

# Strategy Research Project International Fellow

## Returning Foreign Fighters in the Caribbean: Issues and Approaches

by

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Class of 2017

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188		
The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2017		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Returning Foreign Fighters in the Caribbean: Issues and Approaches			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Jaimie Ogilvie Jamaica Defence Force			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. Paul R. Kan			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT      Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited. To the best of my knowledge this SRP accurately depicts USG and/or DoD policy & contains no classified information or aggregation of information that poses an operations security risk. <b>Author:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>P.A.:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 5672					
14. ABSTRACT The return of Foreign Fighters (FFs) from the Middle East to their countries of origin in the Caribbean, have created concerns about the future security and stability of the region, for policy makers and stakeholders alike. The potential negative impact of these persons, whether integrated into criminal networks or engaging in acts of terror, on the developing but vulnerable tourism-based economies of the region, as well as in such close proximity to the United States of America, is palpable. This paper explores approaches to the reintegration of persons with violent skill sets, and draws on the experiences of other countries facing the same challenge, as well as lessons learned from Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and criminal deportation programs, to make recommendations appropriate for the Caribbean. These include greater information sharing, enhanced detection and monitoring capabilities, the development of structured reintegration programs (RPs) designed to re-socialize and equip returning FFs to positively contribute to society (whether incarcerated or at liberty), the communication of clear policies by governments, and capacity building in regional institutions by external actors to mitigate the threat. A failure to adequately engage these FFs could have negative effects on the security of the region.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Terrorism, Regional Security					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 27	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

## Returning Foreign Fighters in the Caribbean: Issues and Approaches

(5672 words)

### Abstract

The return of Foreign Fighters (FFs) from the Middle East to their countries of origin in the Caribbean, have created concerns about the future security and stability of the region, for policy makers and stakeholders alike. The potential negative impact of these persons, whether integrated into criminal networks or engaging in acts of terror, on the developing but vulnerable tourism-based economies of the region, as well as in such close proximity to the United States of America, is palpable. This paper explores approaches to the reintegration of persons with violent skill sets, and draws on the experiences of other countries facing the same challenge, as well as lessons learned from Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and criminal deportation programs, to make recommendations appropriate for the Caribbean. These include greater information sharing, enhanced detection and monitoring capabilities, the development of structured reintegration programs (RPs) designed to re-socialize and equip returning FFs to positively contribute to society (whether incarcerated or at liberty), the communication of clear policies by governments, and capacity building in regional institutions by external actors to mitigate the threat. A failure to adequately engage these FFs could have negative effects on the security of the region.

## **Returning Foreign Fighters in the Caribbean: Issues and Approaches**

The involvement of Foreign Fighters (FFs) in conflicts around the globe is not a recent phenomenon. From as early as the time of the Crusades, individuals have been leaving their home territories for distant shores to wage war.<sup>1</sup> However, the detailed study of this field has only emerged in the last 10 – 15 years, with even less written about it in relation to the Caribbean region. The motivations of these FFs to leave their home countries to participate in these conflicts, is varied and includes, philosophical, ideological, nationalistic and/or religious sympathizing, adventure, financial gain, “restless warrior syndrome,” disaffection with their own domestic circumstances, and in some cases being unable to return home after the fighting and so simply moving to the next battlefield.

The return of these FFs to their countries of origin at the end of, or during a lull in the fighting, has presented challenges to the security of these countries. Whether the reintegration process meets with socially acceptable norms, is organized or ad hoc, or is characterized by behavior that is disruptive to the security and stability of the country or surrounding region, the return of these FFs has to be considered carefully and strategies devised for addressing the impact of their return.

This paper will provide a brief background to the problem, define some key terms, discuss the perceived threat posed to security in the region, and examine how other countries are currently addressing the problem. It will also review lessons learned from the reintegration processes associated with Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) programs and the deportation of violent criminals. It will then discuss options available for regional policy makers and make recommendations in this regard. While it is acknowledged that stemming recruitment on the front end will negate

or minimize the need for addressing returning FFs that matter remains outside the scope of this paper.

## Background

In 2014, reports surfaced of Caribbean nationals leaving their home countries in the Caribbean, bound for the Middle East, ostensibly to join in the fight being waged by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>2</sup> Governments and societies in the Caribbean have been concerned, both by the movement of their nationals to join the fight as FFs, as well as by their return to the region. Successive Commanders of the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), General John Kelly,<sup>3</sup> and Admiral Kurt Tidd,<sup>4</sup> have expressed concerns about the potential impact of these returning FFs to the security of the United States, countries of origin of the FFs, and the region as a whole.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS),<sup>5</sup> estimates that since 2013 approximately 200 Caribbean nationals have traveled to either Iraq or Syria to engage in fighting on behalf of ISIS. These individuals have now been placed on regional and international watch lists and intelligence databases. It has anticipated that the challenge to Caribbean nations posed by the return of these FFs is not just their presence within countries, but the potential use of their enhanced skill sets, illicit international networks, and the opportunity to continue “the fight” in their countries of domicile or neighboring countries by attacking soft targets.<sup>6</sup>

