

The Saudi Foreign Fighter Presence in Syria

by [Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

Apr 28, 2014

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Gloria and Ken Levy Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.



Articles & Testimony

A closer look at the numerous Saudis who have joined the fight in Syria and the potential consequences of their large-scale mobilization compared to past jihads.

The foreign fighter trend currently developing in Syria is unprecedented in terms of the quantity of fighters and the number of foreign nationals involved. For Saudi foreign fighters, this trend is not new. Saudis have been involved in foreign conflicts since the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s. They played one of the most prominent roles in that war, as well as in subsequent conflicts in Chechnya, Bosnia, Afghanistan in the 1990s, Afghanistan post-9/11, and Iraq. Similarly, Saudis are one of the leading foreign national groups in Syria in terms of the total number of individuals fighting, and also among those who have died.

This article offers a brief history of Saudi involvement in past jihadist conflicts and the current statistics on how many Saudis have traveled to Syria, highlighting cases of important Saudis who have joined the war. The article finds that similar to past foreign fighter mobilizations, Saudis have been one of the largest contingents, with some individuals taking important positions on the ground as clerics or leaders. This development could have far reaching implications...

Download the PDF to read the full article.



CTC Sentinel



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[An Israel-Lebanon Agreement May Not Be Worth the Costs](#)

May 14, 2024



David Schenker

[\(/policy-analysis/israel-lebanon-agreement-may-not-be-worth-costs\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Tracking Anti-U.S. Strikes in Iraq and Syria During the Gaza Crisis](#)

May 14, 2024



Michael Knights,
Amir al-Kaabi,
Hamdi Malik

[\(/policy-analysis/tracking-anti-us-strikes-iraq-and-syria-during-gaza-crisis\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[The Arab Approach to Mediation—Reshaping Diplomacy in a Multipolar World](#)

Spring 2024



Nickolay Mladenov

[\(/policy-analysis/arab-approach-mediation-reshaping-diplomacy-multipolar-world\)](#)

TOPICS

[Gulf & Energy Policy \(/policy-analysis/gulf-energy-policy\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Gulf States \(/policy-analysis/gulf-states\)](#)

[Syria \(/policy-analysis/syria\)](#)