I. Articles

'Gonna Get Myself Connected':
The Role of Facilitation in Foreign Fighter Mobilizations

by Timothy Holman

Abstract

How do foreign fighters access the battlefield? Research has found that social networks are important for joining groups involved in violence. Foreign fighters have no such connections to a conflict at its outset and present potential security risks to the insurgent entity. Facilitation, a mechanism, bridges the gap between the local and transnational, helping resolve a potential security dilemma. This article presents four types of evidence to demonstrate the existence of facilitation, including three case studies of French foreign fighters who traveled to fight or train abroad between 1992 and 2014. Facilitation has an emergent quality: it is not, necessarily, present at the beginning of a mobilization, but arises as would-be volunteers seek to connect to the battlefield. The initial connections are contingent and may become more stable over time, but they can be challenged and forced to re-emerge if networks are targeted and neutralized. This article contributes to the existing foreign fighter literature by identifying and explaining the functioning of a mechanism within the foreign fighter mobilization process.†

Keywords: *Foreign Fighter; Mobilization; Security Dilemma; Facilitator; Facilitation*

Introduction

In March 2003, a journalist interviewed Boubakeur el-Hakim, a French national in Baghdad, Iraq. He yelled, "All my mates in the 19th, you need to come for jihad. I am here. It's me, Abu Abdallah. I am in Iraq. We are taking part in jihad. All of my brothers who are over there, come to defend Islam…I am ready to fight on the frontline. I am ready to blow myself up: put on the dynamite and BOOM…"[1] During 2004, el-Hakim worked in Syria and Iraq, and helped his brother and their friends from Paris to travel to participate in the insurgency in Iraq as foreign fighters. Three members of the so-called 19th network (see p. 11) died, two were captured by United States (U.S.) military forces in Iraq, and two, including el-Hakim, were expelled by the Syrian authorities to France. The French judiciary tried and imprisoned both men.[2] In January 2005, the French authorities arrested two more members of the group as they were about to fly to Damascus, effectively ending the groups' involvement in fighting against the U.S.

This case of French foreign fighters traveling to reach the battlefield highlights the fact that not all arrive. Some are arrested before they access the insurgency, either in a transit location or in their country of residence, while others make it into the transit zone but leave because they could not find a way to join or to cross the border into the conflict zone. Why does this occur? Is it not enough to simply make the effort to travel and join? Is this simply a random process where some would-be fighters are lucky and others are not? Underlying these questions is a fundamental issue: how do foreign fighter volunteers make the connection from their local circumstances to an insurgent entity in another country?

This study takes a mobilization approach (instead of radicalization) to address the question of foreign fighters. This research does not seek to understand the 'why' of their involvement in this activity but rather the 'how' of their participation. If most engagement in political violence is made possible through social networks–peers, kin or activist groups–how are foreign fighter volunteers able to make the connection from their local circumstances to an insurgent entity to whom they have no prior social ties? This question has not been dealt with explicitly in the research to date on foreign fighter mobilizations. Facilitation enables foreign fighters

and travelers to bridge the local and the transnational dimensions of a conflict. A 'facilitator' is an individual or entity providing information and services to volunteer foreign fighters, creating opportunities for them to join an insurgency. Facilitators vet, house, and move foreign fighters from their country of origin, through transit zones and into the combat zone. In the absence of facilitation, a foreign fighter departing their country of origin and arriving in a transit location is less likely to cross borders or find and be accepted by an organization operating in a semi-clandestine manner, wary of infiltration by hostile government agents.

This article does not address why foreign fighters travel, their responses to frames or narratives, or the effect of insurgent group propaganda. The researcher makes a loose distinction between foreign fighters and those traveling for training abroad. Foreign travel for training involves a similar, if not identical, process to travel by foreign fighters. Facilitation is not used in this article to make claims about size or variation in foreign fighter mobilizations; while facilitation may play a role, further research and investigation into other mechanisms present in the mobilization process is required. For the purpose of this study 'mobilize' is defined as an individual's attempt to "[o]rganize and encourage (a group of people) to take collective action in pursuit of a particular objective."[3] This article seeks to establish the presence of facilitation in the foreign fighter mobilization process, its role in aiding travel abroad, and the changes in how it manifests overtime. The central question is not why foreign fighter mobilizations occur, but how foreign fighters make the connection from their local circumstances to become involved in a transnational mobilization?

Process-based reasoning is used to explain foreign fighter mobilizations, seeking to analyze "smaller-scale causal mechanisms that recur in different combinations in different aggregate settings with different aggregate consequences in varying historical settings."[4] The term 'mechanism' is used to refer to a "delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations" and the expression "processes" is used to describe "regular sequences of mechanisms that produce (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements."[5] This research suggests facilitation is a mechanism operating within the foreign fighter mobilization process.

The literature on recruitment to terrorist organizations finds that social networks are important, although there is some debate about how and why networks contribute.[6] There is consensus that networks–family, peer groups, and activist groups–contribute to joining violent groups.[7] This research has primarily focused on three areas: joining an organization active in the person's country of residence; transnational participation, primarily through mechanisms for diaspora mobilization; or in the case of jihadist activity, why individuals come to participate in violence.[8] These investigations do not deal explicitly with how foreign fighters join insurgent organizations involved in irregular warfare in other countries.

Individual foreign fighter profiles are not used as a variable to predict participation in foreign fighting. This assumption is based on research conducted on terrorist profiles that finds there is no terrorist profile of mental illness.[9] Socio-demographic indicators[10] or root cause arguments[11] are also not able to suggest the likelihood of engagement in violence. In contrast, studies do point in one way or another to the importance of group dynamics in the process or route to political violence.[12] Sageman is emphatic on this point, speaking of "takfiri" terrorism being about "bunches of guys" who get together and either try to join the jihad overseas or organize a local attack.[13] Horgan and Taylor, among others, now suggest an approach that does not ask why an individual enters into violent activity but how individuals became involved.[14] This process or pathways approach has gained significant traction amongst those involved in terrorism research.[15] This study seeks to build on the conclusions in this literature that personal networks are important when joining organizations engaged in violence. It examines how this occurs in transnational foreign fighter mobilization.