The presence of these FFs who return to the Caribbean, having honed their skills in far flung conflict zones,<sup>7</sup> have created uncertainty in the region due to their continued use of those skills, or their disposition towards positive reintegration in their home countries. The fragile and largely tourism dependent economies of the Caribbean, the

proximity and access to the United States of America through this “Third Border,”<sup>8</sup> and the inadequacy of resources to effectively track and monitor the reintegration of these individuals when they return, have raised the stakes to regional and domestic security for stakeholders in the region. Consequently, the question arises, “Do returning Foreign Fighters (FF) to the Caribbean pose a threat to national and regional security and what are the policy options to be developed to counter the threat, if any?”

### Definitions

The main term to be defined in this study is Foreign Fighter. David Malet (2015), in sifting through the various definitions relating to foreign fighters, highlights the 2014 UNSCR 2178 definition of “foreign terrorist fighters” as “individuals who travel to a state other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning of, or participation in terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.”<sup>9</sup> This paper will adopt the modified definition proffered by Malet of a Foreign Fighter (FF) as “a non-citizen of a state experiencing civil conflict who arrives from an external state to join an insurgency (e.g., International Brigades, ISIS),”<sup>10</sup> while acknowledging that there is the potential for these FFs to engage in terrorist activities, synonymous with those activities associated with foreign terrorist fighters as defined above.

Two other terms to be defined here for clarity are “reintegration” as used in the context of “Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration” (DDR), and “deportee.” The United Nations defines reintegration as “the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. [It] is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level.”<sup>11</sup> The Oxford Dictionary defines a deportee as “a person

who has been or is being expelled from a country.”<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of this paper, deportees are defined as those being removed from a country for violent criminal offences, as opposed to those being deported for immigration crimes, fraud and other non-violent offences.

### Perceived Threat

The Caribbean region is particularly vulnerable to returning FFs for a number of reasons. Geographically, the region is large and offers numerous unmonitored points of entry, which makes it possible for returning FFs to re-enter countries in the region unnoticed, if they so desired. This is the most likely approach for those FFs who want to “fly below the radar”, given the coordinated approach already adopted by most Caribbean countries with regard to the Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS). Corruption of these border control systems is always a possibility, but the less likely of the two. Additionally, the lack of resources to adequately monitor these spaces, make it an attractive option for returning FFs who are not keen in announcing their return. Similarly, breakdowns in the regional sharing of information on the presence and movement of FFs within/through the region, deliberately or otherwise, represents an area of vulnerability which could be exploited.

There are many soft targets in the Caribbean which individuals or small cells can target and attack, as part of a broader global ISIS campaign. The significant contribution which tourism makes to Caribbean economies, makes these countries vulnerable to the devastating impact of a terrorist attack within their borders; whether the targets be domestic, or planned against American interests (cruise ships, commercial aircraft, offshore universities, embassies, diplomats, visitors, business interests). Unlike developed economies which are more resilient in the aftermath of terror attacks, fragile

and developing economies stand to suffer major and longer lasting damage.<sup>13</sup> The proximity of the Caribbean to the United States (often referred to as the Third Border of the US), may also make the Caribbean an attractive staging area for the movement of terrorist cells into the continental United States (CONUS) to carry out terror attacks.

The enhanced individual skill sets of these returning FFs are a cause for concern to states everywhere. Proficiency with firearms, explosives, communication technologies, advanced combat skills and tactical field craft (including infiltration, escape and evasion), or any combination of the aforementioned, along with the experience, exposure and discipline of battle hardened fighters, can prove as deadly off the battlefield as on it. Whether acting as a “lone wolf” or as part of a small cell (as prime actors or enablers), and potentially with the support of/to international terror networks, the threat is palpable and of grave concern to stability and security in the region.

Jason Fritz’ May 2016 exposé on the hotbed of ISIS recruiting in the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, provides a succinct synopsis of the FF problem faced by Caribbean countries and the threat posed to the security of the United States of America.<sup>14</sup> This threat is confirmed by Trinidadian authorities and other regional security practitioners, who estimate that over 100 Trinidadians left Trinidad and Tobago to fight for ISIS between 2013 and 2015.<sup>15</sup> Trinidad and Tobago has a history of supplying already radicalized individuals from its relatively small but active Muslim community, to conflicts in the Middle East, from as far back as the civil war in Lebanon in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup> The attempted *coup d’etat* in Trinidad and Tobago by the radical Muslim sect Jamat-Al-Muslimeen (JAM) led by Yasin Abu Bakr in 1990,<sup>17</sup> demonstrates the potential impact

these returning FFs can have. While there is no direct evidence to indicate that persons involved in the attempt were returning FFs, the experiences and transfer of knowledge within the community is likely to have played a significant role. Despite this major event, there have never been any specific government organized reintegration programs for returning FFs in Trinidad and Tobago. The returnees have always been received and looked after by their families and the broader Muslim community. However, some of these FFs end up using their acquired skill sets to engage in criminal activity.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, these returned FFs continue the recruiting and radicalization of potential FFs and facilitating their departure to conflict zones, primarily in the Middle East.

