



Addressing the Reintegration Challenges Faced by Foreign Terrorist Family Members Returning to the United States from Middle East Internally Displaced Persons Camps





The Issue

Three years after the collapse of the Islamic State and the US Government (USG) continues to struggle with how to best address the societal reintegration of US Person (USPER) foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) family members returning from internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Syria and Iraq.

As a result, these returning USPER women and children, possessing exposure to long-term trauma and radicalization, lack access to the necessary support services needed to successfully and safely transition back into society.

Research Conducted

To identify a means to balance humanitarian assistance with threat mitigation measures, this study reviewed and analyzed four rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives undertaken by foreign partners for lesson learned and transferable best practices.

Recommendations

The study recommends the USG establish a *federally-funded transition center and rehabilitation program* – to include a cooperation agreement and aftercare services – as well as the official position of *‘returnee coordinator’* within the federal structure.



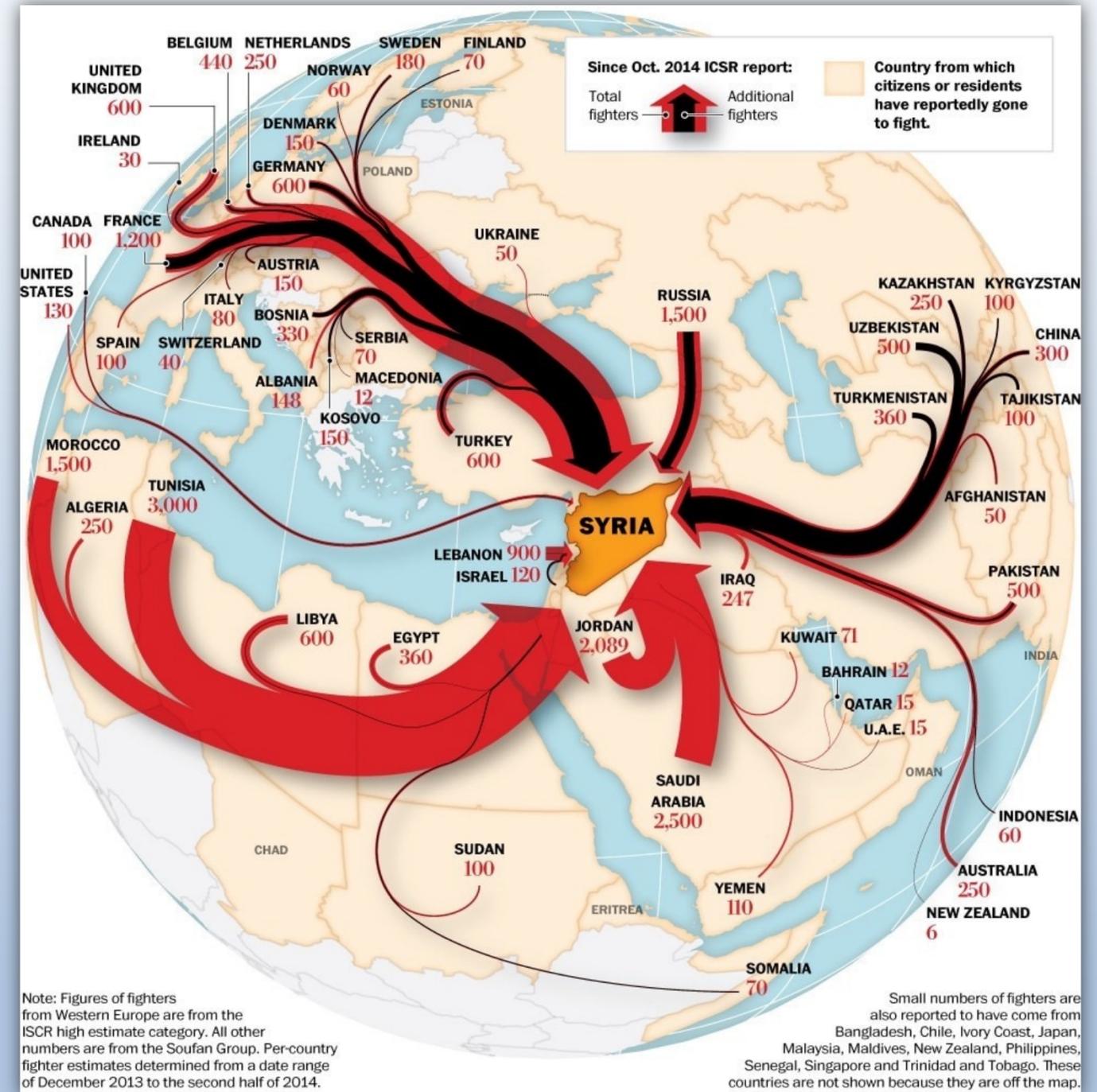
➤ Regional conflicts and birth of the Islamic State

