected around one hundred fighters.[320] Al-Shishani invited Samir Salih Abdallah al-Suwaylim – also known as "Emir Khattab" - an Afghan veteran as well, to Chechnya.[321] Khattab was not only a veteran of the conflict in Afghanistan, but had also served as a commander of one of the three Arab units that fought in Tajikstan's civil war (1992-1997).[322] When the first Chechen war ended in 1996, Khattab wanted to continue the fight and set up training camps in the southeastern part of Chechnya. He became leader of the "peacekeeping" militia, together with Shamil Baseyev, one of the Chechen commanders, and trained a number of Arabs, Turks and North Africans who would operate in neighbouring Dagestan.[323]

While the Russo-Chechen conflict started with a nationalist agenda, especially after 2000 it was dominated by a global jihadist agenda. In 2003, a number of individuals across Europe were arrested who had ties to Chechnya. They were linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian jihadist who would become the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). He was involved in the earlier

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[319] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty. 'Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya: From Communism and Nationalism to Islamism and Salafism', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2009), pp.73-94, p.74.
[320] Moore and Tumelty. 'Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya', p.84.
[321] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty. 'Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessment', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 31, no. 5 (2008), pp.412-433, p.416.
[322] Hafez. 'Jihad after Iraq', p.82.
[323] Ibidem.

mentioned "Chechen Network" in France, a group of Algerians and French-Algerians who had trained in Chechnya and were plotting to blow up the Russian embassy in Paris.[324]

Fighting in Chechnya has been reported to be very dangerous. Not many fighters return alive. One example is given by German intelligence officials. They point to the so-called 'Ulm Scene', a group of radical Islamists centered around the Multi-Kultur-Haus in the city of Neu-Ulm. At least four men who frequently visited the centre have reportedly travelled to Chechnya. Of those four, only one returned while the other three were killed.[325]

A factor that could explain why not that many Western foreign fighters went to Chechnya is that it was relatively difficult to join Khattab and his legion. According to the 9/11 Commission Report, a number of the so-called Saudi 'muscle hijackers'[326] tried to go to Chechnya but were sent to Afghanistan instead. Since 1999, foreign fighters were not very welcome anymore. They were seen as inexperienced and unable to adjust to the local circumstances.[327]

5.4.2 The failure of Iraq

When it became clear that the United States was planning to invade Iraq, many jihadists hoped that it would find its 'Afghanistan', referring to the Soviet Union's experience in that country. After the other invasion of Afghanistan - following the attacks on 9/11- Al Qaeda hoped to cope with the losses by moving to Iraq. However, as explained by Jason Burke, jihadist activities in Iraq were very hard to categorise. It consisted of a 'whole complex array of different groups, of all sizes, loyal to different leaders and often liked to different, if overlapping, networks inside and outside the country, sometimes working together for a roughly common cause (though with widely different priorities and tactics), sometimes actively competing'.[328] Due to this complexity, it is almost impossible to accurately summarise the situation in post-invasion Iraq without falling prey to overgeneralisations. Most accounts focused on al-Zarqawi, who would – despite renaming his group Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) – see himself mainly as a rival of Bin Laden instead of a real and trusted associate.[329] Despite the British and American insistence that foreign fighters were present in Iraq, Burke showed that nearly 95 percent of all insurgents captured in Fallujah and other towns in April and May 2004 were Iraqi.[330] The number of Western recruits coming into Iraq was

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[324] Nesser.'Chronology of *Jihadism* in Western Europe 1994-2007', p.932.
[325] Nicholas Kulish and Souad Mekhennet. 'In Plot Suspect, Germany Sees Familiar Face', *The New York Times,* September 7, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/07/world/europe/07fritz.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.
[326] The muscle hijackers were assigned to help overpowering the passengers and crew on the flights hijacked on 9/11. See National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004, p.233.
[327] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p.233.
[328] Burke. *Al-Qaeda,* p.273.
[329] Idem, p.274.
[330] Idem, p.276.

extremely low, with only a few dozen French and British Muslims. Some of those would however generate a lot of publicity because they became suicide bombers.[331]

The lack of foreign fighters was noticed by Bin Laden as well, who disappointedly stated in 2007: 'Where are the soldiers of the Levant and the reinforcements from Yemen? Where are the knights of Egypt and the lions of Hejaz? Come to the aid of your brothers in Iraq!'.[332] According to Steven Simon, a real effort was made by Zarqawi to internationalise the jihad but only with limited success. One very well-known case was that of Muriel Degauque, a Belgian Muslim convert who became a suicide bomber targeting an American convoy in 2005.[333] Still, the only connection between European plots and Iraq were the foiled attacks in London and Glasgow of 2007, when one of the perpetrators had telephone numbers linked to Al Qaeda and one other, Bilal Abdullah, was of Iraqi descent. It was never proven that any operational link existed.[334]

The French group of foreign fighters in Iraq was called the '19th Arrondissement Cell'. Upon the arrest of all the members, the leader, Farid Benyettou, justified the jihad in Iraq but said committing terrorist attacks in France was clearly not allowed, repeating 'We are in France, we are in France'.[335] Of the seven prosecuted group members, only two went to Iraq to fight, while three others never returned from Iraq alive.[336]

The same pattern can be seen with regard to the United States. According to J.M. Berger, there is only one clearly documented case of an American reaching Iraq to take part in the jihad. A Syrian-American from Massachussets, Ahmad Abousamra, spoke with a couple of friends, including convert Daniel Maldonado, about going to Pakistan. However, when he arrived in Afghanistan and tried to join Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, he was refused access. After this failed attempt, he tried to join the Taliban, but according to Berger, he was refused again, this time because of a lack of experience.[337] A few months later, together with a friend from Boston – Tarek Mehanna – Abousamra went to Yemen to receive training which could prepare them to fight the U.S. forces in Iraq. Again, they did not succeed. Abousamra went on to Fallujah in Iraq where he finally met 'insurgents' but they did not allow him to participate because he was American.[338]

So Iraq was not really attracting Western foreign fighters. An interesting question for further research would be why exactly this has been the case.

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[331] Idem, p.282.

[332] Steven Simon. 'The Iraq War and the War on Terror: The Global Jihad After Iraq', in John Duffield and Peter Dombrowski (eds.). *Balance Sheet: The Iraq War and U.S. National Security,* Stanford University Press, 2009, p.18.

[333] Simon. 'The Iraq War and the War on Terror', p.20.

[334] Ibidem.

[335] Idem, p.21.

[336] Elaine Sciolino. 'Fears of Iraq Becoming a Terrorist Incubator Seem Overblown, French Say', *The New York Times*, April 8, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/08/world/europe/08terror.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[337] Berger. *Jihad Joe*, p.194.

[338] Ibidem.

CHAPTER 6: A FIRST TYPOLOGY OF THE FOREIGN FIGHTER

The previous chapter examined three different conflicts that were able to attract a significant amount of foreign fighters under the banner of the defensive jihad. These conflicts occurred in three different regions (the Middle East, Europe and Africa) and in three different decades (the 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s). While these conflicts had distinct causes and their own particular characteristics, they had one thing in common: people from far away decided to travel many miles to join the local insurgents in battle. For those people, the situation was very similar. The conflicts were all framed as a battle between good and evil and the foreign fighters were the heroes fighting for the oppressed in the name of Allah.

In the case of Afghanistan and Bosnia, public opinion in the West largely sided with the mujahideen. As described by Berger, at this time it was still possible to be a mujahideen and a good American. Fighting the Soviets was seen as admirable by some and certainly not as a precursor to terrorist activity.[339] The same was largely true for the situation in Bosnia. In Western countries, this was especially the case after the tragedy of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre which the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) failed to prevent. Following this massacre, the NATO decided to actively intervene against the Bosnian Serbs in Operation Deliberate Force.

It should certainly not be forgotten that these conflicts predated Al Qaeda's terrorist activity in or against the West.[340] This changed in 1996 when Bin Laden declared war against the United States in his infamous fatwa. The 1998 United States Embassy Bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam put Bin Laden's words into practice. In the subsequent years, the link between militant Islamism and terrorism against the West was only being strengthened, culminating in the attacks on 9/11 which killed almost 3,000 civilians. Europe also became a legitimate target: the 2004 Madrid Bombings and the 2005 London Bombings led to the death of hundreds of civilians.

After 2001, Western authorities started a true crackdown on radical Islamists who were suspected of having links to Al Qaeda or other terrorists groups. Abroad, this resulted in the War on Terror and the invasion of Afghanistan (2001).[341] In Europe, numerous radical Islamic preachers who had previously enjoyed relative freedom in inciting young people to join the jihad were arrested and sometimes deported (think of the Abu Dahdah network in Madrid or Abu Qatada and al-Masri in London).[342] This War on Terror also dealt a devastating blow to training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan where Al Qaeda trained future militants and terrorists. It is important to

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[339] Berger. *Jihad Joe,* p.273.
[340] Europe had already been confronted with the jihadist-inspired attacks of the Algerian GIA and The United States had experienced jihadist-inspired attacks such as the 1993 World Trade Center Bombing.
[341] Burke. *Al-Qaeda,* p.259.
[342] Vidino. *Al Qaeda in Europe,* p.47.

recognise this context before starting to categorise foreign fighters and arriving at a first typology.