There is no indication that other countries in the region, are faced with the extent of the problem as is present in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, enquiries from selected countries in the region, revealed that no more than a handful of individuals from any of these countries, were either suspected or confirmed of having left to become FFs with no indication of whether or not they had returned.<sup>19</sup> Information concerning the return of such individuals is even harder to confirm. Consequently, in these countries, and given the small numbers involved, the assessment of the threat presented by returning FFs, is that they are lacking in numbers, leadership, resources, networks and the capacity to plan terror activities. At best, they are likely to engage in local criminal activities, but are largely focused on survival as they seek to reintegrate. Consequently, the default approach to dealing with these individuals is centered around law enforcement strategies concerned with fighting violent crime, and an increased awareness of this “peripheral” threat, leading to greater information sharing.

Notwithstanding the local threat assessments, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director James Comey in July 2016, projected an increase in the flow of FFs from Syria and Iraq to Western nations and their countries of origin, due to gains made by the coalition forces fighting ISIS in those countries.<sup>20</sup> The gains made in the fight against ISIS in those countries in the second half of 2016, have increased the likelihood of this exodus and the potential destabilization of the security environment in these destination countries. The collective, yet distributed, presence of increased numbers of radicalized fighters in the region, has increased the sensitivity of the U.S. to the threat posed by returning FFs as described by General Kelly and Admiral Tidd.

Even though the estimated numbers of persons leaving the region to join ISIS may be comparatively small, with an even smaller but as yet undetermined number returning, it only takes one or a few to commit one act which would cause major disruptions in the region. The potential involvement and influence of networked terror cells raises the stakes even higher, and increases the likelihood and efficacy of any such attack. The impact of an attack in one Caribbean country is highly unlikely to be confined to that country. The interconnectedness of the region and the perception of it as one contiguous space, through which visitors have multiple ports of call, would deliver a mortal blow to regional economies for years to come. Cruise ship visitors, stop over visitors and airline overflights, would all be likely to experience significant declines.

Currently, there are very few countries with existing legislation within the English speaking Caribbean, which makes it an offence for persons to travel to another country to engage in terrorist training, activities or even to support such training and activities. Although there are some countries currently developing the legislation, and most

countries in the region have ratified UNSCR 2178 which calls for countries to enact such legislation, this remains a major gap, which is at risk of being exploited by FFs. Short of other countries honoring the resolution and preventing the movement of such persons back to the region, the region is open and vulnerable to the return of these FFs.

### Current Foreign Fighter Reintegration Approaches

There are several avenues of approach worthy of exploration in developing options to counter the threat of returning FFs. The first and most logical approach is to examine how other countries deal with the problem. The lessons learned from this may then be juxtaposed against the environment in the Caribbean and what regional security policy makers are currently contemplating and seeking to implement. Value may also be gained from examining best practices from similar challenges.

The Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders by the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF),<sup>21</sup> provides a summary of best practices on the reintegration of persons involved in violent extremism. Similarly, the discussions among experts assembled during the White House Summit on “Countering Violent Extremism” (CVE) as reported by the Washington Institute,<sup>22</sup> provides insight into what works and what does not, on the matter of the reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters.

Despite UNSCR 2178 stipulations, there are very few countries which have made it illegal for nationals to participate in conflicts outside of the auspices of the state. Those that have, still find it challenging to prove the involvement of their nationals in external conflicts, in order to successfully prosecute and incarcerate. Criminalizing the act of becoming a foreign fighter, with the ultimate penalty of incarceration, raises a number of issues. Foremost is establishing the legislation to implement this policy

option. Additionally, it is quite likely, as has been seen elsewhere, that there could be difficulty in proving participation in hostilities as a FF.

Once the offence has been proven, the issue of incarceration will arise. This is a double edged sword as prisons can be (and in many instances are) a hotbed for radicalization of inmates by FFs, thereby creating a ready pool of future FFs which will eventually be released one day.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, prisons may be seen as a controlled environment in which to conduct the early identification of radicalized inmates and execute tailored de-radicalization programs, as well as penetrate FF networks both inside and outside the prisons.<sup>24</sup> This option requires significant resources by countries and a commitment to information and intelligence sharing to convict and incarcerate the offenders.

The Rabat Memorandum on “Good Practices for Effective Counter-Terrorism Practice in the Criminal Justice Sector” encourages countries to “ensure that convicted terrorists are appropriately punished and develop policies for their incarceration and reintegration... [as] an effective system for incarcerating terrorists is a critical part of an effective criminal justice response to terrorism.”<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, the decision to adopt this approach has to be assessed against a cost-benefit model, which includes the short term benefits of limited containment, and the exponentially greater medium to long term implications, of increasing the pool of radicalized individuals willing to engage in violent extremism either at home or in other countries.

