



Hedayah

Principles for Reintegrating Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)

Introduction

As many as 30,000 people from up to 90 different countries have left home to fight in foreign wars, often engaging with known terrorist groups in the process. This number is increasing, and countries with no previous history of foreign fighters may discover they have citizens travelling to war zones. While it is unclear how many of them will ultimately return to their countries of origin, there is an increasing international concern regarding the anticipated return of these Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs). Some FTFs may have become disillusioned; others may have escaped; still others may have been sent back for a specific reason. Individuals who return will undoubtedly have seen or participated in traumatic events and are likely to hold more extreme views. While the Global Counterterrorism Forum's (GCTF's) *Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders* addresses what to do with violent extremist offenders, including returning FTFs who are incarcerated, countries may be unable or find it impractical to prosecute all their returning FTFs. However, to reduce the likelihood that these individuals will return to terrorism, Governments need to help them disengage from violent activities and successfully reintegrate them into their communities after their return.

There are, of course, a range of interlinked factors that increase an individual's vulnerability and susceptibility to being drawn into foreign terrorist activity. Many of today's FTFs who traveled to Syria and Iraq were vulnerable individuals: poor, uneducated, from marginalized areas and regions, with little understanding of any religion. Many had previous experience with the criminal justice system, often for petty crime or drug problems. Many came from broken families with little engagement between parents and sons. In addition, many travelled to help build a new state, with no intention of becoming involved in violence but nevertheless were drawn into armed conflict. These challenges need to be met with a range of programs involving a law enforcement and social arms of national Governments, as well as the local communities from which these returning FTFs come.

Although programs should be tailored to local conditions, cultures, and legal traditions while still meeting applicable international and national laws, the principles below offer a suite of practices that can potentially serve as the foundation for countries' policies and programs. As the United Nations noted, reintegration programs "need to be considered carefully in view of their direct impact on fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and opinion, as well as the right to fair treatment in accordance with the Rule of Law." Importantly, there is ample evidence that responses breaching these rights can, in fact, be counter-productive, antagonize sentiments of mistrust amongst key communities, and ultimately strengthen support for violent extremist groups.

This list of principles is not intended to be exhaustive. Countries can choose to expand or modify the list to account for their own experiences in these areas, while sharing information about their efforts with other interested countries. Learning more about what has succeeded or failed, and why, can offer valuable lessons as Governments build or improve their own programs.

A. Program Structure

Principle # 1 Establish clear goals and objectives to identify success and failure.

Decide what the expected program outcomes are for measuring success and failure. Use quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and psychological, social, and cognitive approaches to determine if a program is providing the desired results. Experts in psychology, religion or psychiatry can develop useful indicators to show program outcomes.

Principle # 2: Good standards and practices are a key to building effective, safe and smoothly operating reintegration programs.

Initial contact with a returning FTF should seek to build trust and engender a positive attitude towards authority. If detention is required, a clear legal basis and procedural framework should be followed. These should comply with human rights and international law obligations, clearly delineating the institutions and agencies involved, as well as their respective roles, responsibilities and powers. An FTF's regression or recidivism does not imply a program has systematically failed; this work is inherently unpredictable. Well-crafted, robust reintegration policies can provide a strong framework and balance out less successful efforts.

Principle # 3: Conduct effective assessments to determine the best approach for reintegration program needs.

Programs should be designed with individuals in mind. Understanding why returning FTFs take the path of violent extremism is critical to designing their reintegration programs. Assess which individuals are suitable candidates for a program and which are not. Those deemed suitable candidates should then be further assessed to establish the risk and threat they pose, and to design the best program for them. Learn as much as possible about an FTF's personal background, criminal history, personality traits, ideology and behavior. Assess their motivation for returning, to discover where they fall on the spectrum between completely disillusioned and further radicalized and emboldened. Conduct these assessments regularly, to inform management decisions and security concerns; estimate the intervention strategies' effects; detect changes in participants' attitudes; or to adjust strategies.

