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

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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.

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