➤ The 'Travelers'

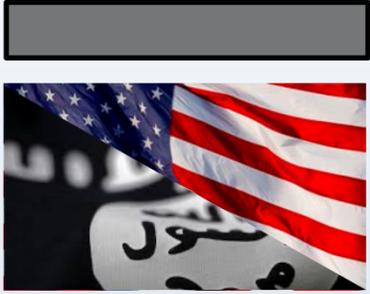
- FTFs and family members
- Estimated 40,000 individuals from 110 countries
- Including more than 200 U.S. persons (USPERs)

➤ Fall of the Islamic State and immediate aftermath

- *Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) facilities*
 - Male detainees: 8,000 – 9,000 (~ 2,000 FTFs)
 - Women and minors: 60,000 – 70,000 (~ 13,500 FTF family members)
- *Iraq-based facilities*
 - Male detainees: several thousand (undisclosed FTFs)
 - Women and minors: 300,000 (undisclosed FTF family members)



Source: International Center for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), The Soufan Group, CIA | Gene Thorp, Julie Tate and Swati Sharma (October 11, 2014)



➤ **IDP camp/prison conditions**

- Severe overcrowding
- Increasing levels of violence
- Increasing levels of crime
- Increasing levels of social tensions
- Increasing levels of radicalization
- Understaffing of security forces

➤ “*We will kill you...we are the Islamic State*”...threats posed by minors within IDP camps

➤ “*A strategic problem 10 years down the road*”...Gen. McKenzie concerning the minors in IDP camps



Source: Syrian Observatory for Human Rights



- **As many as 272 USPERs assessed to have traveled to join the conflicts in Syria and Iraq**
 - In reality, exact number unknown
 - Indirect travel...surreptitious means of departure...lack of travel records

- **Approximately 40 USPERs remain at-large**
 - Likely deceased or held within camps/detention facilities in either Syria or Iraq
 - Challenges to identification
 - Fit no singular profile
 - Use noms de guerre and kunyas
 - Children born abroad...orphans



Why Do We Care?



➤ **The ‘Right to Return’**

- Citizens vs. legal permanent residents (LPRs)
- At least 28 USPERs repatriated since 2016