The GCTF, while focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration through incarceration, highlights the critical importance of unambiguous and carefully thought out policy goals and strategy implementation. They also advocate enhanced information

sharing, making use of a wide cross section of properly trained and sensitized stake holders, the retraining of FFs in both cognitive and vocational skills, and incentivizing and recognizing transformation in FFs, along with post-release support (including fostering a positive community environment). Finally, the Forum encourages international agencies and countries with the capability to engage in capacity building with those countries in need of, and which request it.<sup>26</sup>

Trinidad and Tobago as a co-sponsor of UNSCR 2178, and as the Caribbean country with perhaps the most significant FF population, have increased their collaborative information sharing and networking with other countries, to track the movement of their nationals and other persons of interest, in and out of the country. In 2014, through the APIS, Jamaican authorities were notified of the impending arrival of the leader of the Jamat Al-Muslimeen in Jamaica. Abu Bakr was subsequently detained upon arrival in Jamaica and repatriated to Trinidad and Tobago within hours.<sup>27</sup> The increased, but still ad hoc, monitoring of FFs once they return, has also been a feature of the increased emphasis by the state to mitigate the threat posed by these individuals.

Countries like Australia and the United Kingdom,<sup>28</sup> among others, have taken the extreme measure of seeking to bar the return of FFs, by stripping them of their citizenship on security grounds. This however has limited application to persons with dual nationalities or who may be able to obtain citizenship in another country. Also, stripping a “sole citizen” of their only national identity and thereby rendering them stateless, is against the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>29</sup> which guarantees the rights off all persons to a nationality. There are also concerns that taking this approach may infringe upon the standing of these countries as good global citizens

and create even greater problems in the long term.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, this approach presumes that the authorities know those who were engaged in the fighting, as well as being able to identify their mode of return. For Caribbean nations, tracking the return of FFs becomes even more problematic, due to the multiplicity of unmonitored points of entry and the inadequate intelligence network to monitor them.

Other countries like Denmark, have opted to focus on the reintegration of FFs in a holistic way, focusing on individual risk assessments, counselling, de-programing of radicalized individuals, mentoring, helping FFs reconnect with family, friends and society in general, and helping the families of FFs reintegrate with their family members. They have however, been very clear and unambiguous in their communications to FFs about their reintegration prospects. Specifically, it has been made patently clear to the population, that if there is sufficient evidence that link FFs to participating in hostilities, then they will be prosecuted. However, in the absence of any such evidence, the focus is on reintegration. Due to the difficulty in obtaining credible evidence in this regard, reintegration has been the approach used more often than not.

Similarly in the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the current Attorney General, Mr Faris Al Rawi, along with the current and former Ministers of National Security, have unequivocally stated the government's position on Trinidadian nationals travelling to the Middle East to fight for ISIS. The government has consistently warned its nationals that in accordance with UNSCR 2178 it will be "red flagging" persons who "travel to war torn countries or those having known associations with terrorist entities", and that they will be subject to investigation and prosecution under anti-terrorism and related legislation, including money laundering.<sup>31</sup>

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recommends that reintegration programs (RPs) be sustainable, measurable, complementary, innovative (including multi-sectoral partnerships), and balanced. Additionally, established RPs which have economic, social and psychosocial dimensions, make continued participation in FF lifestyles less attractive and spur voluntary return.<sup>32</sup> The challenge with reintegration programs in countries with challenged economies however, is that the provision of limited resources to FFs may be met with opposition by the population, who will demand that these same resources be spent on social services such as health and education for the law abiding citizens.<sup>33</sup>

#### Lessons from Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration Programs

The United Nations has long recognized the value of preventing future conflict through the planned Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of protagonists. Edloe, distills some DDR best practices which find useful application in the FF problem.<sup>34</sup> At the heart of effective reintegration strategies are the political will and the execution of a mandatory orientation program to facilitate re-integration. These orientation programs ideally should be long term in nature, tailored specifically towards the FFs and their dependents, jointly run by government agencies and NGO partnerships, include effective and strong public information operations, and incorporate Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) counselling and marketable skills training and other sustainable socio-economic stabilizers.<sup>35</sup>

The scale of RPs and the associated resource requirements to be considered for FFs, is nowhere near what it is in typical post-conflict societies (given the numbers involved), making them less economically burdensome. A failure however, to effectively re-integrate FFs and their dependents, could see them turn to crime (both ad hoc and

organized), or worse yet violent extremism within borders, thereby negatively impacting the security and public safety environment for Caribbean nations and the region as a whole. The potential economic cost of FFs engaging in terrorist acts within the region are likely to be significantly more than any investment to reintegrate them. In the heavily tourism dependent economies of the region, the sustainable and adequately resourced RPs for FFs merit serious consideration. Unlike typical post-conflict states, the countries of the Caribbean with relatively strong institutions of government and governance systems, along with robust international support and strong partnerships, are well positioned to develop and deliver such programs.