The rest of this article proceeds in the following manner: First, the gap in the existing foreign fighter literature related to the question of facilitation is briefly identified; second, prior research on how the local and transnational connect is examined; third, four types of evidence that support the existence of facilitation in

the foreign fighter mobilization process are described; fourth, three brief case studies are used to show the presence of facilitation across time; finally, the piece concludes by suggesting that the level of contingency in the mobilization process may led to a mechanism that is based primarily on relational diffusion where the opportunity for participation is limited or it may lead to a scale shift which creates broader opportunities for participation.[16]

The Foreign Fighter Literature

Academic research on the phenomenon of foreign fighters and foreign fighting is relatively recent, dating back to 2003.[17] It has established the existence of foreign fighters and situated the presence of foreign fighters in conflicts throughout history.[18] The origins of foreign fighting, and the reasons why, where and how they fight have all been scrutinized.[19] Research has examined why foreign fighters participate in conflicts – civil wars or in irregular warfare against invading or occupying forces – in response to frames and narratives that resonate outside of the immediate conflict zone with a wider transnational community.[20] The reasons for fighting are primarily ideational and not material. What foreign fighters do in the conflict zone and how domestic allies view these activities in the insurgency have also been examined.[21] Case studies have provided details of foreign fighter participation in various conflicts.[22] The conflict in Syria generated a renewed interest in foreign fighters and numerous studies on national contingents in Syria have been written.[23] However, with the exception of de Bie et al there has been limited research on how foreign fighters mobilize to participate in a conflict.[24]

Connecting the Local and Transnational

Research has set the parameters of the foreign fighter domain, but numerous questions remain unresolved or not explicitly addressed, including how foreign fighters get to the battlefield and how they make connections to the insurgents. These questions fall under the rubric of how foreign fighters mobilize. In what ways do they organize in response to frames? Malet argues this leads to mobilizations.[25] What factors allow or permit travel to occur and which ones dissuade or prevent travel? The existing foreign fighter literature acknowledges the existence of a process or factors that influence mobilization. Hegghammer observes that there are two elements required for a large scale foreign fighter mobilization to occur: First, an ideology stressing solidarity within an imagined transnational community, and second, "a strong cadre of transnational activists."[26] Moore and Tumelty submit that this cadre of transnational activists have roles and explain how "[c]omplex local and global social networks enable and motivate foreign fighters…[with] gatekeepers who facilitate movement."[27] This is suggestive of a process, and—depending on how this functions—some fighters can travel while others are unable to reach the battlefield. What are the constituent parts or mechanisms involved in the process? Do these mechanisms change between mobilizations or do they stay the same?

The author reviewed literature specifically related to foreign fighters, including material from terrorism studies, diaspora mobilizations, and social movements to see how, if at all, they explained the ways in which people connect to external entities. There is a consensus that a bridging entity is required to connect the local to the transnational. A variety of terms are used to describe this entity: "gatekeeper," "broker," "political entrepreneur," "relational diffusion," and "facilitator." Hogan-Harris, Zammit, and de Bie point to facilitation having a role in influencing outcomes, Zammit in relation to the absence of terrorist attacks in Australia, and de Bie in influencing the ability of would-be foreign fighters to join a conflict.[28]

To establish the existence of a facilitation mechanism and understand how it might function, accounts of conflicts with foreign fighter involvement, including Spain, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria were examined. This included scholarly research of the conflicts, press material, court documents, captured terrorist documents,

and autobiographies of foreign fighters. The material on the various conflicts suggest that for a mobilization to occur, would-be fighters need to engage with the frame and, if they are receptive, they then need to act on this frame to travel; thus, they need to access networks linked to the conflict. Admittance to these networks is provided by a facilitator (an individual, a more formal structure like a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), or a social media platform) who aids the incoming fighter by providing information and resources to be able to travel and join the insurgency.

Origins of the Term Facilitator

The term 'facilitator' did not come from the academic literature, but rather, it originated with government entities. The earliest use in press sources is a reference to one of the 1998 US embassy bombers, "Wadih el Hage…was accused of being a key 'facilitator' for both bomb teams."[29] 'Facilitator' is first used in relation to foreign fighters during the conflict in Iraq and appears in a January 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) briefing to explain a High Value Target's activities.[30] U.S. officials used the term frequently to describe foreign fighters and individuals involved with foreign fighters in Iraq. The term is present in many of the previously secret assessments of Guantanamo Bay detainees.[31] A reading of the material where the term is employed suggests that 'facilitator' is understood as a role. The idea of a facilitator as an individual connecting local volunteers to foreign insurgencies is seen in the account of the activities of an individual named "Sheik." He is described as someone with "… extensive connections throughout the Middle East to include Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Syria. From those countries, his connections recruited and financed foreign fighters who were later smuggled into Iraq, usually through Syria…"[32] Governments understand facilitators as entities providing information and resources to create opportunities to connect the local to the transnational.

Theorizing on Connecting the Local and the Transnational

Writing about transnational networks of suicide bombers, Hafez argued "collective action requires pre-existing ties and organizational settings from which to draw recruits, resources and leaders" but, in the case of foreign fighters, how these ties are established within a transnational context requires explanation. [33] Moore and Tumelty suggested the presence of "gatekeepers who facilitate the movement of volunteers, who link terrorism and conflict…"[34] Sageman, in his earlier study of transnational jihadist networks, asked how volunteers connected to al-Qaeda. He used the terms "strength of weak bonds" and "brokers" to describe this process.[35] He argued that "brokers" provide a bridge to jihad between local cliques and the al-Qaeda organization.[36] In parallel to Sageman, Neumann et al. use the term "broker" to describe the activities of "middle managers," individuals connecting al-Qaeda with persons outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan.[37] They argue that "middle managers" are "critical to forging linkages as well as facilitating the flow of information, resources, skills, and strategic direction between the top and the bottom of the organization."[38]

Explanations of transnational diaspora mobilizations also refer to brokerage.[39] Adamson argues that the "mechanism of transnational brokerage" is useful in explaining how diaspora networks become connected to what she terms "conflict networks," i.e. those engaged in violence in the home state.[40] In the Kurdish case, this occurred as "transnational brokers," connected elements of the Kurdish migrant community in Germany with entities in southeastern Turkey.[41] They set up political and cultural associations that were used to mobilize community support for the conflict in southeastern Turkey. She terms these transnational brokers "political entrepreneurs" who build organizational entities in order to "command political loyalties and mobilize resources."[42]

Thus, the underlying idea of facilitation is equivalent to the notion of a "weak tie" as conceptualized by Granovetter.[43] He sees 'weak ties' as "an important resource in making possible mobility opportunity."[44] In his view, "weak ties" are more likely to link members of different small groups."[45] Further, "[w]eak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle..."[46] Other scholars term this 'brokerage,' "whereby an actor acts as an intermediary between two actors not directly linked, thus creating a new line of communication and exchange."[47] The role played by a facilitator is similar to that of a brokerage, the "linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites."[48] A facilitator grants access to trust networks, "ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes or failures of others."[49]

Studies suggest that facilitation not only links or connects disparate entities but that it influences outcomes. Sageman contended that when "brokers" could not be found, individuals seeking to join the jihad were unable to do so.[50] He argued that the "process of cliques joining the jihad has strong implications for its rate of growth–degree of ambient hostility or tolerance affects its rate of growth…"[51] Zammit describes how the position of facilitators in the Australian context was essential in aiding travel and joining overseas groups. He stated that these foreign connections enabled plotting in Australia and without access to facilitators plots decreased.[52] De Bie et al., in their study of foreign fighters in the Netherlands, concluded, that "the lack of instrumental brokers and fixers obstructs the accessibility of a conflict area."[53] Facilitation is not only about connecting, it shapes opportunities for joining the local and the transnational.