The case study of Somalia shows that future foreign fighters could expect to be arrested once it became known that they wanted to join Al Shabaab. As of 2008, Al Shabaab has been put on the US list of designated terrorist organisations.[343] It can be assumed that this had some impact on how foreign fighters perceived their decision and their connection and attitude towards the country of origin. When the conflicts in Bosnia and Afghanistan had ended, Western foreign fighters usually still had the opportunity to return to their country without immediately fearing arrest and prosecution.

There is another very important difference between the Western foreign fighters who fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia and those in Somalia. A significant amount of the Western foreign fighters who went to Somalia were members of the Somali Diaspora. These communities are in many aspects not comparable to other parts of society. As shown in a report for the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, the Somali community in the United States 'suffers the highest unemployment rate among East African diaspora communities in the United States, and experience [sic] significantly high poverty rates and the lowest rate of college graduation'.[344] Although a link between poverty and terrorism is disputed by many scholars[345], this fact should not be disregarded too easily.

The Somali-Americans (or Somali-British, Somali-Swedish and so on) might be different from other groups of foreign fighters who went to Bosnia or Afghanistan. While this notion of an exceptional situation might seem to be confirmed by Sageman, who found that most of his researched 'global salafi jihadists' were middle class, Bakker came to a different conclusion.[346] In his sample of 'jihadi terrorists' in Europe, forty individuals belonged to the lower class, thirty to the middle class and three to the upper class, which might be a reflection of the general socio-economic status of Muslim immigrants in Europe.[347]

Still, this does not imply that poverty indeed causes terrorism. Perhaps some communities might be more susceptible to the work of recruiters. This could also be caused by other factors, such as the extent to which these communities are assimilated into the rest of society. Some examples of Somali-American foreign fighters seem to suggest that they were mainly driven by nationalistic motives rather than a clear jihad. When the nationalist goals were achieved (expelling

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[343] Condoleezza Rice. 'Designation of al-Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization', U.S. Department of State, February 26, 2008, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/102446.htm.

[344] Andrew Liepman. 'Violent Islamist Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America, testimony before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee', March 11, 2009.

[345] See Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malecková. 'Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?', *NBER Working Paper No. 9074* (2002); James Piazza. 'Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages', *Terrorism and Political Violence,* vol.18, no. 1 (2006), pp.159-177.

[346] See Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks,* p.73. Sageman states that of the 102 individuals, 18 were upper class, 56 middle class and 28 lower class. Converts and the "Maghreb" cluster were more dominated by individuals from the lower class.

[347] Bakker. *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe*, p.46.

the Ethiopian troops) many of these foreign fighters returned home to resume their pre-departure life. There is reason to think this is different for non-Somali foreign fighters, such as converts like Omar Hammami or Daniel Maldonado. However, the sample is much too small to say anything substantial about converts.

So while we should not forget these differences in context, it is possible to make a first typology of the different types of individuals who joined the fight for the defensive jihad. First of all, what has already partly been addressed in this section are what can be called group-differences: when taking foreign fighter movements as a whole, differences can be seen related to the nature of the conflict and the 'stage' or 'aspect' of the jihad that was most heavily articulated. In some jihads, the perception of the 'bad guy' was also echoed in the general opinion in Western countries, as was for instance the case in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and now in Syria.

Many foreign fighters therefore claim they were motivated by the inability or unwillingness of the West to do something. They were, however, not primarily inspired by anti-Western views. There are many examples of young Muslims who felt deeply affected by images of fellow Muslims suffering. They probably felt a genuine need to help. Some held the West accountable for not coming to the help of their fellow Muslims, especially in Bosnia, and thought this to be partly caused by a lack of interest in the fate of Muslims. However, the countries they departed from where not seen as perpetrators or instigators of the conflict. It mainly related to the victimization of the *ummah*: this has been clearly articulated by Abdullah Azzam in his work about the defensive jihad and the individual obligation (*fard ayn)* to fight.

Therefore, in theory, when the defensive jihad had finished, there was no need to continue fighting. Internal struggles about whether or not to proceed with the jihad and if so, where, divided the mujahideen, as could be seen in Afghanistan and Bosnia. On top of that, the chaos in Kabul left many Arab-Afghans disappointed, leading to the decision of some to go home. The conflict in Bosnia invoked the notion of defensive jihad again and presented a clear opportunity for a continued involvement.

Fighting in Iraq after the US invasion of 2003 was however a direct confrontation between the mujahideen and the West. In Iraq, being a good American and a mujahid, as Berger said with regard to Afghanistan, was not an option any longer. Although this thesis did not analyse why foreign fighters refrained to go to Iraq but only observed this fact, it can be assumed that the few fighters who did go to Iraq were fundamentally different from the large majority of Western fighters in Afghanistan or Bosnia. They were prepared to directly confront the troops of their own country.

6.1 The types based on post-conflict behaviour

These group-differences are important and should not be neglected. There is however another method to describe these group-differences. It can be argued that these conflicts attract groups with

a different composition of in-group differences: there seem to be different types of foreign fighters within conflicts. It is the proportion of these different types that leads to a specific composition of a foreign fighter group. In order to understand the threat that could possibly be posed by foreign fighters, specifically the threat of direct involvement in terrorist attacks and plots as stated in the research question, it is important to look into these types and their presence within a specific group. Rather than formulating a typology based on the motivation of individuals to become foreign fighters, this typology relates to the post-conflict behaviour of foreign fighters. Because this thesis focuses on the involvement in terrorist attacks and plots of Western Muslim foreign fighters, the types are designed to help us better understand the threat posed by the different fighters. It tries to formulate a first answer to who will pose a security threat and who will not. This might give us some guidance on how to approach this issue because, generally speaking, some types can be expected to pose a greater threat than others.

Before proceeding to the five categories that can be distinguished, one final limitation must be acknowledged. While these case studies provided a lot more insight into the development of foreign fighter movements, showed how they were formed, the influence they had on conflicts and what happened to the movements afterwards, it is still impossible to give real estimates about how many foreign fighters stayed, went home, continued fighting somewhere else or were involved in terrorist activity.

There is a clear lack of information about the hundreds, probably a few thousand, of foreign fighters who did not prove to be a threat to their country of origin. The focus of all the important publications has been on those who indeed turned out to be dangerous. Primary sources, such as court proceedings that can provide us valuable[348] information about mujahideen networks are naturally centred on high-ranking Al Qaeda figures. This focus on 'foreign fighters turned terrorists' is entirely logical, given their presumed high presence in terrorist incidents in the West.[349]

Whereas this confirms the expectation that it is impossible to quantify different types of foreign fighters, these case studies have made it possible to better understand the foreign fighter. It can be argued that foreign fighters, based on their post-conflict behaviour, can be divided in five types. These categories are: a) the martyr, b) the veteran, c) the recruiter, d) the reintegrated fighter e) the terrorist.

The first category that can be distinguished is perhaps – together with the terrorist – the easiest one: the martyr. The martyr is a foreign fighter who joins a conflict and is killed during battle. With the risk of stating the obvious: the martyr will pose no further risk to the country of origin unless the martyrdom itself is employed to recruit others to fight. In any case, it is safe to say that the individual himself (or herself) is no longer a risk.

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[348] Although not always very reliable.
[349] This has been partly countered in Chapter 4.

The second category is the veteran. While the term 'veteran' is normally applied to fighters who are no longer active, in this categorisation it refers to an experienced fighter who continues fighting as a veteran of a prior conflict. The veteran adopted the jihad as a way of living and can be expected to continue (at least for some time) on this path. Once the original defensive jihad has ended, the veteran will continue fighting. Sometimes this will be in the same area even though the original conflict has ended. This could also be in another conflict where the concept of defensive jihad can be applied. There might even be exceptional cases where a veteran goes home after the original conflict has ended, resuming his ordinary life only to leave to another conflict zone when he hears the call of the defensive jihad again.[350] While the veteran is a risk to the conflicts he fights in, he is no risk to the country of origin because he is not involved in terrorist activity in the West.