#### Lessons from the Reintegration of Deportees

There is a fairly long history of persons leaving the Caribbean to other parts of the world where they have become involved in serious crimes (including murders and other forms of violent crime), who have been convicted of these criminal offences, sentenced, and then deported back to their countries of origin. A World Bank case study on criminal deportations, provides insight into the impact of violent criminal offenders' reintegration into society within the Caribbean region, exposing some of the limitations and challenges faced by Caribbean countries, in respect of acceptance, monitoring and management of these criminal deportees and their impact on national security.<sup>36</sup> Even though the figures relating to deported persons re-offending in their country of domicile are relatively small, the impact they have on crime in these countries with small populations is significant, especially if they assume leadership positions and leverage their international connections.<sup>37</sup>

The U.S. Department of Justice statistics show that in the US in the 1990s, approximately two thirds of criminals released from prison re-offended within three

years.<sup>38</sup> While there is insufficient definitive data which tracks the rate of recidivism among persons deported to the Caribbean for violent criminal offences, a CARICOM Regional Task Force Report (2002), suggested that persons deported for both violent and non-violent offenses who had been away for long periods, were at a higher risk of recidivism when returned to their country of origin, given their lack of support there.<sup>39</sup>

Professor Bernard Headley in another study (2005), found that older deportees (age 30 and above) were less likely to reoffend. In Barbados between 1994 and 2001, 13% of deportees were found to have committed offences, and in Trinidad between 1999 and 2001, 15% of deportees were found to have committed offences. These low rates are favorable when compared to the 50% recidivism rate for locally incarcerated criminals upon their release in Caribbean countries.<sup>40</sup> Headley and Milovanovic in their study of the impact of deportation in Jamaica, indicate that the Jamaican Constabulary's National Intelligence Bureau (NIB), reported that only 4% of a sample of 1000 persons deported to Jamaica between 2005 – 2012, for both criminal and non-criminal offenses, were charged at least once for offences ranging from drug related offences to illegal possession of firearms, robbery and/or assault.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding the seemingly low percentages, the raw numbers are themselves cause for concern, given the likely impact anyone of these persons could have on the stability and security of the particular country in question and the region. They also highlight the positive impact on effective re-integration of deportees, when there is a collaborative effort at addressing the social and economic re-integration of persons deported for criminal offences. In particular, the establishment of the National Organization of Deported Migrants (NODM),<sup>42</sup> as a collaborative effort of government agencies, academia, NGOs, partner nations, civil

society and former deportees, addresses the need of deportees for social acceptance, non-stigmatization and economic security, thereby enabling successful reintegration.<sup>43</sup>

Best practice recommendations regarding the re-integration of deportees include mandatory community supervision, half-way houses and parole officers to monitor and counsel individuals, cultural networking and orientation to help reduce recidivism, and the establishment of offices for the resettlement of deportees. Program support and reintegration subsidies by the departing countries under a development support theme, are also strongly recommended, as deportation falsely assumes border and immigration integrity. Given proximity, and the relative ease with which persons are able to illegally cross sovereign borders, the US and other countries would stand to benefit from supporting RPs in the Caribbean, thereby reducing their own vulnerability and exposure to criminal/terrorist activity. The same applies to returning FFs.

#### Options for the Future

The foregoing sections of this paper have examined in some detail, possible approaches to addressing the FF problem, with application to the effective reintegration of FFs within the Caribbean region. Even though it may appear at this time that Trinidad and Tobago is the island facing the greatest challenge, other countries could see a burgeoning problem given the continuing reduction in ISIS controlled territory in the Middle East, and the likelihood of more persons who departed the region as FFs returning to their country of origin. Consequently there are two options which may be considered by regional governments, one much broader than the other, as countries seek to deal with these returning FFs.

The first is to work with international and regional partners and agencies, to completely exclude these FFs from returning to the region. Although UNSCR 2178

speaks to signatories preventing the travel of FFs to and from conflict zones, it does make provision for the coordinated return of FFs to countries of origin, to face prosecution for acts criminalized under national legislation as required by UNSCR 2178. While the exclusion of FFs from the region by this means would reduce the threat in the region, it is not guaranteed to eliminate it completely. The exclusion of nationals from their country of origin, is also likely to be problematic and offend international treaty obligations, thereby making it unacceptable. Sovereign borders, both within the region and outside the region, are not impervious to the unregulated movement of people. Additionally, the corruption of border control officials and procedures, and the ability of FFs to avoid detection by border control agents and systems, renders this proposed policy of total exclusion impractical and infeasible. While it may be deemed an acceptable approach based on national caveats and political considerations supported by domestic public sentiment, international law on the rights of individuals to belong to a state, and the unsuccessful experiences of Australia and the United Kingdom in pursuing this approach of total exclusion, work against it being a suitable option.

The second option is for Caribbean states to pursue a deliberate program of reintegration. This option should have a broad enabling national focus, with specific targeted RPs at the individual FF and community levels, and solicit support by regional and international partners and agencies.