Defining Facilitation

The extant literature, both on how the local and transnational intersect as well as historical accounts of mobilizations demonstrates there is a need for a mechanism to connect the local to the transnational. This is variously termed "brokerage," "political entrepreneur," "middle manager," "gatekeeper," or "facilitator", depending on the literature involved. This study uses the term facilitator and argues that facilitators occupy an enabling function between foreign fighter volunteers and the insurgent organizations they are seeking to join. Facilitators connect disparate entities: the volunteer and the insurgent entity. In many cases, the absence of a facilitator means that the volunteers are unable to connect to the battlefield.

The researcher differentiates between two types of facilitation: ideologically aligned and ideologically neutral (see Table 1). "Ideologically aligned" refers to facilitators who are a part of the insurgent organization. They are more likely to have other roles, to be trusted, have greater access to information, and perform services, due to belief and commitment to the insurgent group.[54] These facilitators are potentially more useful to the organization but are a point of vulnerability due to them being embedded *within* the organization. An "ideologically neutral" facilitator provides limited on demand services, such as the movement of foreign fighters between cities, or across borders.[55] This type of facilitator is more akin to a smuggler or criminal. They have less access to information and are less likely to be trusted, performing services primarily for money. They are used to circumvent shortcomings in the insurgent groups' capacity—for example, knowledge of smuggling routes into and out of a conflict zone.

The facilitation mechanism is, therefore, the cumulative activity of facilitators between countries of origin and the battlefield. There are two types of facilitation mechanisms: a covert mechanism that relies heavily on relational ties – friends and kinship – for access, and a mechanism that is overt and relies on organizational ties that are open and accessible to large numbers of would-be foreign fighters. The different expressions of the mechanism are not, necessarily, mutually exclusive. Foreign fighters of one nationality may access an overt facilitation point, while others may need to gain access through covert networks. Simply put,

facilitation bridges the gap in a transnational mobilization between a would-be foreign fighter in their country of origin or residence and the insurgent group in the destination country.

Table 1: Facilitator types, expressions and spaces

Type	Expression	Spaces	Consequences	Conflict Presence
Ideologically-aligned	Overt (Access is open)	Government support, NGOs, public meetings, established offices, religious or language schools, social media platforms	Scale shift (often temporary at beginning of conflict) widespread availability of information and resources	Afghanistan I*, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq (early to mid 2003), Somalia, Yemen, Syria
Ideologically-aligned	Covert (Access is limited)	Family, friendship, prison and activist networks	Relational diffusion of information and resources	Afghanistan II & III*, Chechnya, Iraq (post mid to late 2003 onwards), Yemen, Syria
Ideologically-neutral	Covert (Access is limited)	Criminals, smugglers, corrupt officials	Relational diffusion of information and resources	Bosnia, Afghanistan II & III, Iraq, Syria

* Afghanistan I refers to the period up until the Soviet withdrawal; Afghanistan II, the period following the withdrawal until the fall of the Taliban; and Afghanistan III refers to the period after the fall of the Taliban regime.

The conditions under which the mechanism manifests as overt or covert are not entirely clear. Factors that may play a role include the structure of the conflict, whether it is a civil war or an invasion. Alternatively, the attitudes and actions of states involved with or interested in the conflict and its outcome may influence how facilitation establishes itself. In the first Afghanistan conflict, the mechanism was relatively overt due to widespread sympathy for the Afghan insurgents as well as material support through both state and private channels.[56] The Saudis did not identify, at this time, a threat from the travel of their nationals to the region and thus did not seek to disrupt the facilitation mechanism.[57] The activities of these groups were not targeted until governments in North Africa, perceiving a threat, started to pressure the Pakistani authorities in the early to mid-1990s.[58] In contrast, the U.S. in Iraq was relatively quick to identify and act against the foreign fighter issue limiting the development of an overt mechanism.[59] The conflict in Syria initially attracted sympathy for the rebel movements and calls for Assad to step down.[60] This ambivalence created an environment, where many early foreign fighters from Libya and Tunisia traveled with relative ease, and it was in Tunisia that French nationals first sought to connect to the conflict in Syria.[61]

The Dual Function of Facilitation

Facilitation fills two functions. First, it makes available information and resources related to the logistics of traveling, such as which routes to take, how to dress and behave, and what kind of material (clothes and so forth) to bring.[62] Second, it helps resolve the risk of accepting volunteers, who are in fact government agents or assets, and mitigates the risk of infiltration by hostile entities. Ideologically aligned facilitators deal with both these aspects, while ideologically neutral facilitators provide services related to travel and border crossing.

This second function of facilitation resolves, in part, the signaling dilemma identified by Hegghammer.[63] Recruitment is not without risk, even more so with foreign volunteers. The insurgent group needs to ensure that it does not accept agents of foreign governments. Facilitation allows the group to vet incoming recruits. The vetting process is referred to as *tazkiyah* in Arabic.[64] It consists of an incoming volunteer providing the name or, more often, the *kunya* (pseudonym) of the person recommending them to the insurgent group.[65] Without the ability to provide the *tazkiyah*, an incoming volunteer may either be rejected or asked to wait until they can find someone to recommend them.[66] The signaling aspect of facilitation is present across all of the mobilizations, although with differing degrees of strictness in its application.

Al-Qaeda was stricter because the costs of allowing in an enemy agent or asset were high – the killing or capture of senior leaders or compromise of ongoing attack plans.[67] On the other hand, the Islamic State (IS) seems to have accepted some fighters without recommendations but still vetted them, and these fighters, in turn, recommended their friends.[68] The looser application was due to the group's territorial control and, for a time, lower interest in external operations. IS had time to "evaluate," "probe," and perform "costly induction" in the absence of a *tazkiyah*.[69] Thomson writes that French volunteers trying to obtain recommendations were defrauded by Tunisians selling fake ones.[70] IS initially had the confidence that its internal security service would be able to identify spies or agents and deal with them accordingly. As the Syria conflict has progressed, IS has become more concerned about infiltration and recommendations are now sought from would-be fighters.[71]

Evidence for Facilitation

This study looks for four types of evidence to confirm the presence of facilitation as the mechanism that bridges the circumstances of local volunteers to the overseas insurgency. The first three types are primarily illustrative, while the fourth evidence category provides greater detail in the form of basic process tracing to examine the presence of facilitation amongst French foreign fighters and travelers. First, the author examined biographic accounts of travelers and how they say they traveled for mention of facilitators or bridging entities; second, he looked for trace evidence, specifically, documents or mentions of documents that pointed to facilitation in an insurgent organization; third, he examined whether governments or other entities took action against facilitation or make mention of this activity in their responses to foreign fighter mobilizations; finally, he drew on three case studies, spanning a 20-year period, from an observation set of French foreign fighters and travelers. The choice of case studies is partially purposive, as the author wanted cases from the earliest period of foreign fighters and travelers, towards the middle of this period, and then a relatively recent case. The selection is partially based on data availability; cases were selected where there was sufficient information to a make a determination about how individuals traveled. In these case studies, the researcher first looked for the absence of prior ties to a conflict and then tried to determine how they bridged this gap to participate (or not) in the conflict.