The third category is the recruiter. This category is in many aspects closely related to that of the veteran. The recruiter is a former foreign fighter who returned home to recruit others to fight. Recruiters are also often called veterans but surely can be considered a different category.[351] These recruiter-veterans enjoy the credibility of having fought in conflict zones themselves and are thus very successful in attracting new recruits. As shown in the examples of the Finsbury Mosque in London or the Islamic Cultural Institute, these individuals are often central in the recruitment activities for new conflict zones. However, it must be noted that the role of the recruiter has possibly somewhat changed in the past years. Prior to 9/11, these individuals enjoyed relative freedom but nowadays their activities are more closely monitored. This is shown in a report of the Dutch General Security and Intelligence Services who noticed the prevalence of former foreign fighters in recruiting new fighters.[352] These recruiters often have ties to terrorist organisations both at home and abroad. Generally speaking, the recruiters are not directly involved in terrorist activity themselves but there are many cases where they have been regarded spiritual guides to terrorists. Thus, while they are perhaps not a direct risk, they do form an indirect risk by constantly feeding the local jihadist community.

The fourth category is the reintegrated fighter. This is the one-time foreign fighter. After the conflict has ended, the reintegrated fighter will return and resume his pre-departure life or will at least not be involved in terrorist activity.[353] Some of these fighters might have been driven by a genuine need to come to the help of the oppressed. They are, in that sense, the closest adherents to the notion of the defensive jihad, and could even be called idealists. However, the reintegrated fighter might also have been driven by less idealistic but more adventurous ideas. He might be

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[350] Think of the case of the American Clevin Holt who went to Afghanistan, returned home and after years left again to fight in Bosnia.

[351] Think of "Captain Hook" al-Masri in London or Al-Shabaan in Milan.

[352] Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD), Recruitment for the jihad in the Netherlands: from incident to trend, 2002, p.11.

[353] This is a group where psychological problems such as PTSD could occur. While these fighters form no security risk in the sense of involvement in terrorist plots and attacks, 'reintegrated' fighters could certainly pose a risk to themselves and their direct surroundings.

mostly attracted by the possibility to escape ordinary life or wants to feel important. Friends perhaps convinced him to go without having profound knowledge of the conflict or Islam. This fighter might return home disillusioned because in many aspects, the conflict was not what he expected it to be. These reintegrated foreign fighters are usually no risk to the country of origin.

The final category is the terrorist. The terrorist is a foreign fighter who went to a conflict zone, but experienced a (drastic) change in priorities and legitimate actions during or after the fighting. This mainly occurs when he comes into contact with terrorist networks that are already present in the area. Somehow, the foreign fighter becomes convinced that it is not only a priority to fight for the oppressed abroad, but also to target the country of origin. Sometimes, he already had contacts to radical militants at home, but this can also be said of the four other categories. This type of foreign fighter made the most fundamental shift in identity. An observation that deserves further attention is that a relative high number of converts are present in this group. Clearly, the terrorist is a direct threat to the country of origin.

Now that a first typology of foreign fighters has been established, the question arises if it is already possible to provide some estimates of the proportions of these types. A first observation is that our knowledge of the different categories is not of the same level. Three of these five categories might be better understood than the other two. This can be partly explained by the (perceived) security risk they pose or simply because these fighters are relatively well-documented. These types are the martyr, the terrorist and the recruiter. The cases of martyrdom are reported by the foreign fighter movements themselves which regularly publish martyrdom notices on the Internet. The terrorist is directly linked to a terrorist attack and can therefore be expected to have a high exposure. The recruiter is often under surveillance of intelligence authorities, as was also shown in the example of the Dutch General Security and Intelligence Services.[354] Of course, there is no conclusive evidence that we know all the cases of these above mentioned categories but we can at least reasonably expect to be aware of a high proportion of these cases. This is not the case for the other two groups: the veteran and the reintegrated fighter. This is mainly caused by the fact that their exposure to society is lower: the veteran is still fighting in a distant conflict and the reintegrated fighter returned home, sometimes largely unnoticed.

If we compare the assumed total number of Western Muslim foreign fighters in conflicts and subtract the assumed numbers of martyrs, terrorists and recruiters, there is still a significant number of unaccounted cases. Thus, it might be that we know the least about the two types with the largest volume: the veteran and the reintegrated fighter.

This means that the 'radicalisation rate' of 1 out of 9 presented by Hegghammer, claiming that one-ninth of all foreign fighters become involved in terrorist activity, cannot be confirmed. The

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[354] Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD), Recruitment for the jihad in the Netherlands: from incident to trend, 2002.

case studies and literature study point at a much lower ratio: thousands of Western Muslim fighters have fought abroad while only a few dozen of them become involved in terrorist activity. It is however impossible to present a new ratio because of the lack of knowledge and empirical data on the exact numbers of the different types of foreign fighters. Fortunately, this might be changing in the future. Returned foreign fighters surely now get more attention and are intensively monitored by intelligence services. Therefore, we can expect to be able to give better estimates of the different types in the future, possibility leading to the calculation of a more evidence-based radicalisation rate.

While this section might suggest that these five categories are fixed, unchanging and the only possible categorisation of foreign fighters, this is certainly not the case. These categories should rather be seen as lenses through which we can better examine the possible threat posed by Western Muslim foreign fighters, especially in the form of direct involvement in terrorist plots and attacks. It hopes to serve as a tool to structure our thinking about post-conflict actions of foreign fighters rather than being a direct answer to the question of the possible threat. It should not be interpreted as a rigid depiction of an 'empirical reality' in which a foreign fighter can either be classified as category A, B, C, D or E but certainly not more than one type or any other type, for instance as 'F'.

Of course, it is possible (and it happens) that a recruiter becomes involved in terrorist attacks. This would mean that a foreign fighter falls into two different categories. While this is possible, it does not make these categories less helpful to understand the types of threats posed by foreign fighters. A recruiter poses a different, more indirect type of threat than a terrorist does. This does not mean that a recruiter is not important or dangerous, but he is simply different. When answering the research question, it is 'only' the terrorist that is linked to this threat while the recruiter poses a different type of threat by facilitating terrorist activity. When a recruiter also becomes personally involved in terrorist attacks and plots, he then forms a different type of threat. To understand the danger posed by foreign fighters in the past, but also the future threat, it can be helpful to understand the different ways in which foreign fighters pose a threat. Different ways, in turn, ask for different approaches to counter it.

Thus, this chapter tried to present a first typology of foreign fighters based on their post-conflict actions. This typology should be seen as tool or a set of different lenses to look at the phenomenon, rather than as a fixed and unchanging observation of some 'empirical reality'.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis took the current concern expressed by various Western countries of the presence of Western Muslims fighting in Syria against the regime of Assad as a starting point. In some countries, this concern has resulted in an elevated threat level, as can be seen in the Netherlands. This decision mainly revolved around the scenario of returned fighters possibly launching a terrorist attack in the West. However, while the conflict in Syria almost certainly attracts unprecedented numbers of Western foreign fighters and the numbers are still rising, this phenomenon is not new. In the past, many conflicts have attracted significant numbers of Muslim foreign fighters under the banner of the defensive jihad. This was most heavily articulated by Abdullah Azzam who revolutionised existing interpretations of the jihad by making it a personal obligation to come to Afghanistan to expel the Soviet troops.

The aim of this thesis was to contextualize and historicise the current concern for Western Muslim foreign fighters by looking at the threat they posed in the past. This threat was specifically narrowed down to direct involvement in terrorist attacks and plots, corresponding to the main concern as expressed with regard to the fighters in Syria. This thesis examined foreign fighter mobilisations in the past and tried to challenge the findings of the few scholars who studied Western foreign fighter movements. The most important scholar who tried to quantify the threat posed by foreign fighters is Thomas Hegghammer. In his work, Hegghammer gives two figures: the first is the ratio of foreign fighters in terrorist activity in the West, which he calculates as 1 out of 4. The second figure is a so-called radicalisation rate of 1 out of 9, meaning that one-ninth of all foreign fighters become involved in terrorist activity. This thesis has shown that there are a number of problems with Hegghammer's approach.

7.1 The first approach

The first approach of this thesis specifically challenged Hegghammer's findings that 1 out of 4 terrorists in the West is a foreign fighter. However, as Hegghammer claims to focus on 'Western jihadists', it is important to define who can be counted as Western and who cannot be counted as Western. A former Saudi foreign fighter who comes to Europe only to launch a terrorist attack cannot be categorised as 'Western' and does not have any importance when looking at the security risk posed by Western foreign fighters. Thus, the database in this thesis employed criteria to be categorised as Western. A second issue is that Hegghammer does not distinguish between foreign fighting and foreign training. A foreign fighter joins a conflict where he fights a jihad together with local insurgents while a 'foreign trainee' trains in a terrorist training camp, sometimes to prepare

for fighting in a conflict but more often to prepare for terrorist activity somewhere else. Thus, the database in this thesis distinguished (where possible) between the two different types.