B. Program Foundational Elements

Principle # 4: Prepare communities for a reintegration program; address their legitimate concerns from the outset.

Countries should prepare members of communities carefully before instituting reintegration programs and bringing returning FTFs into their midst. Respected local community public or religious leaders should be consulted on the attributes, features, and benefits of the proposed reintegration program, clearly defining the program's intentions and parameters. These leaders should be involved in explaining the proposed program to the community, including how security

will be maintained and what everyone's roles will be, to ensure everyone understands that security is the single most important element of the reintegration plan. Effective communication about such sensitive issues will require planning and clarity—in the minds of the program officials, in written materials that countries prepare and release to the public, and in the specific information conveyed to communities hosting returning FTFs. Equally important to the process will be listening carefully and responding appropriately to a community's legitimate concerns. Countries could consider carefully training anyone who is entrusted to engage in a community as a spokesperson, to ensure trust and allay community fears from the outset, and to foster a program with a full understanding among community members of how their contributions can and will affect the safety and well being of all involved.

Principle # 5: Provide strategies to gain the trust and cooperation of communities.

Involving families, community members and civil society organizations in developing programs to reintegrate returning FTFs can further the goal of safe reintegration back into a community. Providing support to communities, and in particular those groups within communities that are likely to have influence over FTFs (e.g., women, families, and community leaders) can be the difference between FTFs being accepted and settling into communities that oppose violence and their returning to groups that support violence. Determine if FTFs in reintegration programs will be integrated into the surrounding population or housed in separate facilities, therefore requiring specific practical and financial support. Identify grievances among the various parties, participate in finding solutions, and empower communities to implement them. The goal should be to create a support network around a returning FTF within and beyond their family and community.

Principle # 6: Law enforcement can play an instrumental role in successful reintegration efforts.

Law enforcement officials could prepare a community engagement plan to help obtain trust and goodwill within communities and support partnerships with local leaders and organizations. Train and educate all enforcement officials and officers to understand and address the complexities of reintegration efforts. Train program staff and professionals to distinguish signs of radicalization, respond appropriately to potential extremist threats, and communicate with FTFs in constructive ways that avoid conflict. It is important to remove stigma, remain professional, and ensure an FTF has support from family and community and does not become unduly dependent on individual program staff members. Countries could explain programs to all involved by conducting training sessions or meetings. Respecting the rule of law and preventing human rights' violations remains a key consideration and should not be confined to detention centers.

C. The Roles of Different Participants in Reintegration Programs

Principle # 7: Reintegration programs should use a broad range of cross-disciplinary experts, with close coordination among relevant officials.

Combine a variety of experts into a multi-agency approach to meet the needs of returning FTFs, and to ensure effective communication with radical individuals. Psychologists, social workers, religious scholars, aftercare experts, youth services, mental health services, local law enforcement, and, in particular, family members and community representatives are all integral to a successful reintegration program. Government institutions and civil society should work together to carefully plan, structure, and coordinate these efforts to maximize program effectiveness, ensuring that all those involved impart consistent messages to FTFs. Identify and name individuals to facilitate trust and cooperation between agencies/entities and with individual FTFs. Develop a strategic communications plan with clear rules and guidelines on information sharing and reciprocity. Encourage FTFs to actively participate in their reintegration process, but ensure that relationships between them and program staff remain correct, professional, and institutionalized.

Principle # 8: Fully integrate psychologists and other social service professionals in the reintegration process and encourage returning FTFs to participate in their own programs.