Accounts of Foreign Fighters and Travelers

The researcher first reviewed biographic accounts by former foreign fighters or travelers as well as one account by a former intelligence asset.[72] In the case of two travelers, the researcher compared their accounts with those available in the Guantanamo Docket.[73] He did not look at interpretations as to why they traveled or what they had done after arriving but only at how they had made the connection to Afghanistan. In the case of two of the French travelers, there is little difference between their account and the documents in the Guantanamo Docket. The two travelers from Lyon left France in late June 2001, and were facilitated by the brother of one of the travelers. They traveled to London where they were given further help from an established Algerian facilitator, Rabah Kadre (Toufik).[74] They described the use of false passports, calling from phone boxes in London to make contact with the person they knew only as Toufik, who housed

them, bought them tickets, and gave instructions. His help enabled them to travel onwards to Pakistan, where they were aided by another facilitator, "Mohammed."[75] This person vetted them, housed them, and arranged for them to go to Afghanistan. They took pseudonyms and did not use their real names while in Afghanistan.[76] While there, they spent time at the Algerian guesthouse in Jalalabad before entering the training camps. Following the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, both were taken into custody and transferred to Guantanamo Bay before their eventual release back to France.

Omar Nasiri, a former French intelligence asset, traveled to Pakistan in 1995, to try and access the camps in Afghanistan to provide information to the French external intelligence service. It took him some time to locate a person who could facilitate his entry, and because he had arrived without the recommendation of a Europe-based facilitator, he was asked, "did someone send you here?"[77] His previous participation in a *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA) logistics network in Belgium and the fact the members of that network had previously been in Afghanistan, appear to have weighed in his favor. He was allowed to travel into Afghanistan.[78] The accounts of former travelers refer to the presence of facilitators and their role in enabling travel and subsequent access to Afghanistan. Connecting to the facilitator was permitted by friendship and kinship networks, and in the case of Nasiri, his former role in a militant network that contained members who had previously been in Afghanistan.[79]

Documentary Evidence

A second source of evidence is documents or material produced by insurgent groups that mention foreign fighters. A review of the various conflicts found material suggestive of facilitation for Afghanistan (circa 1992-2001),[80] Iraq (2003-10),[81] and Syria (2011-onwards).[82] In Afghanistan, U.S. forces recovered administrative forms that contain reference to facilitation, "the person who recommended you."[83] For Iraq, a Belgian trial referred to details from a foreign fighter list, and a French trial report mentioned another list that contained the names and other details of 258 persons.[84] During this trial in France, one of the foreign fighters described filling in the form that was used to compile this list.[85] The best known documentation is the Sinjar material captured in September 2007, containing detailed records of some 700 foreign fighters. The documents, similar to the al-Qaeda ones from Afghanistan, contain references to facilitators.[86]

Since 2012, documents similar to the Sinjar ones have been recovered, likely in Mosul and made available to German journalists; another listing with references to foreign fighters was found by a French journalist in Syria.[87] In January 2016, *Zaman al Wasl* reported it had obtained documents containing the names and details of 1,736 foreign fighters. The documents belonged to the IS border administration department, and are similar to the Sinjar documents from 2007.[88] Other documents recovered during a raid in 2014, which killed the IS military chief-of-staff, contained leadership roles and positions in the IS. One of the roles was for the person in charge of the guesthouses for the foreign fighters. This person reported directly to the leader of IS.[89] Other types of evidence include a 50-page book produced by foreign fighters associated with IS that provides detailed information and contact details for persons wishing to travel to Syria.[90]

Another example of the documenting of facilitation and associated activities is seen in a letter recovered amongst the Sinjar documents.[91] The letter is from "Husayn" to two persons in Iraq. Over the course of six pages, it discusses in detail al-Qaeda in Iraq's (AQI) facilitation activities in Syria. There is mention of French foreign fighters and French nationals active in Syria. Other topics range from the status of safe-houses, training in the production of forged identity documents, whether or not one of the individuals they are working with is being run by a Syrian intelligence service and how to reorganize communications with Europe, following the arrest and expulsion of French fighters responsible for Europe. The letter makes reference on two occasions to "Abu Qasurah," a *kunya* for the Swedish-Moroccan foreign fighter, Mohammed Moumou, who had risen to a leadership role with AQI in Mosul.[92] One of the French fighters was working for Moumou in Syria. The letter provides insight into facilitation activities as well as concerns about

avoiding Syrian intelligence penetration. The documents and organizational roles point to the existence of management and record-keeping relating to foreign fighters, including direct mention of facilitators in some of the documents. They suggest that facilitation plays a role in ensuring the security of the insurgent entity.

State Responses

Another way to infer whether facilitation plays a role in foreign fighter mobilizations is to examine the actions of states when dealing with foreign fighters. If states target facilitation albeit using different terminology, it would suggest that they understand it as a mechanism that aids mobilization and permits volunteers to enter the battlefield. During the conflict in Iraq, U.S. military briefers frequently referred to facilitation and emphasized action against facilitators as important. A U.S. military intelligence officer briefing on the insurgency in Iraq was asked, "[f]rom an intelligence standpoint, wouldn't these be the people that you should be targeting?" To which the officer replied, "[a]nd we are. We go after them as much we can."[93] The level of risk the U.S. military was willing to assume when dealing with facilitators suggests the importance of the mechanism. In 2008, U.S. Special Forces crossed into Syria to kill or capture an important Syria-based facilitator, risking problems with the Syrian government in doing so.[94] More recently, Europol,[95] Interpol,[96] and the United Nations,[97] mention facilitation as an activity to be targeted to disrupt foreign fighter flows. The term appears in trials–for example, in a December 2015 trial of a cluster of foreign fighters from the Val-de-Marne in France, a non-traveler tried to minimize his role by stating he was an "intermediary." The President of the court asked if the person meant, "a facilitator." The individual replied, "yes but not all the time," to which the President responded, "we did not say it was a full time job."[98] There is a widespread recognition not only of the existence of facilitation within the mobilization process, but that it is a mechanism that, if disabled, would limit the ability of volunteers to connect with overseas insurgencies.