The findings of this database - consisting of 26 plots and 123 individuals - can be summarised as follows: first of all, just over half of the individuals involved (68) could be categorised as Western. Using the definition of Hegghammer, 27% (33) of the 123 individuals can be categorised as Western foreign fighters. This figure seems to confirm Hegghammer's ratio of 1 out of 4. However, if we distinguish between foreign fighting and foreign training, we see that only 11 of these 33 individuals could be classified as foreign fighters whereas 22 could better be described as foreign trainees. Thus, only 9% (11 out of 123) individuals can be categorised as Western foreign fighters. This more narrow definition of foreign fighting points to a 1 out of 11 ratio of Western Muslim foreign fighters in terrorist activity in Europe rather than the 1 out of 4 presented by Hegghammer. This database also finds that five of the 26 plots (19%) contained at least one individual who can be categorised as a genuine foreign fighter whereas 8 plots (31%) had a link to a Western individual who went to a terrorist training camp.

However, these findings might have been distorted by two plots that disproportionally influenced the figures. The 2004 Madrid Bombings disproportionally decreased the foreign fighter ratio whereas the Chechen Network disproportionally increased this ratio. If both plots are excluded, it is found that 30% (22) of the individuals could be categorised as foreign fighters or foreign trainees. When distinguishing between fighting and training, it becomes clear that only five of these 22 cases were foreign fighters while the other 17 could best be categorised as foreign trainees. Thus, only 6% of the individuals involved (five out of ninety) in these 24 plots could be categorised as Western Muslim foreign fighters. This results in a 1 out of 17 ratio of those involved in terrorist activity being a Western Muslim foreign fighter.

Both excluded plots are significant. The 2004 Madrid Bombings were the most lethal jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks in Europe, claiming almost 200 lives. This plot contained no direct link to foreign fighting or training with the exception of one Algerian GIA operative. The other plot that was excluded, the so-called 'Chechen Network', clearly showed the risk that Western Muslim foreign fighters could pose. All the members of this network fought with Chechen rebels in the Pankisi Gorge area in Georgia which borders Chechnya. When back home in France, these returned fighters made plans to bomb the Russian embassy in Paris. Thus, this is the perfect example of how Western foreign fighters could pose a direct threat to their country of origin. This should certainly not be discounted. However, it must be noted that this single plot – which was never executed and therefore did not result in a single injury – contained more than half of all cases of foreign fighting found in the database (6 out of 11).

Still, with just 26 plots in the database, it is difficult to say whether or not some plots should be excluded because they do not seem to fit the 'average' plot. Perhaps the number is too small, making it impossible to judge what deviates from the norm because there actually is no

norm. Depending on whether or not these two plots are counted, the foreign fighter : terrorist ratio is 1 out of 11 or 1 out of 17. Despite this uncertainty, both ratios seem to indicate that the 1 out of 4 ratio mentioned by Hegghamer is perhaps not appropriate to describe the presence of foreign fighters in terrorist plots and attacks in Europe.

Besides calculating the overall ratio of foreign fighters in the 26 plots, the first approach also calculated the ratio of foreign fighters in the most lethal plots. These plots can be seen as the ones that resulted in the highest damage. If we only count plots that resulted in injuries or casualties, we find that only 11.5% of the individuals could be categorised as Western foreign fighters or trainees (seven out of 61). If we distinguish between fighting and training, we find that all of these seven individuals went to training camps and, applying this distinction, none was a foreign fighter. Thus, no Western Muslim foreign fighter has been involved in jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks in Europe between 1994 and 2013 that resulted in injuries or casualties (other than the perpetrator). However, the 2005 London Bombings – the most lethal attack after Madrid - showed a direct link to foreign training: two of the four bombers trained in Pakistan prior to the attacks.

It is this scenario of successfully executed terrorist attacks that is feared most by Western countries with regard to returned Western Muslim foreign fighters. Of course, these findings depend on the criteria for inclusion that were chosen. It is possible to argue that the criteria for 'Western' were perhaps too strict. It is also possible that not all cases of foreign fighting were reported in newspapers and secondary sources that were used to categorise the plots. Another possible argument to counter these findings is that this database only includes 26 plots. Indeed, it must be immediately acknowledged that this database does not reflect all jihadist-inspired terrorist activity in Europe. However, this database did include all fatal attacks and there are good reasons to think it also included the most dangerous plots because it only used the Category 1 plots of Nesser. Thus, the findings of this database cannot be extrapolated to all jihadist-inspired activity, but it does contain the most lethal and dangerous plots. Therefore, these findings are useful when answering the research question about direct involvement of Western Muslim foreign fighters in terrorist activity in Europe.

In sum, the first approach shows that the 1 out of 4 ratio of Hegghammer is largely incorrect when it concerns Western Muslim foreign fighters as defined in this thesis. Rather, the ratio is 1 out of 11, and if corrected for possible distortions, 1 out of 17. This counters prevalent ideas that foreign fighters 'really do make more lethal domestic operatives' if this is regarded to be more than just a hypothetical statement.[355] In the most lethal plots, it is rather the absence than the presence of foreign fighters that is apparent. The link to foreign training is more visible, although

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[355] Hegghammer. Should I Stay or Should I Go', p.6.

perhaps also not as high as expected. If foreign trainees in the lethal plots are counted (7), this points to a ratio of 1 out of 9 (7 out of 61).

Again, it must be said that this approach did not use any sophisticated statistical research methods but was merely a calculation of the foreign fighter : terrorist ratio. Thus, this thesis does not pretend to give results that can be labelled statistically significant. The aim of this approach was to respond to the figures presented by other authors who did not use those research methods either but still presented figures. The fact that the calculation was simple does not mean that it cannot hold any importance. The main debate revolves around what criteria should be included to measure a phenomenon, in this case the risk that foreign fighters become involved in terrorist activity in the West.

This thesis tried to argue that the current criteria might not be the most appropriate while it is highly influencing how we look at the danger posed by foreign fighters. While this thesis tried to be as transparent as possible about the chosen criteria and it has been argued why these criteria (in contrast to existing ones) were employed to calculate the ratio, the criteria must of course remain open for debate. Therefore, this first approach should certainly not be seen as a revolutionary calculation with new, statistical research methods. It used a conventional but rather time-consuming research method: collecting data to compile a database that can be used to make some simple calculations. By doing so, it tried to challenge unreservedly accepting presented ratios without questioning what criteria might have caused this ratio and, more importantly, whether or not these criteria accurately reflect the phenomenon that is claimed to be investigated. This thesis presented different ratios that correspond to different criteria. It hoped to serve as a reminder of the power of defining an issue and the difficulty of 'objectively assessing' it. To the best knowledge of the author, this has been attempted in an objective and transparent manner. Still, future research might possibly again challenge the criteria employed in this thesis. That is, however, the only way we can move forward in research.

7.2 The second approach

The second approach of this thesis examined the different conflicts that Western Muslim foreign fighters fought in, focusing specifically on the conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia. It was shown how the idea of a defensive jihad attracted hundreds if not thousands of Western Muslims to fight in distant conflicts. These conflicts show similar patterns: these foreign fighters often do not get along with the local insurgents and their battlefield contributions are mostly meagre. Nevertheless, these conflicts highly contributed to the legacy of the mujahideen as holy warriors and saviours of the *ummah*. The case studies also show that these conflicts do not only attract foreign fighters who want to defeat the enemy, but that these are also the perfect operating bases for terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda or Al Shabaab. It was the defensive jihad in Afghanistan that attracted many Arabs who would later become involved in the founding of Al

Qaeda. Still, it is important to distinguish between the leadership of terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda who know an opportunity to consolidate or expand their activities when they see it, and the foreign fighters who join the conflict under the banner of the defensive jihad.

Chapter 6 showed that these foreign fighters can be divided into five categories based on their post-conflict behaviour: the martyr, the veteran, the recruiter, the reintegrated fighter and the terrorist. When we speak about a possible risk in terms of direct involvement in terrorist attacks and plots, it is the terrorist that immediately comes to mind. However, the recruiter also poses an (indirect) threat by recruiting others to become a foreign fighter or by serving as an ideological guide inspiring future terrorists. It was explained that these categories should not be seen as fixed and unchanging, but rather as a tool or a set of lenses through which we can examine the threat posed by foreign fighters. It is possible that a fighter changes from one category to another or could fall into more than one category. It might also be possible that a fighter could not be described as any of those types. How could we categorise the hypothetical case of a foreign fighter turning into a 'common criminal', robbing banks purely for economic gains (and not to facilitate terrorist activity)? Calling him a 'reintegrated fighter' might not seem a good reflection of reality. Strictly speaking, he does fall into this category as this type of fighter has been described as resuming his pre-departure life or at least not being involved in any terrorist activity. Certainly, this does seem to be a satisfactory description. Categorisation always leads to some form of simplification as it is a form of heuristics to structure our thinking. Seeing this typology as a tool to examine the threat posed by foreign fighters is helpful but the categories should remain open for debate.

