

Foreign Fighters and Their Economic Impact:

A Case Study of Syria and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)

Oct 19, 2009



Articles & Testimony

Over the past several years, terrorist and insurgent groups have established sophisticated networks in Syria to facilitate the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq. These networks are worth closer scrutiny since foreign fighters, facilitated through Syria, have been responsible for some of the most spectacular attacks on Iraqis and coalition forces.

Given the priority that Iraq and Syria both play in the Obama administration's efforts to stabilize the Middle East, as well as the wealth of information now available on Syrian-based foreign fighter facilitation networks, this article provides a case study of Syria, foreign fighters in the Iraqi insurgency, and their economic impact. Foreign fighters' use of third party countries for training, fundraising, and transit is not merely an operational phenomenon; it is an economic one as well. There are direct and indirect economic consequences -- both positive and negative -- that result from the existence and operation of foreign fighter networks in a country like Syria. These consequences impact Syria and its government, various elements of the Syrian populace, Iraq as the foreign fighters' destination, and other countries in the region. Over the past several years, terrorist and insurgent groups have established sophisticated networks in Syria to facilitate the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq. These networks are worth closer scrutiny since foreign fighters, facilitated through Syria, have been responsible for some of the most spectacular attacks on Iraqis and coalition forces. Given the priority that Iraq and Syria both play in the Obama administration's efforts to stabilize the Middle East, as well as the wealth of information now available on Syrian-based foreign fighter facilitation networks, this article provides a case study of Syria, foreign fighters in the Iraqi insurgency, and their economic impact.

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Developing realistic strategies to contend with foreign fighter networks that operate in third party countries is contingent upon first developing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon, including its economic impact...

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