Psychologists can help identify factors that made an individual vulnerable to violent ideology and motivated an FTF to engage in terrorist activity. This information helps to determine whether a returning FTF is a threat and to design an individualized reintegration plan. Psychologists can be specially trained to perform this type of work. Returning FTFs may require psychological or medical attention or specific assistance in returning to normal society, which will require supervision and monitoring. Information sharing and collecting data points is invaluable to prevent, deter, and mitigate incidents. Have clear agreements with social services, law enforcement, and civil society organizations as to who communicates what to whom and when, in terms of information gathering and exchange. An FTF should understand the reintegration program and what it is trying to accomplish, as well as have the opportunity to comment about its effectiveness and help tailor it to his needs. This will encourage a sense of ownership and an interest in success. Getting a returning FTF to help others in similar programs can also be helpful to everyone.

Principle # 9: Program participants, law enforcement, and civil society members should understand the reintegration process.

To avoid undermining the reintegration process, all participants in contact with returning FTFs should receive training on professional conduct, FTF rights, rules and responsibilities, and on how to supervise FTFs by employing firm, fair, and consistent techniques. Tabletop exercises can enhance moderated discussions between professionals, as they examine the different stakeholders' roles and address issues related to FTFs in their programs. Participants could include representatives from diplomatic, policy, military, civil society, academic, intelligence, and law enforcement communities. FTFs should be able to see that all laws are applied fairly and evenly, to further their trust in the program and those involved in running it. To be effective, all those involved with reintegrating FTFs need to be trusted by those FTFs. Countries will benefit from empowering civil society. Civil society may have better means of coping with these issues, but they cannot function without support. When programs are provided by civil society and civil society is provided with needed resources, the outcome is superior.

Principle # 10: Consider integrating appropriate scholars and other experts into the reintegration process.

Scholars, including religious experts, can play an important role in the reintegration process. Returning FTFs who cite religion for their actions may have a shallow knowledge or a manipulated perception of the religion by which they believe they were inspired. Encouraging properly trained scholars to engage in extensive dialogue with FTFs may raise doubts about the FTF's views on the acceptability of the use of violence. Since these scholars might become targets for terrorists, countries should take steps to ensure their safety throughout this process. Having respected religious leaders to both debunk and counter their religious assumptions could be a first step in a reintegration process.

Principle # 11: Appoint the most suitable interlocutor to a returning FTF; ensure the interlocutors receive specialized training and coordinate their activities closely with reintegration professionals.

Positive initial contact with authorities is extremely important to reintegration efforts. Assess returning FTFs, including through a face-to-face interview, to help appoint the most suitable interlocutor. Train all participants in information gathering and proper interviewing techniques. Knowledge of an FTF's background, triggers, drivers and enablers that led to their radicalization, experience (or lack thereof) in the battlefield, or current governing ideology could be systematically and methodically identified and analyzed. Law enforcement officers could have regular, voluntary conversations with FTFs and their family members, to demonstrate their concern with the FTF's welfare. It is however, important to draw a distinction between these conversations and an interrogation for information gathering purposes. As a multi-agency approach, law enforcement officers could support socio-preventive services as well as stay focused on their security goals.

Principle # 12: Include victims and positive voices in reintegration programs.

Victims of terrorist violence can be powerful voices within reintegration programs, as can parents, especially mothers, or siblings who lost a loved one in a terrorist act. If approached correctly, there may be the potential for contact between victims and FTFs. This may contribute to a victims' physical and psychological wellbeing and possibly improve that of the FTF. It may also contribute to reversing the dehumanization process through which violent extremists often seek to legitimize violence against those they perceive as "the other". Using a victims' narrative could show the consequences of terrorist actions and demonstrate their immorality, which may lead the FTF to question their core beliefs and assumptions. Moreover, dialogue between FTFs and victims and their advocates may reduce psychological tension and may contribute to an FTF's successful reintegration. It is important to carefully consider when, how, and which victims are introduced, so that FTFs are most receptive to their messages and, vitally, to minimize any potential negative side effects for the victims.

Principle # 13: Former violent extremists can be influential with those going through the reintegration process.