Facilitation in France: Three Case Studies

The working of facilitation and changes over time are seen in the three brief case studies that follow. The first case deals with the Marrakech group and points to the one of the origins of facilitation in France and its initial manifestation as relational, with access to facilitation provided by outsiders. The second case looks at the so-called 19th network who traveled to Iraq. Again, the mechanism is relational, but this time instead of the mechanism coming from outside of France, the French fighters traveled abroad to interact. The third case looks at travel to Syria by a cluster from Lunel in southern France. This case suggests that while facilitation is still relational, the creation of relationships can now occur through virtual channels – the contingent nature of facilitation of 'being in the right place at the right time' has to a certain extent altered with access moving from physical spaces to virtual ones.

'Rachid', 'Nasser' and 'Said': Early facilitators in France, 1992 to 1994

Some of the earliest foreign travelers and fighters from France appear to be the Marrakech Group. This network was involved in a series of attacks in 1994 in Morocco.[99] The group formed around two Moroccan nationals, Abdelilah Ziyad (Rachid) and Mohamed Zinedine (Said), residing in France who began organizing and recruiting from the late-1980s. Both were previously active in Morocco with the Moroccan Islamic Youth Movement, an opposition group that became clandestine and resorted to violence as Hassan II's government repressed it.[100] They left Morocco and eventually came to France. In France, they established a clandestine network, comprised of two clusters: one from the suburbs outside of Paris and another from Orléans. The separation of the clusters was due to Ziyad living and working in the vicinity of Paris, while Zinedine was based in Orléans. The two groups were composed of males mostly in their mid to late-20s at the time of their initial engagement. The groups were a mix of friends and one set of two brothers. The two primary

facilitators were a decade older than those they sent to Afghanistan for training. The participants included a student, others in menial jobs, while others had backgrounds in petty crime.[101]

From 1992, they organized travel to Afghanistan for training for approximately 16 members of the group. [102] The group members agreed to the training in Afghanistan as a means of being able to then fight in Bosnia.[103] One person from this group did fight in Sarajevo, Bosnia.[104] Another trained in Algeria with the *Mouvement Islamique Armé* (MIA) in February 1994.[105] According to Bruguière, the French authorities did not become aware of the foreign travel until their investigations following the attacks in Morocco.[106] The researcher identified twelve of the sixteen travelers from a review of press reporting; eleven traveled to Afghanistan, one to Afghanistan and then to Bosnia, and one to Algeria. The travel to Afghanistan was organized by the two Moroccans, one of them had spent time in Algeria and appears to have spent a short period in Afghanistan in 1986.[107] They used two individuals, a Tunisian based in Germany with contacts in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and a Moroccan based in Peshawar, Abdelkrim Afkir (Nasser). [108] One of the travelers recounted being accompanied by one of the Moroccans.[109] Some traveled alone and others traveled in groups.[110] Even with access to a facilitator, there was no guarantee that an individual would travel; one of the Marrakech group stated that he was asked to travel to Afghanistan but he refused. [111]

One of the travelers linked to the Marrakech group recounted the trip to Afghanistan to the French police. [112] He stated that they took an airplane from Roissy in June 1993 and once in Pakistan, went to a house in Peshawar. At the house, they were greeted by a dozen other residents. Their passports were taken from them, in what the individual described as a 'security measure.' They took *kunyas*, at which time this person became "Ali" and another of his fellow travelers, "Saïd." Prior to the trip into Afghanistan, they bought local clothes. He stated that once he had arrived, he wanted to leave, as he was sick. Back in Peshawar, they requested their passports, but were told that the passports were lost. The group was obliged to declare the loss of the passport at the Embassy to obtain temporary travel papers to return to France.

The origins of facilitation in France came through contact between foreign militants seeking refuge in France, recruiting French nationals and residents, often (but not exclusively) with family links to the same countries as the facilitators. These original militants had contacts, most probably with Algerians, connected to the initial foreign fighter mobilization in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union.[113] These types of connections enabled the Marrakech group to organize travel to Afghanistan. The nature of facilitation was clandestine and based on relational diffusion. There does not appear to be spontaneous travel during this period. The mechanism at this point was highly dependent on knowing the right person. Without access to a social network with links to facilitators, travel to Afghanistan at this time was not possible. The contingent nature of the mechanism in this case is seen when the police arrested members of the network. There is then no further travel from this cluster. It was effectively disrupted because the relational linkages have been removed.

"Abu Turab" and "Tarek" get their friends into Fallujah: the 19th in Iraq 2003 to 2004

The 19th or Buttes-Chaumont group traveled to Iraq between 2003 and 2004. The travel network was dismantled by the French authorities in 2005 and the members tried in court in 2008 and 2011. The group was one of the first post-9/11 networks without significant connections to prior jihadi travel networks to travel overseas to fight.[114] The group grew from friendship and family ties formed in schools in and around the 19th district of Paris. Through their interest in religion and opposition to the Iraq war, they formed an informal study circle around a young charismatic self-styled religious figure, Farid Benyettou. [115]

Prior to the outbreak of the war in Iraq, two members of the group, Boubakeur el-Hakim and Tarek Ouinis, were students in Syria, while others who would become foreign fighters were studying or working in France.

[116] The wider group is estimated to have included about 50 persons, but the number who actually were involved in foreign fighter related activities was much smaller–about eleven.[117] The group was exclusively male, mostly in their late teens and early 20s, connected through friendships as well as family links. The majority of the group were unmarried at the time of becoming involved in foreign fighting.

Prior contacts with the militant milieu in France were limited to Benyettou's relationship with his brother-in-law, an Algerian with ties to Algerian militant groups and travel networks, and his contact with Mohamed Karimi, a Moroccan national, involved with a number of persons connected to a late 1990s Afghanistan travel network.[118] Karimi was expelled from France in 2000 and while present on two militant websites — *Assabyle* and *al-Mourabitoun* — did not play a role in connecting the group to foreign fighter facilitators.[119] Similarly, Benyettou's brother-in-law does not appear to have aided the group having been expelled from France in 2004.[120] Prior to the U.S.'s invasion, none of the network had connections to Iraq.