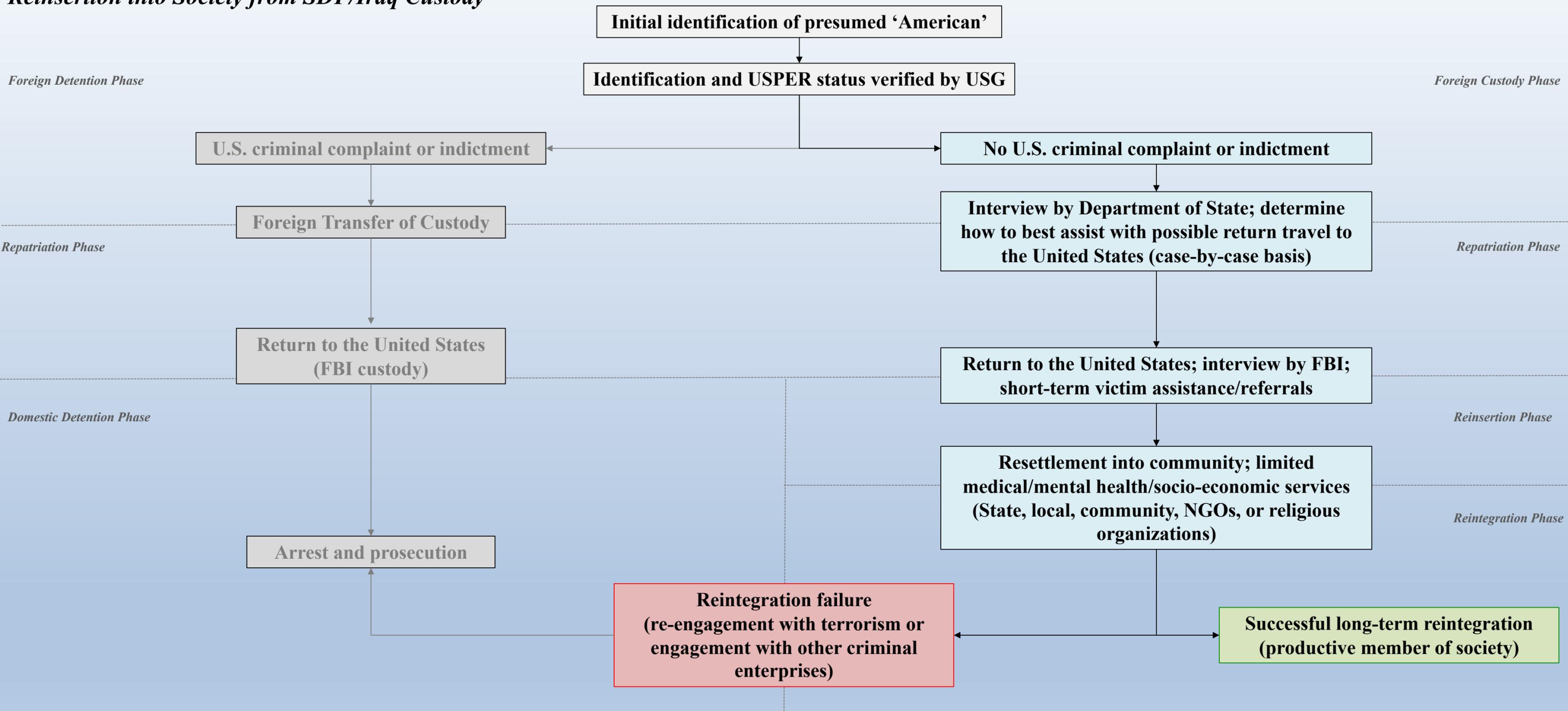
➤ **Long-term exposure to trauma, violence, radicalization, and possible weapons training**

- Women and minors often not criminally-charged
- Many require access to medical and psychological care
- Current return system not equipped to address the challenges posed



Why Do We Care?

Figure 1. Current Steps for USPER Repatriation and Reinsertion into Society from SDF/Iraq Custody



Current U.S. Return Process



- **Conducted review of potential efforts undertaken by foreign partners**
 - Included both democratic and authoritarian nations

- **Initially, identified and ranked nations based upon:**
 - Willingness to repatriate FTF family members
 - Governmental support for rehabilitation and reintegration efforts focused on these individuals

- **Next, the individual programs of each relevant nation ranked based upon:**
 - Experience with countering Salafi-jihadist ideology
 - Type and extent of interaction between program staff and participants
 - Focus on staff creditability with participants
 - Dedication to both short-term and long-term care and support

- **Finally, four unique case studies selected for additional review and analysis**
 - Identification of any transferable elements applicable to the needs, culture, and legal constraints of the United States



Munasaha Program or ‘Counseling Program’

- **Founded:** 2006 by the Saudi Ministry of the Interior (MOI)
- **Program approach:** Centralized policy/centralized execution
- **Oversight/funding:** Advisory Committee within MOI; funding from Saudi government
- **Program length:** At least eight weeks...depends on participant’s progress

Entry and progression steps

- Starts at either preventive or punitive detention stage
- Religious and counseling (clerics, scholars, and psychologists)
- Evaluation and transfer to residential rehabilitation center
- Specialized training and mental health consultations...increased freedom with progress
- Release and aftercare (family)

Success rate: Approx. 80-90% (per Saudi government)

Key takeaways and transferable elements

- Utilization of rehabilitation centers as a ‘*transition facility*’
- Treats participants as ‘*victims*’ of radicalization
- Incorporation of ongoing psychological counseling as well as non-judgmental religious dialogues
- Well-funded by the Saudi government





KEMENSOS Plan

- **Founded:** 2017 by Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA); disbanded mid-2018
- **Program approach:** Centralized policy/decentralized execution
- **Oversight/funding:** Tension between MSA and security agencies; no dedicated budget
- **Program length:** 30 days