This typology leads to the question how foreign fighters are distributed among these categories. Unfortunately, it is impossible to give clear-cut answers to that question. First of all, estimates about the total number of Western foreign fighters differ highly. Prior to the attacks on 9/11, foreign fighters were not a (top) priority of Western authorities and therefore they were not systematically counted. However, the case studies seem to suggest that the terrorist is probably the smallest group of the five. This corresponds to the findings of the first approach that foreign fighters are not very much present in the 26 plots. As already stated, it might be possible that we know the least of the two types that are most common: the veteran and the reintegrated fighter.

Given the fact that thousands of Western Muslim foreign fighters fought in conflict zones and that we only know of perhaps a few dozen (which might already be highly overestimated) who got involved in terrorist activity in the West, it is safe to say that – generally speaking – Western foreign fighters hardly get involved in terrorist activity in the West.

Although no real 'radicalisation rate' is given, the 1 out of 9 rate given by Hegghammer can almost certainly be dismissed. First of all, his total estimate of 945 Western foreign fighters

seems to be far too low.[356] As was discussed in the literature review, this is even less plausible when realising that Hegghammer not only counted foreign fighters but also those who went to terrorist training camps. At the same time, many of the 107 cases he classified as 'foreign fighters who turned into terrorists' also disappear when foreign fighting is separated from foreign training. Thus, while it is impossible to say what this radicalisation rate should be, it can be expected to come nowhere near Hegghammer's rate of 1 out of 9.

Leaving the figures for what they are, it is the notion of the defensive jihad that seems to attract most foreign fighters. It is still a large step from fighting an insurgency to help those who are being killed or oppressed to committing terrorist offenses in the West. It takes a far more radical view embracing terrorism to do the latter. On the other hand, foreign fighters have already shown they are willing to use violence. In all these conflicts, there was a hardcore radical group that saw great potential to work on some of their own goals. These goals did not have to be related to the local conflicts. These conflicts and defensive jihads form the perfect safe havens for extremists to work on parallel structures and goals. The example of Bosnia is telling in that sense: from the beginning, there was a group – the Arab-Afghan veterans including Bin Laden – who saw Bosnia as the ideal place to launch attacks against Europe and the United States.

This shows that it is perhaps not the presence of foreign fighters in a conflict, but the safe haven a conflict zone forms for radical groups that should worry us. The main danger is that those conflicts are uncontrolled recruiting environments where organisations like Al Qaeda can unreservedly look around to discover the future terrorist generation. While terrorist training prior to the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 largely took place in training camps like Khaldan or al-Farooq, these camps are now closed. Conflict zones could provide the necessary cover to facilitate these training activities.

Nevertheless, many, if not most foreign fighters arrive with the idea to fight a local, defensive jihad, aiming to help the oppressed brothers and sisters in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Somalia, or Syria, who are oppressed. This is, however, not the entire story.

7.3 The impact of small numbers

First of all, while Western foreign fighters generally speaking do not become terrorists, the case studies have shown numerous examples of foreign fighters who turned into recruiters. Places where these recruiters were present often coincided with large numbers of new foreign fighters. However, the examples mainly showed the relatively high presence of Arab-Afghans in Europe, such as Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza in London, Anwar Shabaan in Milan and al-Suri in Madrid. Perhaps not being fluent in Arabic can be an obstructing factor for becoming a religious authority or recruiter in Europe.

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[356] Hegghammer himself also acknowledged this, saying that 'the same observation set can arguably justify a maximum estimate of 7,500 individuals (i.e., more than 350 per year)'. Hegghammer. Should I Stay or Should I Go?, p.5.

This might have changed after the attacks on 9/11. These attacks resulted in a crackdown on the freedom enjoyed by most of these radical clerics. At the same time, recruitment seemed to have profited from other channels as well: the example of Omar Hammami shows that is possible to be a foreign fighter while at the same time recruit others on the Internet by means of videos. This is harder to control and it is more difficult to monitor who is watching these videos than who is visiting a mosque where radical sermons are being held.

A final and more fundamental comment to the statement that Western foreign fighters (generally speaking) hardly turn into terrorists is that, in the end, you only need one foreign fighter to launch a highly lethal terrorist attack. The examples of the Chechen Network, Dhiren Barot and Andrew Rowe show that it is indeed possible and happening. Terrorism is about small numbers and a few individuals can already have an enormous impact. This is exactly where the current fear originates from. However, if we look at Western foreign fighters in a neutral, rational manner, and when trying to assess all the material that is available, it is only possible to arrive at the conclusion that Western Muslim foreign fighters only rarely have been directly involved in jihadist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in Europe in the past. This is confirmed by both the low presence of foreign fighters in terrorist activity in Europe and the analysis of past conflicts Western Muslims fought in.

In the introduction, it was observed that most threat assessments of the risk posed by Western Muslim foreign fighters can be called 'possibilistic': it refers to the possibility of Western Muslim foreign fighters mounting an attack at home whereas a 'probabilistic' assessment is not focusing on what could happen, but rather on what can be expected to happen. This thesis tried to bring those two together by studying Western Muslim foreign fighters in the past. Rather than referring to possibilities, it tried to examine what indeed happened. The threat posed by Western Muslim foreign fighters in the past appears to be rather low and certainly lower than what is now being portrayed. This observation should be taken into account when not only determining which measures are effective but also what can be seen as proportional when addressing the issue of foreign fighters in Syria. Again, it cannot be mentioned often enough that this is certainly no prediction of the future risk posed by Western Muslims who are now going to Syria. The question to what extent these Western Muslims will pose a security risk to Europe in the future is impossible to answer. Time will tell.

This thesis perhaps raises more questions than it answers. When looking at the database of terrorist activity in Europe, it is interesting to see that most cases refer to foreign 'trainees' rather than foreign fighters. It seems worthwhile to further investigate the real significance of this distinction and its relation to the security risk and possible counterterrorism measures. After 9/11, however, many terrorist training camps have been closed as a result of the War on Terror. Thus, it might be the case that foreign fighting and foreign training are becoming increasingly merged,

making this distinction less viable in the long run. More research into the motivations of both foreign fighters and foreign 'trainees' could still give more insight.

Secondly, it might be interesting to further investigate the presented typology to see how it could be of help in designing counterterrorism measures. Again, this needs further research into all the factors that could explain how individuals relate to the categories. These factors include personal motivation but also the influence of battlefield experience, contacts with radical networks as well as coincidental circumstances whether or not related to the conflict. Of course, these categories sometimes overlap and it is possible to change between (most of) the categories. Although the practice of categorisation is a simplification of reality, it should rather be seen as a tool to enhance our understanding.

This thesis has shown that we still have more questions than answers regarding this phenomenon but hopefully, it has also indicated relevant topics for future research. After all, this is highly required if we want to better understand the Western Muslim foreign fighter and want to assess the possible risk for society.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

Keywords in a thesis like this one – or perhaps in any thesis – should definitely be 'but', 'however' and 'on the other hand'. It is extremely difficult to answer a question that directly originates from the desire to assess the possible future threat posed by foreign fighters in Syria. The simplest answer to the question how dangerous they are, is that we simply do not know yet. In fact, it is the only correct answer. There are numerous (unknown) factors that can influence the course of history and it is silly to pretend we can predict these. That would point to a form of historical determinism. The pure fact that we even speak of a 'course of history' gives away this tendency to think of history as a rolling train, which – although it can suddenly change tracks - moves down a certain known path.

While we write thousands of pages about the history of conflicts, structural factors and changes in ideology, we sometimes forget that one person or event can have more explanatory power than all these factors taken together. Just think of the impact of the decision of one man, Gavrilo Princip, to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 or an example of an event that is more relevant in this context: the crashing of two planes into two buildings in New York in 2001. In the end, history comes down to a chronicle of human behaviour rather than of structural factors, and, unfortunately, human behaviour is unpredictable and for that sense, irrational, but this is a debate of its own.

Taking this to another level of analysis, in International Relations theory, which looks first and foremost at the behaviour of states[357], this view would often contradict (Neo-)Realist approaches that see the international system as a form of (organised) anarchy and states as the most central, rational actors driven by self-interest.[358] The topic of foreign fighters or for that matter other violent non-state actors (VNSAs) has mostly been neglected by scholars in this field because the state does not pose as the primary unit of analysis. VNSAs, defined by Klejda Mulaj as 'non-state armed groups that resort to organized violence as a tool to achieve their goals' have no place in the system of sovereign states that have dominated the international system ever since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) was signed.[359] Theories about how VNSAs influence international relations have yet to emerge.