At the national level, there must be strong and unwavering political will to address the FF problem. The development and communication of clear policies dealing with FFs, through robust information operations aimed at increasing public awareness of the FF problem, obtaining public support and buy in of FF oriented RPs, while

countering radicalization and recruiting messaging, will be critical to the success of any such initiative.

The developed RPs must be sustainable, measurable, complementary, innovative and balanced, while incorporating broad multi-sectoral and multi-agency involvement in execution. The provision of resources required for these RPs is a necessary investment in establishing a positive security environment. This includes increased monitoring and surveillance capabilities to track the activities of FFs when they return, whether they be incarcerated, or are being reintegrated at the community level.

Returning FFs must also be held accountable for their actions in keeping with international standards, as part of the reintegration process. Countries should therefore seek to develop and enact national legislation in accordance with UNSCR 2178 to criminalize FF activities, thereby laying the foundation on which accountability processes may proceed. There must also be the concurrent development of effective investigation and prosecutorial processes targeting FFs; both to punish and to serve as a deterrent.

Countries should consider implementing specifically tailored programs in prison to transform and de-radicalize FFs (including the incentivization and public recognition of successful transformation), limit recruiting opportunities in prison, and which will work to rehabilitate, re-socialize and reintegrate FFs into a receptive society. Likewise, there should be specific tailored RPs for returning FFs who do not face incarceration. FFs are a vulnerable group that often consist of “poor, illiterate, uneducated, unskilled fighters with few links to jobs and training opportunities.”<sup>44</sup> RPs should be long-term oriented

and promote community support and acceptance of FFs to facilitate re-integration.

Reintegration Programs (RPs) must also address the needs of dependents.

These programs should address the social, economic and psychosocial needs of the FFs, inclusive of counselling, skills training, psychological/cognitive adjustments and job placement. Additionally, support should be provided to families to facilitate the reintegration of the FFs, as well as public education and sensitization initiatives to encourage acceptance and positive reinforcement of acceptable social behavior in FFs by the receiving communities. Finally, countries should seek to establish mandatory orientation facilities and activities for individuals as part of RPs, under the central direction and control of a multi-disciplinary body, who will take ownership of the RPs for newly returned FFs, or recently released rehabilitated individuals from prison.

At the regional and international levels, Caribbean countries should solicit and seek to facilitate and promote increased information and intelligence sharing with regional and international partners, to monitor the movement of FFs. Finally, Caribbean countries should seek external support (both resource and technical) for RPs and capacity building for dealing with FFs.

This raft of strategies under the second option, all derived from best practices of dealing with violent migratory individuals, are both feasible and suitable by virtue of their successful application in other jurisdictions. However, the transfer of these best practices to the Caribbean region and their efficacy will depend on the rigor and integrity with which they are implemented, and the degree of support/buy in at the domestic, regional and international levels. This acceptability will in large part be determined by the effectiveness of the public information/education campaign which ought to precede

and underpin the implementation of these strategies, along with the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

The return of FFs to the Caribbean from conflict zones, primarily in the Middle East, presents a challenge for the security and stability of the region. The loss of territory and influence of ISIS in the Middle East, is likely to see an increased flow of these persons back to the region in the foreseeable future. For countries like Trinidad and Tobago with a history of its nationals participating in conflicts overseas as FFs, the challenge continues. The current ad hoc approach throughout the region to addressing this potentially destabilizing phenomenon, is neither feasible, acceptable nor suitable because it does not offer a sufficient guarantee in maintaining the security and stability of the region. It is therefore necessary that Caribbean states develop deliberate and planned RPs for FFs.

One of the most significant steps is the demonstration of the political will to address the problem in a comprehensive way and the commensurate commitment to develop and implement programs in this regard. For those countries without the requisite legislation to authorize specific courses of action, this becomes a necessary first step. Improving the capacity to detect and monitor the movement and activities of FFs as well as a commitment to greater sharing of intelligence and information. This should be followed by clear and unambiguous statements by regional governments about the illegality of becoming a foreign fighter and the associated consequences, inclusive of prosecution, incarceration, re-socialization and reintegration. Notwithstanding the incarceration of FFs, there must be programs in prisons geared towards the positive reintegration of these returned FFs.

Similarly, for those who do not face incarceration, there must be an equally clearly articulated pathway for reintegration. These reintegration initiatives should come under the centralized control and direction of one entity, be multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary in character, be established in accordance with international human rights law and best practices, and focus on the social, economic and psychosocial needs of FFs. This should be complemented by initiatives to prepare the families and communities to receive these individuals in such a way that will facilitate their reintegration, including counselling, networking and the identifying and reporting of behavior indicative of a return to FF tendencies or engaging in criminal activities.

Finally, recognizing that the likely success of any effort to reintegrate returning FFs, is going to increase with the support of external partners, countries of the region are encouraged to reach out and collaborate with each other, as well as other external partners and entities. Tapping into the considerable experience and resources of the broader global community, in addressing this problem, will better position local and regional RPs for success. These external partners also stand to benefit from a secure and stable region, and should thus be encouraged to support regional initiatives.