Entry and progression steps

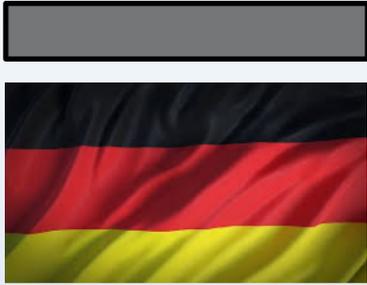
- Began with forcible repatriation to Indonesia
- Detainment and interrogation by National Police
- Transfer to MSA for rehabilitation at government-run shelter
- Questionnaire and in-take screening process
- Behavioral and religious counseling (adults vs minors)
- Loyalty pledge and release
- Aftercare (local civil organizations)

Success rate: Approx. 100% (per Indonesian government)

Key takeaways and transferable elements

- Shelters as ‘*transition zones*’
- Medical care and life skills training
- Specialized counseling for minors





HAYAT-Deutschland (HAYAT)

- **Founded:** 2011 by ZDK Society Democratic Culture (NGO)
- **Program approach:** Decentralized policy/centralized execution
- **Oversight/funding:** ZDK Society Democratic Culture (NGO); partial funding from federal sources
- **Program length:** Case specific...months to years

Entry and progression steps

- Starts with family or friends contacting program regarding radicalized individual
- Team of experts conduct risk assessment
- Development of counseling plan to empower the family to address the situation

Success rate: Restricted (privacy laws)

Key Takeaways and Transferable Elements

- 24-hour national support hotline
- Diverse team of specialists
- Family inclusion in the rehabilitation process

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Mehr Informationen
www.hayat-deutschland.de
www.journal-exit.de
www.zentrum-demokratische-kultur.de

Literaturhinweise
C. Dantschke: 'Pop-Jihad' - History and Structure of Salafism and Jihadism in Germany. Working Paper 02/13. Institute for the Study of Radical Movements (ISRM); online: www.hayat-deutschland.de

C. Dantschke, A. Mansour, J. Müller, J. Serbest: „Ich lebe nur für Allah“. Argumente und Anziehungskraft des Salafismus. Schriftenreihe Zentrum Demokratische Kultur, Berlin 2011. Aktualisiert 2019.

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Islam der Weg ins Paradies

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge



Aarhus Model

- **Founded:** 2007 by the Danish city of Aarhus; expanded in 2013 to address returning FTFs
- **Program approach:** Whole-of-society
- **Oversight/funding:** SSP Aarhus (collaborative); federal funding
- **Program length:** Case specific...approx. one year

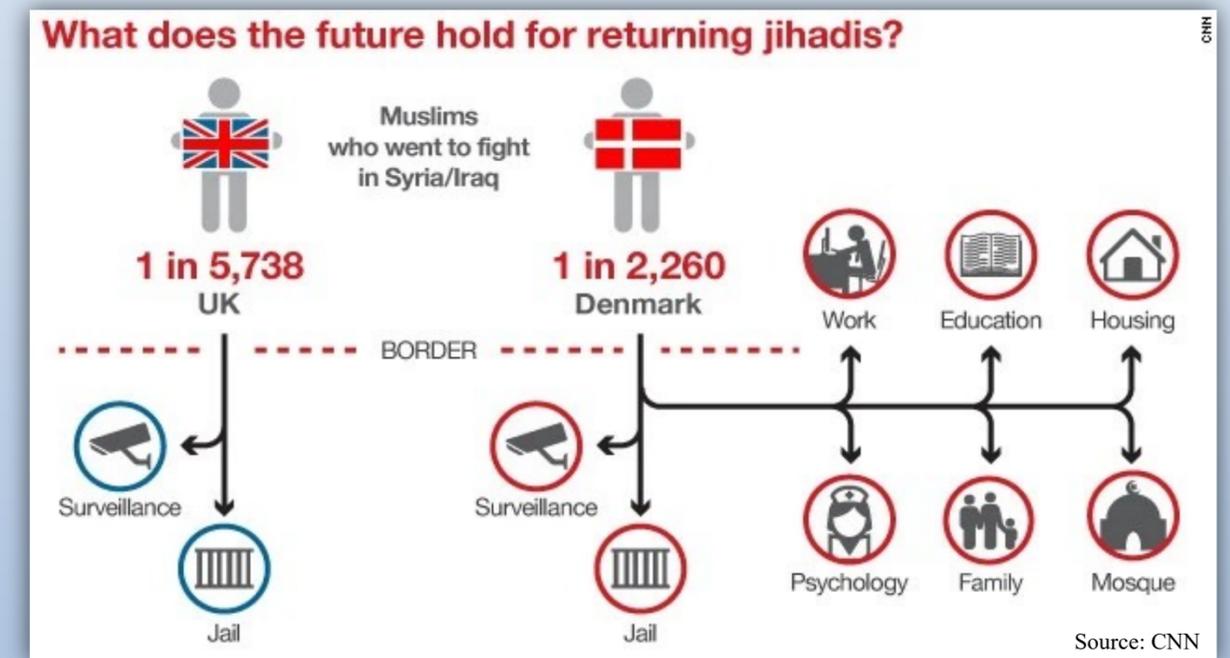
Entry and progression steps (exit portion of the program)