Testimonials of former extremists and supporters who have turned away from terrorism may be powerful testaments to a misguided ideology, and could be incorporated into a reintegration dialogue. Reformed extremists, particularly those who have been through a reintegration process, may be influential with returning FTFs participating in these programs. Former violent extremists should be carefully selected before being introduced into a reintegration program. Since former extremists might become targets for violent retaliation, countries should ensure their safety

throughout this process. As in most steps of a reintegration process, getting the help and involvement of an FTF's community to enlist a former FTF or extremist could reduce the chances of recidivism.

Principle # 14: Charismatic members of the community can help inspire change.

Celebrities and other influential personalities from a community can also help inspire change among returning FTFs. Thought should be given to which audiences violent extremist groups target for radicalization, and who might be alternative role models for this demographic. When possible and appropriate, integrate relevant community members into reintegration programs. Since they might then become targets for violent retaliation, take steps to ensure their safety throughout this process.

D. Reintegration Components

Principle # 15: Include cognitive skills programs in reintegration efforts.

Develop cognitive programs that assist offenders in defining the issues that pushed them towards violent extremist behaviors and, subsequently, in formulating objectives and identifying and implementing solutions. Cognitive programs can increase skills such as logic and reasoning, memory and retention, improving the way in which an FTF processes brain, auditory, and visual stimuli. These skills aid in problem solving, learning more efficiently, and understanding new concepts, all of which may encourage critical thinking to challenge radicalizing narratives that may otherwise lead to recidivism.

Principle # 16: Reintegration programs could include basic education courses, vocational skills training and employment assistance.

Interventions should be evidence based, responding directly to those factors that were assessed as making an individual FTF more vulnerable to engaging in violent extremism. Improving a returning FTF's education may increase their self-esteem, self-confidence, opportunities, and status within their communities. Vocational programs should complement educational ones and be linked to the kind of jobs available in the regions where FTFs live. Governments could encourage civil society and governmental institutions to provide academic opportunities, skills training, community re-establishment programs or other trainings. Installing liaisons between a country's program and employment services could help match an FTF's vocational skills to the employment market in their community and country. At different program stages, FTFs could be required to certify that they have met certain educational, vocational, assessment and experience requirements as a prerequisite to obtaining jobs or other development opportunities. Recognize the achievement of FTFs who have completed education and vocational training programs with certificates or graduation ceremonies. However, there is a risk of providing 'too much' support to FTFs, thereby creating a sense that FTFs in some way benefit from their stature on return.

Principle # 17: Consider introducing specific mechanisms with regard to returning FTFs' communication.

Country officials should consider limiting or restricting contact between the general population and dangerous or violent extremist FTFs. Country officials could control returning FTFs' communication with persons outside the country or visitors coming to the country, but should avoid prejudicing an FTF's legal defense rights. This monitoring may apply to family visitors, telephone

calls, mail or email. Country officials will want to detect, deter, and disrupt all communications that would benefit terrorists' objectives. It is important that restrictions be in accordance with the level of threat and domestic and international law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Each country should apply these measures evenly and without discrimination, consistent with the rule of law, and be publicly and widely understood as applying them in this manner.

Principle # 18: Use appropriate incentives for returning FTFs who participate in reintegration programs.

Including incentives for returning FTFs going through reintegration programs could help move individuals towards more pro-social behavior and ease their transition back into society. Incentives should be carefully considered and given with great care and should not be confused with rewarding a returning FTF for their participation in a foreign conflict. For example, support could be in the form of better housing for a returning FTF's family. Countries could consider revoking incentives in cases of violations of rules and codes of conduct or evidence of involvement in criminal activity.

Principle # 19: Develop aftercare programs, working in close partnerships with civil society organizations and communities.

Develop robust, individualized, and effective aftercare programs to facilitate transition, demonstrate continuing goodwill, and provide an important support structure. A holistic approach should include multiple agencies and careful coordination and cooperation amongst participants. It should include law enforcement, civil society, and social service workers, who exchange information at regular intervals with returning FTFs, their families, and the wider community. Mentors can also be important contributors in aftercare programs. Returning FTFs could be supervised under strict conditions that focus on individual counseling that provides, among other things, a perspective on a better future. Countries may also want to consider alternative sentencing, as it may be difficult or impossible to mount a credible legal case against them with most events having taken place in a conflict zone in another country.