The risk of these returned FFs, engaging in violent extremist behavior or criminal activity, is a significant threat to the security and stability of the region. The economies and societies of the Caribbean can ill afford the impact of such events and activities. All efforts should therefore be made to engage these FFs and significantly reduce if not totally eliminate the problem. A failure to do so could prove catastrophic for the Caribbean Basin.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Thousands of Christians from Western Europe answered Pope Urban II's call to war against the Muslims in the Holy land in 1095; a struggle which lasted almost to the end of the Thirteenth Century when the Crusaders were driven out of Palestine and Syria.

<sup>2</sup> The Caribbean Council, "ISIS: A Moment for Caribbean Reflection," <http://www.caribbean-council.org/isis-moment-caribbean-reflection/> (accessed February 06, 2017); *Jamaica Observer*, "Trinidad and Tobago Confirms Nationals Fighting for ISIS" October 14, 2014, <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/Trinidad-and-Tobago-confirms-nationals-fighting-for-ISIS> (accessed February 06, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> General John F. Kelly, "Posture Statement Before the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress Senate Armed Services Committee on March 12, 2015," [http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/SOUTHCOM\\_POSTURE\\_STATEMENT\\_FINAL\\_2015.pdf](http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/SOUTHCOM_POSTURE_STATEMENT_FINAL_2015.pdf) (accessed September 16, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Admiral Kurt W. Tidd, "Posture Statement before the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress Senate Armed Services Committee on March 10, 2016," [http://www.southcom.mil/newsroom/Documents/SOUTHCOM\\_POSTURE\\_STATEMENT\\_FINAL\\_2016.pdf](http://www.southcom.mil/newsroom/Documents/SOUTHCOM_POSTURE_STATEMENT_FINAL_2016.pdf) (accessed September 16, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> CARICOM was established in 1973 as the flagship for regional integration in the Caribbean, primarily among English speaking states. Today it consists of twenty countries (15 member states and 5 associate member states) encapsulating some sixteen million people and comprised of a diverse array of ethnicities, cultures and colonial antecedents. CARICOM IMPACS was established in 2006 and was designed to specifically administer a collective response to the crime and security priorities of member states.

<sup>6</sup> The threat is not limited to physical violent attacks, but also includes technical (hacking, planning and financing), and social (recruiting) activities inimical to state interests.

<sup>7</sup> Accurate numbers of FFs who have returned have remained unconfirmed due to inadequate detection and monitoring mechanisms.

<sup>8</sup> The Caribbean has been regarded as the third border of the United States (Canada and Mexico being the other two) and was described as such under the Third Border Initiative launched by the US in April 2001 by the George W. Bush administration, as a policy initiative promoting regional engagement predicated largely along economic, health, education and security lines. See <http://www.cfr.org/world/caribbean-third-border-initiative/p28002> (accessed October 27, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2178," posted September 24, 2014, [http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/SCR%202178\\_2014\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/SCR%202178_2014_EN.pdf) (accessed October 13, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> David Malet, "Foreign Fighter Mobilization and Persistence in a Global Context," in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, posted May 05, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2015.1032151?scroll=top&needAccess=true> (accessed September 15, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, “Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Resource Centre,” [http://unddr.org/what-is-ddr/introduction\\_1.aspx](http://unddr.org/what-is-ddr/introduction_1.aspx) (accessed November 27, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Oxford Dictionary, “Deportee,” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/deportee> (accessed November 27, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Madeline Moreau, “What is the Economic Cost of Terrorism,” *Global Risk Insights*, posted December 13, 2015, <http://globalriskinsights.com/2015/12/what-is-the-economic-cost-of-terrorism/> (accessed October 14, 2016). The article highlights why stronger economies are more resilient by showing how Bali, Egypt, Mali have all suffered significant economic loss in the aftermath of their terror attacks, when compared to the US, Belgium and France. The increasing frequency of terror attacks against tourism oriented targets in the last 8 years demonstrate the vulnerability of this sector.

<sup>14</sup> Jason Fritz, “Islands in the Foreign Fighter Stream: Trinidad’s Extremist Problem,” *War on the Rocks*, posted May 04, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/05/islands-in-the-foreign-fighter-stream-trinidads-extremism-problem/> (accessed September 29, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Based on interviews with senior regional law enforcement officials and security practitioners with intimate knowledge of the FF problem, October 12 - 13, 2016 (the withholding of the identity of these persons is based on the sensitive positions which they occupy); Caribbean 360, “More Than 100 Trinis Linked to Terrorist Activities Overseas,” February 01, 2017, [http://www.caribbean360.com/news/yes-tt-h?utm\\_source=Caribbean360%20Newsletters&utm\\_campaign=f74252c34f-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_02\\_02&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_350247989a-f74252c34f-39496837](http://www.caribbean360.com/news/yes-tt-h?utm_source=Caribbean360%20Newsletters&utm_campaign=f74252c34f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_02_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_350247989a-f74252c34f-39496837) (accessed February 02, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Based on interviews with senior regional law enforcement officials and security practitioners with intimate knowledge of the FF problem, October 12, 2016 (the withholding of the identity of these persons is based on the sensitive positions which they occupy).