This is a serious lacuna because VSNAs most definitely influence the world we live in today. The number of inter-state conflicts has been steadily decreasing over the last decades while the number of intra-state conflicts has been increasing. The effects of the attacks on 9/11 which

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[357] Please note the jump in the level of analysis. A common feature in international relations theory is to have three levels of analysis. In the famous work of Kenneth Waltz, he distinguishes three categories: man (micro-level), state (meso-level) and war (macro-level). See Kenneth N. Waltz. *Man, State and War* (Columbia University Press: 1954).
[358] See for instance George F. Kennan. *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950* (University of Chicago Press: 1951).
[359] Klejda Mulaj. 'Introduction: Violent Non-state Actors: Exploring Their State Relations, Legitimation, and Operationality', in: Klejda Mulaj (ed.). *Violent Non-state Actors in World Politics* (London: 2010), p.3.

incited the United States to start a 'War on Terror', including the invasion of Afghanistan that followed these events within less than a month, only confirm this importance. This gap has been partly closed by scholars in the field of political science, conflict studies, terrorism studies and history who research the importance of VSNAs. This explains why most of the publications used in this thesis could be found in those disciplines.

As a student of the history of international relations, designing a research question that looks at the threat posed in the past can be helpful to understand the possible future threat. Apart from the work of the intelligence and security services, this is best thing we can do to understand it.

The obvious trap is assuming that all foreign fighters in all conflicts are the same. They are definitely not. Contextual factors play an extremely important role: fighting the Soviets in the pre-9/11 Cold War years really is something different than fighting for an Islamic state in Somalia in 2006, or fighting the incumbent Assad-regime in 2013. Despite this obvious fact, we see that some people are fighting in multiple conflicts; that is why I used the term veterans to describe these fighters. As shown, there is certainly not one type of foreign fighter.

Notwithstanding these differences, these fighters and the conflicts they fight in still have something in common: all of these Western foreign fighters have decided to leave their country to fight what they call a defensive jihad. As has been shown, the conflict is always framed in the same terms, that of the *ummah* being existentially threatened.

To focus on the context and ideologies, and discovering certain patterns is what I have been taught in my Master's Programme as well. Perhaps the focus on the defensive jihad as an important chapter in this thesis points to a certain belief in constructivism. Ideologies and individuals do matter. It helps us to make sense of the world. I believe that you cannot understand the Western foreign fighter if you have not studied what he believes in. At the same time, it is very important not to think that all foreign fighters are idealists or even know a lot about the ideology they adhere to. While countering certain ideologies could help to address a certain issue, this should not be overestimated because in the end, it are human tendencies that determine our behaviour. Ideologies are often just vehicles that steer human behaviour. There are many reasons – both personal as well as circumstantial - that could explain why someone adheres to a certain ideology and thus, understanding the ideology does not automatically mean you understand the individual.

There is one final remark I would like to make with regard to ideology. This thesis has shown that the real danger is not what really happened or who were involved in certain conflicts. For instance, the Arab-Afghans, or the foreign fighters in Bosnia and now possibly the Western Muslims in Syria do not really have much impact on the battleground situation. The case studies showed that this does not matter at all. Rather, the greatest danger of these episodes is that it strengthens an ideology or a narrative that is established surrounding the (inaccurate depiction of) events.

The main danger of the current developments in Syria, where jihadist movements seem to gain the upper hand among the rebel groups, is not the actual danger posed by these individuals, but rather a resurgence of the global Salafi jihadist narrative. In the light of the recent developments in the Arab World, this becomes even more pressing: the deposing of a democratically elected moderate Islamist government in Egypt proved the Salafi jihadists that democracy is 'not the way'. More importantly, it strengthened the idea that Islam is not tolerated and that it is under attack. This already comes very close to the narrative of the defensive jihad.

It is important to realise that this idea of victimisation is very much present in radical Islamists circles. These ideologies and notions benefit from the perception of being attacked, for example in the War on Terror. This does not mean that we should simply tolerate everything but we should at least realise this when trying to formulate effective strategies to counter certain developments.

This is especially the case when discussing strategies to address the current issue of Western Muslim foreign fighters leaving to Syria. Arresting every returned fighter or even taking away his or her passport – as has been done in the United Kingdom and is also considered in, for instance, the Netherlands[360] - gives the impression that every foreign fighter is a potential terrorist. This could alienate a large number of individuals who could rather be categorised as idealists or adventurers who are irrevocably cut off from the possibility to return home and resume normal life and thus also from the possibility to become what I have named a 'reintegrated fighter'.

The possibility to resume normal life is an option you certainly want to keep; it is actually the scenario you hope most foreign fighters will choose. Seen from a counterterrorism perspective, the aim should be to remove these foreign fighters from possible radical networks. This can best be done by trying to reintegrate them into society while at the same time keeping close tabs on them to see if this is indeed working. The examples of the Arab-Afghan veteran-recruiters who enjoyed a lot of freedom in Europe to spread radical messages shows that a policy that is too lenient can also have undesired consequences.

While this thesis could be translated into a number of personal policy recommendations (I just mentioned a few), the contribution of this research was mainly academic. I tried to address the lack of knowledge we have about Western Muslim foreign fighters. Unfortunately, this research still depended highly on existing research and no real figures about the size and scope of foreign fighter movements could be given. However, it was able to show that existing research that does try to give these figures is – again unfortunately – largely incorrect. This thesis specifically countered the idea of a very high presence of foreign fighters in terrorist attacks. At least in the 26 chosen plots, this was not the case.

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[360] Alice Ross, Patrick Galey and Nigel Morris. 'Exclusive: No way back for Britons who join the Syrian fight, says Therese May', December 23, 2013, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/exclusive-no-way-back-for-britons-who-join-the-syrian-fight-says-theresa-may-9021190.html.

The typology presented in Chapter 6 should be seen as a starting point for further research. It raises more questions than it now can answer. In this thesis, it was argued that the different conflicts can be described as producing a different mix of these different types of foreign fighters. The next step would be to explain how this distribution comes into being. Does a certain conflict already attract a certain type of foreign fighter or does the conflict itself produce a certain type of foreign fighter more often than others? This again touches upon the question of motivation and therefore, sociological or psychological research might add to this understanding.

In any case, the conflict in Syria is perhaps a potential threat, but it is also an opportunity for researchers. The issue of Western Muslim foreign fighters is placed very high on (inter)national agendas and we have already seen a number of studies that try to determine how we should deal with this problem.[361] It would be recommended to try to follow these foreign fighters in order to see who falls into what category. This can hopefully contribute to our understanding of the foreign fighter and perhaps also result in both positive strategies and preventative measures that can influence the course of action of a foreign fighter. However, addressing them solely as potential terrorists is both wrong and not very sensible.

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[361] See for instance Edwin Bakker, Christophe Paulussen and Eva Entenmann. 'Dealing with European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Governance Challenges & Legal Implications', *ICCT Research Paper,* December 2013, http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-Paulussen-Entenmann-Dealing-With-European-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I - Typical problems when returning from battlefield

While this thesis defined a security risk as only being terrorist activity, there are also risks that do not target the entire society. There are many problems that commonly arise when fighters return from battlefield. Foreign fighters are in essence not that different from soldiers enlisted in an official military. The main difference is that – generally speaking - official military personnel are well-trained and well-equipped while foreign fighters are not necessarily well-trained and well-equipped. Some of these fighters have had almost no prior training and enter the battlefield unprepared, both physically and mentally. But on the battlefield, we can assume that foreign fighters, just like officially enlisted military personnel, are facing the same kind of circumstances and experiencing the same emotions: danger, death, loss but also companionship and glory. When the battle is over and the fighters return, these experiences and memories can affect the mental health of the persons involved. Not much research has been done on the typical problems arising when foreign fighters return but a lot of research has been conducted on mental health problems of military personnel returning from deployments.

The mental health of US military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) has been subject to scrutiny. The US Department of Defense mandated that all the returning service members fill in a Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHA) to increase earlier identification and treatment of mental health problems.[362] As described by Karen H. Seal et al. (2007), the majority of military personnel experience hazardous and threatening situations. They conclude that there is a direct link between combat experience and mental problems. Young people often have lower ranks and will therefore get more 'on the ground' combat experience, which increases the chance that they experience traumatising events that can lead to mental problems.