Principle # 20: Provide protective measures when there is credible information that a reformed violent extremist faces threats to his/her life, or to family members' lives.

Some returning FTFs may be at risk of retaliation when transitioning back into society. Efforts should be made to determine if there are "threats to life" facing an individual or their family members. Where such risks exist, consider relocating the FTF and family to safer areas. FTFs and family members could also be counseled on precautionary safety measures and security practices designed to reduce future risks. It is also important to remember that if an FTF perceives there is no right of safe return, this may serve as a disincentive for him to disengage.

Principle # 21: Formal or informal monitoring post-release can be an effective method to prevent recidivism.

Once a returning FTF has completed a reintegration program and an assessment has been made to determine that they pose little or no risk to the wider community, consider placing these individuals in a behavioral monitoring program. These programs range from active case management by law enforcement to case management by non-law enforcement. Close supervision and guidance can support and reinforce reintegration. Monitoring can provide data that can be used to measure reintegration program effectiveness. Monitoring can take the form of mentoring, using effective

techniques such as speaking the FTF's language in an empathetic and cultural sense, and building trust. Mentors should be screened, have clear rules and guidelines, receive all training necessary, and have access to support for an FTF as requested.

Principle # 22: Integrate families and inner circles of influence into reintegration programs and foster a welcoming, positive community environment.

Include families in reintegration programs. Empower families and communities to create a strong network around a returning FTF. Enlist a group to create a community engagement plan to obtain the buy-in of all stakeholders and to reach all aspects of a particular community group. This group could include families of FTFs, members of civil society organizations, social services, law enforcement agencies, community action groups, and others. Providing family support can be provided separately or within a group, such as a group of parents, or a mothers/fathers group, or in combination. Other means of support could be hotlines, counseling, or forums within which to connect with other families of FTFs. Training could be provided for communities on detecting signs of radicalization; this might also include social media training. Encouraging community members to conduct informal monitoring and/or counseling can reduce the possibility of recidivism. If possible, and situations warrant it, family support could begin while an FTF is still in a battle zone, which would aid relevant agencies in developing relationships with families and communities, as well as assist in notification when the FTF is planning to return.

Conclusion: Capacity Building

These principles can serve to provide guidance in developing community-based solutions to the phenomenon of people returning home from having engaged in violent conflict abroad. The principles outlined in this document are intended to inform and guide countries as they develop programs designed to reintegrate returning FTFs, and as they address more general issues relating to radicalization in their communities. They are not designed as an exhaustive or exclusive list of actions and should be tailored to suit the cultural and political environment at different locations, as well as include a realistic assessment of the resources available to state actors.

Developing reintegration programs requires resources, as they may require partnership building, cooperation and collaboration, and extensive training for the professionals involved, among other expenses. The International Institute of Justice and Rule of Law and the Hedayah Center for Excellence are developing programs to expand the knowledge base around this issue. We have developed two 5-day programs to help nations grappling with challenges associated with this issue.

The Basic Course for Nations is intended for government officials and is designed to help them identify individuals from departments and agencies in their country who are positioned to develop reintegration programs that take a “whole of government” approach. The course is based on these 22 principles and provides a forum for participants to discuss and come up with viable options. The goal is for them to select individuals who will attend the second course, the Basic Course for Practitioners, which assists practitioners in developing reintegration programs that will work in their communities. The Basic Course for Practitioners aims to build capacity by presenting ideas that can lead to practical solutions the participants can implement. It also includes a session on project development. Using these principles as a guide, participants will come away from this course with a set of actions and suggestions for reintegration programs and policies, tailored to their country and ready to be presented to their most senior government officials.