Boubakeur el-Hakim had previously traveled to Syria in 2002 to study and from there went to Iraq in March 2003, following an appeal by the Saddam Hussein regime for foreign volunteers to defend Iraq against the impending United States invasion.[121] He returned to France after being detained on the Syrian border without travel documents. El-Hakim then worked in a local market and married but by March 2004 he was back in Syria, working as a facilitator, moving between Syria and Iraq with a period in Fallujah.[122] In September 2004, he was again arrested by Syrian authorities and imprisoned for a year. In this six-month period, along with Tarek Ouinis, he helped organize the travel of six of the group, from France to Syria and then into Iraq. A seventh traveler made one trip into Syria in 2004 but could not find his friends and returned to France.[123]

Some traveled directly from Paris to Damascus, while others traveled via Cairo, Egypt. They traveled in pairs or alone and at different periods to Syria and then in small groups to Iraq. The majority of those who participated in foreign fighting in Iraq traveled to Syria in the period May to July 2004.[124] Benyettou, with the aid of those in France, collected money from members of the group and other sympathizers to pay for tickets, smugglers and weapons. In January 2005, the French authorities seized some 8,000 euros that was to be taken to Syria by Thamer Bouchnak and Chérif Kouachi.[125]

In July 2004, Peter Chérif, Mohamed el-Ayouni and Ouinis traveled from Syria into Iraq.[126] They were met on the border by a smuggler who left them in a safe house on the Iraqi side, from where they were moved to Fallujah or Baghdad.[127] In Fallujah they were put in a guesthouse with fighters from Europe, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.[128] They were asked to provide their name, nationality, and a telephone number to call in case they were killed or injured. They were given a *kunya*, with el-Ayouni taking the name, *Abu Walid*, and after a quick course in the use of weapons, they were dispatched to different units.[129] El-Ayouni's passport was taken from him similar to the experience of earlier travelers to Afghanistan.[130] This information would form the basis of a 258 name list recovered from a safe house in Iraq and provided to the French authorities.[131] In the safe houses, the fighters were triaged and assigned roles.[132] Younes Loukili, a Belgian foreign fighter, stated in court that he was in the same group in Fallujah as two French fighters in the late summer of 2004–possibly Cherif and Ouinis.[133]

The group used relationships formed by its own members to facilitate their travel. El-Hakim used a flat rented in Damascus to house his friends. He provided information about how to cross into Iraq, including the prices and names of smugglers.[134] Telephone analysis by the French authorities led them to conclude that el-Hakim was not only involved with facilitating his friends but was linked to most of those involved in other foreign fighter networks in France.[135] El-Hakim may have facilitated three or four other French residents not part of the 19th cluster.[136] The facilitation network put in place by the 19th network in Damascus revolved around two of the earliest travelers to Syria–Ouinis and el-Hakim.[137] Ouinis worked for a network in Damascus run by an Algerian, Abu Ubayda al-Jaziri.[138] He ran this network using two Iraq-based facilitators, Abu Hanach al-Suri and Abu Asil al-Jaziri. El-Hakim was involved on the border

moving fighters from Syria into Iraq.[139] Abu Ubayda al-Jaziri helped hundreds of foreign fighters to cross into Iraq up until his arrest in June 2005.[140] He facilitated not only the French fighters crossing into Iraq but with Ouinis transferred two Belgians in the summer of 2004.[141] In total Ouinis was involved with the transfer of 16 foreign fighters including three of his friends, el-Ayouni, Chérif and Abdelhalim Badjoudj. He was responsible for looking after Tunisians from France.[142] Prior to Ouinis himself traveling into Iraq in September 2004, he passed the details of his contacts in France, Belgium and Tunisia to another Tunisian facilitator.[143]

Following el-Hakim's September 2004 arrest and imprisonment in Syria, and Ouinis traveling to Iraq, a 15-year-old Malian from Paris replaced him as the individual dealing with the incoming volunteers from Paris.[144] However, by late 2004, the group in France planned to replace the 15-year-old as they could not access him via telephone and intended to send Chérif Kouachi to replace him.[145] Kouachi was arrested before he could travel to Syria in January, 2005.[146]

The travelers from the 19th accessed the facilitation networks in Syria through friends who happened to have been first in Syria and then Iraq. Their ability to access the facilitation mechanism was contingent on having a friend being in the right place at the right time. In the absence of Ouinis or el-Hakim's connections and information, it is possible that none of the travelers would have traveled to Iraq. The groups in Iraq they joined were dependent on who the facilitator was connected to. Those who arrived in Fallujah in the summer of 2004, for example, joined the Army of Mohamed.[147] Even though they arrived as a group of three, they were split and assigned different roles; el-Ayouni to one unit and Chérif and Ouinis to another.

Much later, when Rany Arnaud went to Damascus, with the intention of traveling into Iraq, and even with the possible support of Peter Chérif, he was not able to access the facilitation networks which had undergone significant changes due to the arrests or killings of those involved in 2004.[148] Rany's experience is similar to three travelers from Tours who arrived in October 2006. Unable to find a facilitator and due to their behavior they were promptly arrested by the Syrian security services and expelled to France.[149] The only successful French traveler to Iraq post-2004 used facilitation networks provided by a Saudi Arabia-based Algerian, who had met one of his friends at a school in Medina.[150]

To Syria via Skype: Facilitation Moves to the Web, 2013 to 2014

The third case study draws on a foreign fighter cluster from Lunel in southern France. A group of approximately 20 persons traveled to Syria, originally joining Jaysh Mohamed in the area around Azaz before moving on to join the IS, with some living in Raqqa and others in Deir ez-Zor.[151]

The accounts of the group's activities suggest no prior engagement in political violence or militant activity. A number of the cluster participated in an informal religious study group run by an individual arrested in January 2015; they were involved with local non-governmental organizations.[152] They organized "jihad nights" to watch films and videos about the conflict in Syria.[153] The cluster is comprised of a core group of friends who met in high school as well as family, including brothers and wives.[154] The group ranges in age from 18 to 44, and includes at least one convert as well as a former member of the French military; some had jobs, small businesses, or were in tertiary education, while others were unemployed.[155] The micro-network has seen eight die, one in a suicide attack, and at least two returned to France where they were arrested.[156] The group financed their own trips through taking out consumer credit loans and leasing a BMW which was sold in Syria.[157] There is no information that suggests the travelers had prior ties to individuals involved in the Syrian conflict before leaving France.

The earliest travelers left for Syria in October, 2013, and were joined by others in the summer of 2014.[158] The last traveler may have left as late as May 2015, although other reports suggest it was December 2014. [159] Once the first travelers had arrived, the next travelers left in January 2014 to join the original three in

Azaz, Syria. There were no further travelers for a number of months. This is possibly linked to the in-fighting between the various groups. One of the travelers switched allegiances from from Jaysh Mohamed to IS.[160] He was involved in exfiltrating the remaining Lunel cluster to IS territory prior to an attack by IS on Jaysh Mohamed.[161] Travel resumed in the summer of 2014, with three groups of travelers leaving France and going to Syria. These travelers joined IS where one of their group had become the leader of an IS *katibat* (brigade).[162] In January 2015, French police arrested five persons alleged to have been involved in aiding the group. Two of those arrested were recently returned from Syria, and a third, acting as the facilitator, was the brother of two others, who had traveled to Syria and are believed to be dead.