The *Iraq War Clinician Guide* of the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center presents an overview of the main types of conflict and associated forms of stress.[363] It notes that even the pre-deployment phase can be a source of stress. There might be a lot of uncertainty due to changing deadlines and locations. Family tensions and worries about safety can all incite stress.[364] The most stressful phase is the deployment phase. High-intensity warfare goes hand-in-hand with chronic fear and uncertainty. Neither the enemy nor

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[362] Charles W. Hoge, Jennifer L. Auchterlonie and Charles S. Milliken.'Mental Health Problems, use of Mental Health Services, and Attrition From Military Service After Returning From Deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan', *Journal of American Medical, v*ol. 295, no.9 (2006), pp.1023-1032, p.1024.
[363] National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. *Iraq War Clinician Guide*. Washington, DC: Dept of Veterans Affairs, 2004, p.7.
[364] National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, *Iraq War Clinician Guide,* p.8.

its plans can be fully known and combatants are faced with the threat of being injured or killed and are regularly confronted with dead, wounded or disfigured combatants (fellow companions and enemies) and civilians.[365] Karen H. Seal et al. described that the majority of military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan faced the chronic threat of roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices (IED).[366] The survey administered by Charles W. Hoge et al. (2004) showed that especially in Operation Iraqi Freedom, combatants were faced with highly traumatising events. Of the US Army Groups, 89 per cent indicated that they were attacked or ambushed, 93 per cent was being shot at or received small-arms fire, 48 per cent was responsible for the death of an enemy combatant, 14 per cent was responsible for the death of a non-combatant, 95 per cent had seen dead bodies or human remains, 86 per cent knew someone seriously injured or killed while 14 per cent was wounded or injured himself and 69 per cent witnessed ill or injured women or children whom they were unable to help.[367]

Interestingly, these figures were significantly higher than those of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. For instance, only 27 per cent of the soldiers in Afghanistan reported to have been shooting or directing fire at the enemy (compared to 77 per cent of the OIF-group) and only 43 per cent knew someone seriously injured or killed (compared to 86 per cent of the OIF-group).[368] According to the *Iraq War Clinician Guide*, the (accidental) killing of innocent civilians can create chronic strain. Only 1 per cent of the OEF-group said to be responsible for the death of a non-combatant (compared to 14 per cent of the OIF-group).[369]

The results from the Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHA) are comparable to those of Hoge et al. (2004) 65 per cent of the soldiers and Marines reported to have any combat experience, which is lower than the Hoge (2006) survey states. More than 50 per cent felt in great danger of being killed.[370] These figures are still substantial but it confirms the idea that deployment location is highly influencing the combat experience.

Combat experience in turn affects the mental health of soldiers returning from deployment. Common mental health disorders, as described by Seal et al, include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and alcohol use disorders among active duty military personnel and veterans.[371] The PDHA, the compulsory assessment, also tests for suicidal ideations, problems in interpersonal relationships and interest in receiving care.[372] In the *Iraq War Clinician Guide*, emotional responses to war are ranged in a three-phase framework of traumatic response. In the

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[365] National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, p.8.
[366] Karen H. Seal et al. 'Bringing the War Back Home: Mental Health Disorders Among 103 788 US Veterans Returning from Iraq and Afghanistan Seen at Department of Veterans Affairs Facilities', *American Medical Association,* vol. 167 (2007), pp.476-482, p.476.
[367] Charles W. Hoge et al.'Combat Duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mental Health Problems, and Barriers to Care', *The New England Journal of Medicine,* vol. 351, no.1. (2004), pp.13-22, p.18.
[368] Hoge et al. 'Combat Duty in Iraq and Afghanistan', p.18.
[369] Ibidem.
[370] Hoge, Auchterlonie and Milliken. 'Mental Health Problems', p.1027.
[371] Seal et al.'Bringing the War Back Home', p.476.
[372] Hoge, Auchterlonie and Milliken. 'Mental Health Problems', p.1025.

immediate phase, during or immediately after traumatic events, the response is 'normal', referring to battle fatigue or combat stress, or exacerbations of pre-existing conditions, or the neuropsychiatric effects insults.[373] Diagnostic considerations associated with these symptoms are, among others, Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), Brief Psychotic Disorder and Personality disorders or traits. In the *delayed phase*, approximately one week after trauma or in the aftermath of combat, this could develop into intrusive thoughts, autonomic arousal, somatic symptoms and social withdrawal (and more). This could point to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression and other mood and anxiety disorders (and more). In the *chronic phase*, months to years after, a veteran could still suffer from PTSD or depression, personality changes, cognitive dysfunction or substance abuse disorders (and more).[374]

The results from the PHDA show the same pattern. 303,905 US Army Soldiers and Marines completed the assessment between May 1, 2003 and April 30, 2004 on return from OEF, OIF and other deployment locations (e.g. Bosnia, Kosovo). The OIF had the biggest share with 222,620 completed assessments (73 per cent). Almost a fifth of all the returned soldiers and marines from OIF, 19.1 per cent, met the risk criteria for a mental health concern while this figure was only 11.3 per cent for OEF and 8.5 per cent for all other locations. On the PTSD-scale, which included 4 questions on which 2 had to be positive to be screened positive for PTSD, 9.8 per cent had a score of at least 2.[375] Of the Soldiers and Marines deployed in OEF or other operations, respectively 4.7 and 2.1 percent were screened positive for PTSD.

Hoge, Auchterlonie and Milliken found that exposure to a combat situation was correlated with screening positive for PTSD among OIF veterans. 79.6 per cent of the veterans that scored positive on the PTSD scale 'reported witnessing persons being wounded or killed or engaging in direct combat during which they discharged their weapon compared with 95,894 (47.8%) of 200 798 who screened negative for PTSD'.[376] 4.3 per cent of the OIF veterans were referred for mental health problems of which 56 per cent were documented to have received a mental health evaluation.[377] At least 31 per cent of the OIF veterans had at least one outpatient mental health care visit within the first year of postdeployment.[378]

What could we possibly conclude from this in the context of foreign fighters? First of all, it is inaccurate to simply apply data on mental health problems from one group onto the other. As described above, the deployment location is greatly influencing the combat experience and therefore also the mental health risks. However, there are some reasons to argue that figures on mental health problems of returned foreign fighters *could* even be higher. The US military is highly

[373] National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. *Iraq War Clinician Guide*, p.11.
[374] Idem, p.12.
[375] Hoge, Auchterlonie and Milliken. 'Mental Health Problems', p.1027.
[376] Idem, p.1028.
[377] Idem, p.1031.
[378] Idem, p.1028.

trained while foreign fighters might be less prepared, both physically, amateurism can increase the chance of being wounded, and mentally, less training to cope with the stress.[379] Secondly, there is a direct correlation between combat experience and the risk of PTSD. Foreign fighters might have more direct combat experience than the surveyed groups. This relates to irregular or asymmetric warfare: the chance of being killed or witnessing the killing of companions is probably higher. Thirdly, there are no formal mechanisms in place to screen the health of returned foreign fighters. There is no early identification of problems and probably not as much as 31 per cent will have an outpatient health care visit in the first year of returning. Depending on the context, this could be caused by a variety of reasons: when foreign fighters such as jihadists are seen as terrorists or people who have committed (war) crimes, they might prefer to stay out of the spotlights instead of voluntarily making a health care visit.

These findings show that foreign fighters face a certain risk of developing mental health problems such as PTSD upon returning. The risk will depend on the combat experience but there are reasons to believe it is higher when compared to officially enlisted military personnel. Incentives to complete mental health assessments upon returning might help in decreasing the risk or at least function as an 'early warning system' of individuals with mental health problems. This is however hard to combine with a more criminalising approach to foreign fighters.

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[379] It is assumed that military training – generally speaking – has some positive effects on both aspects.

Appendix II – Foreign fighter: Terrorist ratio

Legend:

Black: individuals who did not fulfill the criteria of 'Western' or could not be categorised as foreign fighters or foreign 'trainees'.

Green: individuals who fulfilled the criteria of 'Western' and could be categorised as foreign fighters or foreign 'trainees'.

Blue: activity of this Western individual can be categorised as training.

Red: activity of this Western individual can be categorised as fighting.

Orange: failed attempt by a Western individual to train/fight.

Sources:

See Bibliography – terrorist plots for the list of sources.

Database:

See next page.