- Begins with an intelligence-led assessment prior to repatriation
- Multi-discipline 'task force' conduct risk assessment (possible services needed)
- Repatriation to Denmark (physical and mental health assessments)
- Cooperation agreement offer
- Mentorship, health services, education, employment, and housing

Success rate: Restricted (privacy laws)

Key Takeaways and Transferable Elements

- Multiple assessments (intelligence, risk, physical/mental health)
- Voluntary cooperation agreement (civil rights and incentives)
- Long-term mentorship
- Focus on enhancement of societal inclusion





The current posture of non-criminally charged USPER women and minors in IDP camps/prisons along with the experiences of other countries in assisting their own returning citizens demonstrates that a **national-level rehabilitation and reintegration system** is not only **necessary**...but also **achievable** and **desirable**.



- **The status quo of the current situation is not sustainable**
- USPERs possess a legal return to return
 - Cannot/should not be held indefinitely without due process
 - Remaining within IDP camps/prisons only increases exposure to trauma, violence, and radicalization (especially for minors)





- **The current U.S. return process neither addresses security concerns nor provides sufficient care for nationals**
- Current process designed for individuals who are either charged with a crime or viewed as a victim of crimes
 - Does not consider the needs and challenges associated with non-criminally charged individuals exposed to long-term trauma, violence, radicalization, and possible weapons training
 - Both ‘*victim*’ and ‘*perpetrator*’ (women and minors)
 - Successful reintegration often requires a sufficient amount of time and resources
 - The success of past returnees does not equate success for future returnees



Supporting Argument - #2



➤ **A national-level rehabilitation and reintegration system will address both security concerns and provide humanitarian assistance to its nationals**

- Provides immediate access to critically-needed physical care and mental health support
- Allows for evaluation and threat monitoring within a controlled environment
- Alleviates much of the risk associated with direct reinsertion into local communities
- Provides a secure environment for these women and minors to adjust to civilian life



Photo by Vladislav Babienko on Unsplash

Supporting Argument - #3



➤ **Establish a Federally-funded Transition Center and Rehabilitation Program**

Service functions

- In-take process
- Periodic risk assessments
- Social support network development
- Mentorship and ideological dialogues
- Educational support and vocational training
- Family support counseling
- Community outreach
- Post-transition support

Administrative functions

- Funding via U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS)
- Staffing



➤ **Incorporate a Voluntary Cooperation Agreement**

- Formalize support services offered...outline expectations
- Adults vs. minors (contractual capacity)



➤ **Establish a Reintegration Support Hotline and Portal**

- Centralized point of contact
- 24-hour availability
- Access to counselors and information
- Access to aftercare assistance



- **Establish the position of ‘Returnee Coordinator’**
 - Official position within the USG
 - Centralizes and streamlines process
 - Provides overall management/organization/coordination
 - Interacts across all levels (federal, state, local, NGOs, and religious-based groups)



By implementing the four aforementioned recommendations, the USG would establish a rehabilitation and reintegration system that addresses the specific needs of the USPER those USPER women and minors who have experienced long-term exposure to violence and radical ideology while in the IDP camps/prisons. Failure to implement such a system places not only local communities at risk... but also family members while also lessening any potential threat posed to national security by these individuals.

Questions?