It is possible that the first three travelers left France without knowing that they needed help getting into Syria.[163] It appears that it was one of their friends still in Lunel who used Facebook to make contact with individuals already in Syria.[164] One of these persons was Mourad Fares. Fares, a French national, was linked to many of the late 2013 and early 2014 departures from France including two minors from Toulouse, a female minor from Avignon, a cluster from Strasbourg and a group from Lyon and Switzerland.[165] Fares eventually handed himself over to the Turkish authorities and was deported to France.[166] Fares was active on Facebook and gave a number of interviews to the media. He was, at this time, not difficult to locate through social media channels. Fares was not exclusively active on social media, as members of the Strasbourg cluster traveled to meet him in Lyon prior to his departure for Syria and remained in contact with Fares helping to facilitate their travel to Syria.[167] Through this contact, the first three travelers joined Jaysh Mohamed in Azaz.[168] The travelers that followed joined their friends with IS. Once the initial facilitator had been used, it seems the group in Syria then provided advice and information to the next travelers, frequently using Skype as well as other communication platforms.[169] The gaps between the travelers' departure dates, possibly due to the inter-group conflict, suggests that facilitation provides information not only on how to arrive, but also on when it is appropriate to travel.

In this case, one of the individuals who played the facilitation role was not in the conflict zone but had remained in France, although two of his brothers had traveled to Syria. He provided information about travel routes including on how to avoid detection in France by flying from Barcelona, Spain, and organized money transfers for airplane tickets, including wire transfers of funds.[170] Information was collected about the situation in Syria and rivalries between groups. He phoned members of the group in Syria to warn them of the IS attack in April 2014.[171] Some members of the group in Syria played the role of facilitators helping travelers come across the Turkish-Syrian border.[172] Finally, it appears that information about the activities of the group in Syria were available on Facebook, with pictures being distributed and photographs or announcements about the deaths of the travelers circulating.[173]

The activity of facilitators influenced the initial choice of group that the first travelers joined. Later, they were able to change groups due to one of their friends having moved to IS. Because of the presence of this friend, from April 2014 onwards, the remaining travelers joined IS.[174] Since May 2015, no further reported departures have been made public. It is unclear whether this is because there are no more would-be travelers from Lunel, whether the facilitation connection was removed with the arrests in early 2015, or whether the well-publicized deaths have acted as a deterrent.[175] In this case, the travelers were able to overcome the initial absence of relational networks to locate a facilitator by turning to virtual networks, from which they were able to bridge their local circumstances and connect to the Syrian theatre.

Analysis of the Cases

The three case studies point to the role of facilitators in connecting recruits and volunteers with foreign insurgent entities. The Marrakech case suggests that there is not always a clear distinction between recruiter and facilitator. Some individuals may occupy or combine both roles. While all of the facilitators in these cases were military age males, this demographic profile is changing with the increasing interest of young female

travelers. There are now cases where women are known to have acted as facilitators.[176] The facilitators have two primary characteristics: contacts either direct or indirect with insurgent organizations and the ability to vouch or provide bona fides for in-coming fighters. The question of how facilitators came to have these contacts and to be seen as trustworthy is difficult to answer with certainty in all cases. The Marrakech and 19th network facilitators seem to have acquired contacts and trust by meeting individuals connected to militant or insurgent organizations in their overseas travels. One of the Moroccans was in Algeria and later Afghanistan. El-Hakim was in Syria and Iraq at the beginning of the US invasion. The case of Fares is less clear: he does not seem to have been in Syria or Iraq prior to his involvement in facilitation, nor does he appear to have had links to the older jihadist networks in France. Fares may have found his contacts through social media but how he obtained the capacity to vouch for fighters is not clear. The issue of how trust is acquired and then used requires further research, but the available evidence suggests that previous dealings with militancy and/or travel to conflict zones or neighboring countries are factors. More recently, the use of virtual networks may be altering the previous requirement for physical and geographical proximity.

The three cases suggest that facilitation can be observed in the clustering of volunteers and in what the head of the Belgian intelligence has termed the "bandwagon" effect, where an initial traveler or travelers make their way to a conflict zone followed by more persons from the wider social network.[177] Maher and Taub, in separate accounts of Syria-bound foreign fighters, find similar processes at work in relation to the bandwagoning and clustering of fighters from Plymouth in the United Kingdom and Antwerp, Belgium.[178]

The three case studies contain accounts where access to a facilitator enables travel and joining an insurgency. This not always the case: on occasion, even if a facilitator is located, the traveler is still unable to reach the combat zone. Ibrahim Ouattara, a would-be French foreign fighter, attempted four times to access a conflict zone (Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Mali) but was unsuccessful. Even when he had managed to find a potential facilitator–a Belgian in Peshawar, Pakistan–he was eventually asked to leave on the basis that he was black and did not respect the security rules.[179] It is thus not enough to locate the facilitator; other factors may also influence access to the combat zone.

The first case study suggests that the consequences of interacting with a facilitator are not always the ones that were sought by the would-be traveler. These individuals agreed to travel to Afghanistan to enable participation in combat in Bosnia. They did not initially expect to participate in a terrorist attack in Morocco. Similarly, individuals involved with the German "Sauerland" network were interested in fighting in Chechnya or Iraq, but their meeting in Damascus with militants from Azerbaijan led to them traveling instead to Afghanistan, where they trained with the Islamic Jihad Union.[180] This chance encounter through a friend would lead to the opening of a facilitation channel for German militants into Afghanistan that lasted for almost five years, involving some one hundred travelers (successful or unsuccessful).[181]

The cases also point to the interaction between facilitation and state activities. In the first two cases, the removal of the facilitator (through arrest) stopped or hindered travel by would-be fighters. Following the dismantling of the Marrakech group, no further travel was reported from this cluster. In the case of the 19th network, when the French authorities arrested the last two travelers and the Syrians detained el-Hakim, there were no more travelers from this cluster to Iraq. The Lunel case suggests other aspects may play a role in ending travel. The arrest of a France-based facilitator and the deportation of Fares from Turkey to France may have helped end travel from the cluster, but it is equally possible that there were no more willing travelers. The potential pool of travelers was exhausted and the intervention against the facilitators came too late.

The case studies point to the ambiguous role of the intervention by states against facilitators: the efficacy of their activity is not entirely clear. States intervene in different ways with differing ends. The geographical position of a state in relation to conflict is important–is it the state of origin, a transit state or the destination state? The proximity to the conflict influences how a state may to choose to behave. The type of organization dealing with facilitation also impacts on how states organize to counter this activity. An intelligence service

is more likely to want to infiltrate the network to acquire information about who is involved. In contrast, a police agency will want to dismantle it for prosecution, but only after it has had the time to collect sufficient evidence for a court case. In both cases, in the short-run, states may allow facilitators to function until they are satisfied that there is no more intelligence or evidence to be obtained. Facilitation may also function due to the fact that many states historically privileged domestic security over the security of a far-off country. [182] Finally, with the rising use of social media, it is not certain that infiltration or arrests will be entirely effective against facilitation. If the removal of a person through arrest or death was previously effective, the removal of a webpage or social media account has only a temporary impact measured in minutes.