The Database

Plot #	Plot name	Year	Country	Death /injured	Individuals	Country of origin	Western?	Foreign 'trip'	Fighting/training?
1	GIA Air France hijacking	1994	Algeria /France	3	Djamel Zitouni	Algeria	no	GIA member	
					Abdul Abdullah Yahia	Algeria	no	GIA member	
					x	Algeria	no	GIA member	
					x	Algeria	no	GIA member	
2	GIA group	1995	France		Khaled Kelkal	Algeria - moved to France	yes	none	
	St Michel bombing			8/86	Ali Touchent	Algeria	no	GIA agent	
	Arc de triomphe bombing			0/17	Rachid Ramda	Algeria	no	none	
	Lyon railway bomb			plot not executed	Safe Bourada	France	yes	none	
	South Paris bomb			plot not executed	Karim Koussa	Algeria - moved to France	yes	none	
	Jewish school bomb			0/14	Abdelkader Bouhadjar	France	yes	none	
	Maison Blanche bombing			0/12	Nasreddine Slimani	Algeria - moved to France	yes	none	
	Paris train bombing			0/29	Farid Mellouk	Algeria	no	none	
	Lille marketplace			plot not executed	Ali Belkacem	Algeria	no	GIA agent	
	Lille G7 bomb			plot not executed	Boualem Bensaid	Algeria	no	GIA agent	
					Mohammed Drici	France	yes	none	
					Ali Ben Fattoum	Algerian	no	none	
					David Vallat	France	yes	Afghanistan	training
					Joseph Jaime	France	yes	Afghanistan	training
3	Roubaix gang	1996	France	failed	Lionel Dumont	France	yes	Bosnia	fighting
					Christophe Caze	France	yes	Bosnia	fighting
4	Strasbourg Plot	2000	France	plot not executed	Salim Boukhari	Algeria- moved to France	no	Afghanistan	wanted to fight in Chechnya
	Abu Doha Network operating from Khalden camp Afghanistan				Fouhad Sabour	Algerian	no	Afghanistan	training
					Aeroubi Beandali	Algerian	no	Afghanistan	training
					Lamine Marouni	Algerian	no	Afghanistan	training
5	Beghal network	2001	France	plot not executed	Djamel Beghal	Algeria - moved to France	yes	Afghanistan	training
					Nizar Trabelsi	Tunesia- moved to Germany	yes	Afghanistan	contact AQ
					Kamel Daoudi	Algeria - moved to France	yes	Afghanistan	training
					Jerome Courtaillier	France	yes	Afghanistan	training
					Johan Bonte	France	yes	none	
					Abdelghani Rabia	Algeria	no	none	
6	Shoe Bomber	2001	UK	executed - 0	Richard Reid	UK	yes	Afghanistan	training
7	Jewish targets in Germany	2002	Germany	plot not executed	Ashraf al-Dagma	Jordan - moved to Germany	no	none	
					Djamel Moustafa	Jordan - moved to Germany	no	none	
					Ismail Shalabi	Algeria - moved to Germany	no	none	
					Mohammed abu Dhess	Jordan - moved to Germany	no	none	
8	Heathrow plot	2003	UK	plot not executed	Andrew Rowe	UK	yes	Bosnia	fighting

Plot #	Plot name	Year	Country	Death /injured	Individuals	Country of origin	Western?	Foreign 'trip'	Fighting/training?
9	Chechen Network	2002	France	plot not executed	Chelali Benchellali	Algeria - moved to France	yes	Bosnia	"humanitarian aid"
					Maamar Ouazane	Algeria - moved to France	yes	Chechnya (Pankisi Gorge Georgia)	fighting
					Menad Benchellali	France	yes	Chechnya (Pankisi Gorge Georgia)	fighting
					Merouane Benhamed	Algeria - moved to France	yes	Chechnya (Pankisi Gorge Georgia)	fighting
					Nourredine Merabet	Algeria - moved to France	yes	Chechnya (Pankisi Gorge Georgia)	fighting
					Said Arif	Algeria	yes	Afghanistan Georgia	fighting
10	Shoe Bomber 2	2003	UK	plot not executed	Saajid Badat	UK	yes	Pakistan /Afghanistan	training
11	Ricin plot	2003	UK	plot not executed	Kamel Bourgass	Algeria (illegal immigrant)	no	Afghanistan	training: unconfirmed
					Mohammed Meguerba	Algeria	no	Afghanistan	training: unconfirmed
12	Heathrow (Crevice) plot	2002	UK	plot not executed	Mohammed Khawaja	Canada	yes	Pakistan	training
					Omar Khyam	UK	yes	Kashmir	fighting/training
					Jawad Akbar	Pakistan - moved to Italy/UK	yes	Pakistan	training
					Salahuddin Amin	UK	yes	Pakistan	training
					Waheed Mahmood	UK	yes	Pakistan	training
					Anthony Garcia	Algeria - moved to UK	yes	Pakistan	training
13	Madrid	2004	Spain	191/1800	Jamal Zougam	Moroccan	yes	none	
					Otman el Ghanoui	Moroccan	no	none	
					Jose Emilio Suarez	Spain	yes	none	
					Abdelmajid Bouchar	Moroccan	no	none	
					Basel Ghalyoun	Syrian	no	none	
					Youssef Belhadj	Moroccan	no	none	
					Daoud Ouhnane	Algeria	no	none	
					Hasan el Haski	Moroccan	no	none	
					Fouad el Morabit Amghar	Moroccan	yes	none	
					Mohamed Larbi Ben Sellam	Morocan	no	none	
					Rafa Zouhier	Moroccan	no	none	
					Antonio Toro	Spain	yes	none	
					Sergio Alvarez Sanchez	Spain	yes	none	
					Antonio Ivan Reis	Spain	yes	none	
					Hamid Ahmidan	Moroccan	yes	none	
					Mohamed Bouharrat	Moroccan	no	none	
					Rachid Aglif	Moroccan	yes	none	
					Saed el Harrak	Moroccan	no	none	
					Mahmoud Slimane Aoun	Lebanon	no	none	
					Nasreddine Bousbaa	Algerian	no	none	
					Jamal Ahmidan	Moroccan	yes	none	
					Abdennabi Kounjaa	Moroccan	no	none	
					Rachid Oulad	Moroccan	no	none	
					Mohammed Oulad	Moroccan	no	none	
					Serhane Ben Abdelmajid Fakhet	Tunesian	no	none	
					Allekema Lamari	Algerian	yes	GIA?	
					Asri Rifaat Anouar	Moroccan	no	none	
14	Hofdstadgroep	2004	Netherlands	1	Mohammed Bouyeri	Netherlands	yes	none	
					Ismail Akhnikh	Netherlands	yes	Pakistan	training?
					Jason Walters	Netherlands	yes	Pakistan	training
					Nouredine el Fahtni	Morroco	no	none	
					Redouan al-Issar	Syria	no	none	
					Samir Azzouz	Netherlands	yes	Chechnya (failed)	training/fighting

Plot #	Plot name	Year	Country	Death /injured	Individuals	Country of origin	Western?	Foreign 'trip'	Fighting/training?
15	Luton cell	2004	UK	plot not executed	Dhiren Barot	India - moved to UK	yes	Pakistan	fighting in Kashmir
					Mohammed Naveed Bhatti	UK	yes	none	
					Junade Feroze	UK	yes	none	
					Zia Ul Haq	UK	yes	none	
					Abdul Aziz Jalil	UK	yes	Pakistan	training
					Omar Rehman	UK	yes	none	
					Qaisar Shaffi	UK	yes	none	
					Nadeem Tarmohamed	UK	yes	none	
16	Spanish National Court Pot	2004	Spain	plot not executed	Abdelkrim Besmail	Algeria - moved to Spain	no	(GIA)	
	Martyrs for Morocco				Bachir Belhakem	Algeria - moved to Spain	no	none	
					Hoari Jera	Lebanon	no	none	
					Kamara Birahima Diadie	Mauritania	no	none	
					Mohammed Achraf	UAE	no	none	
					Mohamed Amine Akli	Algeria	no	none	
					Mohamed Boukiri	Algeria	no	none	
					Said Afif	Algeria	no	none	
					Mustafa Farjani	Morocco	no	none	
17	London	2005	UK	52/770	Mohammed Siddique Khan	UK	yes	Pakistan	training
					Shehzad Tanweer	UK	yes	Pakistan	training
					Germaine Lindsay	Jamaica - moved to UK	yes	none	
					Hasib Hussain	UK	yes	none	
18	London copycat	2005	UK	0-failed	Mukhtar Said-Ibrahim	Eritrea - moved to UK	yes	none	
					Yassin Hassan Omar	Somalia - moved to UK	yes	none	
					Ramzi Mohamed	Somalia	no	none	
					Manfo Kwaku Asiedu	UK/Ghana	no	none	
					Hussein Osman	Ethopian - moved to UK	no	none	
19	German train plot	2006	Germany	0-failed	Jihad Hamad	Lebanon	no	none	
					Youssef Mohamad El Hajdib	Lebanon	no	none	
20	Glasgow Airport	2007	UK	0-failed	Bilal Abdullah	UK	yes	none	
				perpetrator died	Kafeel Ahmed	India	no	none	
21	Germany bomb plot	2007	Germany	plot not executed	Fritz Gelowicz	Germany	yes	Uzbekistan	training
					Daniel Schneider	Germany	yes	Uzbekistan	training
					Adem Yilmaz	Turkey - moved to Germany	yes	Uzbekistan	training
22	Attempted murder MP UK	2010	UK	0/1	Roshonara Choudhry	UK	yes	none	
23	Stockholm suicide bomber	2010	Sweden	0/2	Taimour Abdulwaha al-Abdaly	Iraq - moved to Sweden	yes	unconfirmed	
				perpetrator died					
24	US soldiers Frankfurt airport	2011	Germany	2	Arid Uka	Germany	yes	none	
25	Toulouse	2012	France	7/5	Mohammed Merah	France	yes	Pakistan /Afghanistan	training
26	Woolwich	2013	UK	1	Michael Adebolajo	UK	yes	Somalia (failed)	fighting
					Michael Adebowale	UK	yes	none	