<sup>17</sup> The Abu Bakr led sect stormed the Trinidadian Parliament building while in session, taking several government ministers including the Prime Minister hostage. The Prime Minister and others were wounded in the stand-off. See the report on the Commission of Enquiry into the attempted coup d’ etat available at <http://www.ttparliament.org/documents/rptcoe1990.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2017), 244.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a senior Trinidadian law enforcement official, October 13, 2016 (the withholding of the identity of this person is based on the sensitive positions which they occupy).

<sup>19</sup> Based on interviews with regional security practitioners from Jamaica, Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda, as well as CARICOM IMPACS, October 12 – 13, 2016 (the withholding of the identity of these persons is based on the sensitive positions which they occupy).

<sup>20</sup> Independent, “FBI Director: Crushing ISIS in Syria Risks Releasing ‘Terrorists Diaspora’ Into the West,” July 29, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/isis-more-attacks-read-fbi-director-james-comey-terrorist-diaspora-fordham-syria-iraq-a7162426.html> (accessed November 29, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Global Counter Terrorism Forum, “Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders,”

<https://portal.thegctf.org/documents/10162/159878/Rome+Memorandum-English.pdf> (accessed November 08, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Kelsey Sagwa, "The Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters," in *The Washington Institute*, posted February 23, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/rehabilitation-and-reintegration-of-returning-foreign-terrorist-fighters> (accessed October 16, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> GCTF, Rome Memorandum.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of National Security, "Yasin Abu Bakr Returned to Trinidad and Tobago," *Jamaica Information Service*, October 16, 2014, <http://jis.gov.jm/yasin-abu-bakr-returned-trinidad-tobago/> (accessed February 01, 2017); Jamaica Observer, "Muslim Leader Blames Trinidad for Deportation from Ja," *Jamaica Observer*, October 18, 2014, <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Muslim-leader-blames-Trinidad-for-deportation-from-Ja> (accessed February 01, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Australia Broadcasting Corporation, "Fact Check: How Does Australia's Plan to Strip Foreign Fighters of Citizenship Compare to Other Nations?" June 11, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-11/foreign-fighters-citizenship-around-the-world/6498920> (accessed October 16, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> (accessed December 06, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Cat Barker, "Citizenship Revocation on National Security Grounds: Context and Selected Issues," *Parliament of Australia*, August 03, 2015, [http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/CitizenshipRevocation#\\_Toc426374260](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/CitizenshipRevocation#_Toc426374260) (accessed November 17, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Gail Alexander, "Terrorist fighters Must Accept Risk," *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, April 22, 2016, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2016-04-22/terrorist-fighters-must-accept-risk> (accessed October 19, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> International Organization for Migration, "Reintegration: Effective Approaches" <https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/docs/Reintegration-Position-Paper-final.pdf> (accessed October 19, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> The first version of the Colombia/FARC peace deal was rejected in a national referendum, as the population *inter alia*, disagreed with the provision of economic benefits and resources to the FARC, while no provisions were made for the victims of the FARC's activities.

<sup>34</sup> L. Lenisse Edloe, "Best Practices for Successful Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration," in *New Voices in Public Policy*, Spring 2007

<http://digilib.gmu.edu/jspui/bitstream/handle/1920/6502/20-99-1-PB.pdf;sequence=1> (accessed November 06, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank, "Case Study: Criminal Deportations and Jamaica," <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTHAITI/Resources/CaribbeanC&VChapter6.pdf> (accessed October 09, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> US Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Reentry Trends in the United States," *U.S. Department of Justice*, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/reentry.pdf> (accessed October 16, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> CARICOM, "Report: Regional Task Force on Crime and Security" September, 2002, [http://www.archive.caricom.org/jsp/community/regional\\_issues/crime\\_and\\_security.jsp?null&prnf=1](http://www.archive.caricom.org/jsp/community/regional_issues/crime_and_security.jsp?null&prnf=1) (accessed October 16, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Clifford E. Griffin, "Criminal Deportation: The Unintended Impact of U.S. Anti-Crime and Anti-Terrorism Policy Along its Third Border," *Caribbean Studies Vol. 30, No. 2*, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/25613371?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25613371?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) (accessed January 24, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Headley and Dragan Milovanovic, "Rebuilding Self and Country: Deportee Re-Integration in Jamaica," *Migration Policy Institute*, August 16, 2016, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/rebuilding-self-and-country-deportee-reintegration-jamaica> (accessed November 26, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> The NODM serves the same purpose of facilitating the reintegration of deportees as the government established Returning Nationals Secretariat in St Kitts and Nevis and the church based Land of My Birth Association in Jamaica.

<sup>43</sup> Headley and Milovanovic, *Rebuilding Self and Country*.

<sup>44</sup> Edloe, *Best Practices*, 18.