Conclusion

Facilitation emerges at the outset of a conflict through the creation of relationships leading to new social networks. These relationships may be entirely new or they may be repurposed. The initiator of these relationships can be appeals for help–for example, Afghan militia leaders traveling abroad, the Bosnians seeking aid through the organization of a conference, the Hussein regime's appeal for fighters, or the support of Libyan nationals to the Syrian protest movement. The Afghan leaders appeal led to early travelers to Afghanistan, who then used their networks to bring in aid including fighters.[183] In Bosnia, fighters accompanied aid from the Arab world, and it was the screening of films in universities that mobilized some of the eventual foreign fighters from the United Kingdom.[184] The Hussein regime's appeal was responded to by, among others, foreign students in Damascus.[185] The travel of Libyans to Syria to aid the nascent armed factions appears to have been accepted because of their recent experience in helping bring about the downfall of Gaddafi.[186]

The initiation of relationships and expansion of social networks can come from those in the conflict zone traveling abroad or from early travelers going into the conflict zone, not necessarily to fight but to bring aid or simply to observe. Later networks may form through repression and state intervention. In one case, Tunisians imprisoned in Damascus in 2004 returned to facilitation in Belgium, and, in a second case, in Turkey.[187] This relationship was later used to organize the travel of the first European female convert into Iraq. Facilitation makes use of social spaces–for example, students of Arabic in Damascus from numerous countries meet in schools or mosques and relationships are formed; eventually, their social networks expand to include persons with connections to the battlefield.

Thus facilitation has an emergent quality, and is not necessarily present at the beginning of a mobilization. It arises as would-be volunteers seek to connect to the battlefield. The initial connections are contingent and may become more stable over time, but they can be challenged and forced to re-emerge if networks are targeted and neutralized. It is rare, if not impossible, that the mechanism will involve the same facilitators at the beginning and at the end of a mobilization. Some facilitators may participate in multiple conflicts. Often, their participation is curtailed by arrests and prison time before they reappear in another conflict zone. Facilitation is emergent and volatile due to its being contested by states.

The level of overtness influences the degree of contingency in the facilitation mechanism, the more overt the mechanism the less contingent. An overt mechanism–for example, a fixed structure like an office–is more easily accessible when compared to a covert mechanism that must be discovered, like clandestine relationships. Technology has influenced facilitation, enabling it to be more readily discoverable and making it more resistant to interference from security forces. In the past, taking down a facilitation network would reduce the flow of travelers, as the relationships needed to travel were no longer present. With multiple social networking platforms – Twitter, Facebook, Ask.fm, Instagram, or Telegram – would-be travelers have new channels to sources of information and persons that can facilitate travel.

This article makes a number of contributions to the existing literature on foreign fighters. It responds to John Horgan's call to examine the "how" of involvement in political violence.[188] In doing so, it suggests that taking a mobilization as opposed to a radicalization approach to foreign fighters allows for mechanisms to be identified and explored. Facilitation is one such mechanism in the mobilization process. The evidence in the article suggests that facilitation influences access to the battlefield. It has also evolved over time, the implication being that state responses to facilitation will also need to evolve and adapt to negate or mitigate these changes.

The introduction of facilitators and facilitation into the process of how foreign fighters join insurgent organizations provides an expanded research agenda. There are three broad sets of questions to further explore. First, there are issues linked to who becomes a facilitator and why. Is it a conscious decision to choose this role or is it based on contingent circumstances? Second, how do organizations come to use and trust facilitators? Linked to this, how do they manage facilitators and eventual differences in managing different types of facilitators? The use of facilitation as an independent variable could explore probabilities of volunteer access as well as impacts on their choice of groups. Finally, a third set of questions using facilitation as a dependent variable could measure the impact of repressive state activities on facilitators. For example, this approach could examine how states infiltrate, monitor, and disrupt their activities. Which of these strategies best negates the role of facilitation and in what ways? How should these strategies evolve in the face of increased use of social media as a facilitation tool? Answers to these questions would allow for a more sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of how foreign fighters and insurgent organizations interact due to the mediating role of facilitation. Further, the policy implications of such research are likely to be relevant to issues of immediate as well as on-going concern.

Facilitation is a mechanism used by foreign fighters and travelers to bridge their local networks to conflict networks abroad. The mechanism is present across conflicts from Afghanistan onwards. Facilitation is not to be confused with recruitment which is persuading someone to join a conflict, although some recruiters may act as facilitators. Facilitation does not always manifest itself in the same manner, as it is sometimes overt but is more frequently covert. Some facilitators operate based on ideological affinity with the networks and groups with which they are interacting, while others–particularly when clandestine movement is required–operate for money. Facilitation emerged as accessible primarily through relational networks of kin, friends and activist groupings. More recently, while still maintaining a relational requirement, it has embedded itself in virtual social networks, no longer requiring physical presence but becoming amenable to new kinds of interactions. Despite this shift, facilitation continues to provide information and resources, creating opportunities for fighters to connect to conflicts.

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Notes

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Indictment 332/05/04 & 1475, Paris, 27 December 2007, p. 140.

[137] Chichizola, "Boubaker el-Hakim : des geôles syriennes à celles de la DST."

[138] Indictment 332/05/04 & 1475, Paris, 27 December 2007, pp. 126-130. for mentions of Farhat Zaidi (aka Abu Ubaydah al-Jaziri) and his activities see Agence France Presse, "Deux belges arrêtés au Maroc au contact de réseaux jihadistes internationaux," *Agence France Presse*, November 26, 2005; Youssef Chmirou, "Les confessions du terroriste Mohamed Rehha," *La Gazette Du Maroc*, December 5, 2005. For a somewhat muddled and poorly sourced account see Mohamed Mokaddem, *Al-Qaïda au maghreb islamique*, (Editions L'Harmattan, 2011), pp. 160-161, 186-194.

[139] Indictment 332/05/04 & 1475, Paris, 27 December 2007, pp. 126-130.

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[141] Indictment 332/05/04 & 1475, Paris, 27 December 2007, pp. 126-130. The two Belgian fighters were probably Younes Loukili (A Belgian-Moroccan) and Kotob Soughir (Belgian-Algerian/Tunisian). Both traveled into Iraq in the summer of 2004. Loukili recounted having fought in Fallujah and being in the same group as French fighters. See "Loukili a perdu sa jambe à Falloudja."

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