Strategic Communications in FTF Repatriation & Reintegration: Guiding Principles for Policymakers & Practitioners

Haroro J. Ingram[a1]

[a]Senior Research Fellow, Program on Extremism, George Washington University

Abstract

With the recent surge in the number of countries willing to repatriate and reintegrate their citizens from camps in Iraq and Syria, policymakers and practitioners around the world are revisiting their approaches to the management of foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) returnees and their families. FTF management policy and practice has significantly evolved in the last decade driven by a growing body of empirical research and a greater awareness of best practices. Despite these advancements, the role of strategic communications in FTF repatriation and reintegration is too-often absent or, at best, underappreciated, by scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike. Yet, interviews with policymakers and practitioners in this field reveals that they are often directly (e.g. as spokespeople) and/or indirectly (e.g. advising to public figures) engaged in public messaging. Without appropriate policy cover and practical guidance, public messaging risks becoming an inadvertent amplifier of policy missteps, public misunderstandings, and malign influence activities. This policy paper argues for an approach to strategic communication in FTF management that is multidimensional, integrated, adaptable, and crosscutting. To these ends, it offers a framework of guiding principles for strategic communication in FTF management that is relevant for both policymakers in government and practitioners in non-government roles.

Introduction

The fields of research and practice in the management of foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) returnees and their families has experienced an extraordinary expansion and evolution in the last decade. During this time, the growth of the research field, the focus of practitioners, and the need for identifying best practice amongst policymakers has been driven by two catalysts of necessity. The first catalyst was the unprecedented wave of foreigners, in both number and countries of origin, who travelled to Syria and Iraq circa. 2012 to 2016, many to join the Islamic State (Van Ginkel & Entenmann 2016; Cook & Vale 2018; European Parliament, 2018). The second catalyst is the more recent surge in the number of countries seeking to

---

[1] Corresponding Author Contact: Haroro J. Ingram, Email: haroro_ingram@email.gwu.edu, Twitter: @haroro_ingram

repatriate and reintegrate citizens from Iraqi and Syrian camps (Doctor et. al. 2023; Margolin 2023). Despite the advancements that have been made in FTF management research, policy, and practice, the role of strategic communication remains, at worst, absent or, at best, underappreciated by policymakers and practitioners. This trend is arguably the product of the challenges and complexities inherent to FTF management *amplifying* persistent misunderstandings about the potential role of strategic communications in this field.

The purpose of this paper is to offer policymakers and practitioners a more holistic understanding of strategic communications and its utility in FTF management. It argues for an approach to strategic communication in FTF management that is multidimensional, integrated, adaptable, and crosscutting. To these ends, it presents a framework of guiding principles for strategic communication in FTF management that is designed for policymakers and practitioners in government and non-government roles. The paper draws on a combination of the author's experiences as a practitioner, scholarly literature, strategic-policy analysis, and interviews with policymakers and practitioners from the United States, EU member states, and across the Asia-Pacific.

This study begins by defining some key terms before briefly exploring the landscape of challenges associated with FTF repatriation and reintegration policy and its implications for strategic communications. It then lays out a broad understanding of strategic communications advocating for an approach that is multidimensional, integrated, adaptable, and crosscutting. This policy paper concludes by outlining a framework of guidelines for strategic communications in FTF management that incorporates the following components: overarching method, partnerships, risk and expectation management, media strategy, crisis communication, evaluations, and practitioner considerations.

Defining Key Terms

It is important to provide working definitions for two key terms that are central to this policy paper. First, "strategic communications" is used as a broadly encompassing term for essentially all types of public communication. From public diplomacy designed for foreign audiences to community outreach initiatives designed for local communities and everything in between, this paper seeks to canvass the various ways that communications can be harnessed

to achieve FTF management objectives. Different government and non-government organizations responsible for various aspects of FTF management will have their own unique challenges and opportunities for using strategic communications that will need to be appropriately managed. It is precisely for this reason that this policy paper uses "strategic communications" as an umbrella term and leaves it to policymakers and practitioners to apply the principles outlined in this paper as they see best.

Second, this paper uses the term "foreign terrorist fighter" (FTF) which the United Nations Security Council defines as "individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training" (UNSC Resolution 2178, 2014). However, this term is applied here while recognizing its inherent limitations and acknowledging that those who travel to conflict zones and may require repatriation and reintegration also includes the families of FTFs and, potentially, other types of returnees that may not have joined proscribed terrorist organizations or perpetrated, planned, or prepared to engage in terrorist acts or training.

The Challenges of FTF Management & Strategic Communications

During interviews with government and non-government practitioners from the United States, several EU member states, and across the Asia-Pacific,[2] it emerged that strategic communications are too-often missing or underappreciated in the FTF repatriation and reintegration fields of policy and practice. This is reinforced by strategic-policy analyses, for example from the EU (e.g. Directive (EU) 2017/541 2017; Eurojust 2020; European Commission 2019; European Parliament Think Tank, 2019; European Commission 2020a; European Commission 2020b; European Commission 2020c; European Union 2020; European Commission 2021; European Parliament 2021), which reveals that strategic communications has an at best understated role in FTF repatriation and reintegration policy.

---

[2] Twenty-two interviews and focus group discussions, mostly conducted under strict Chatham House conditions, helped to inform this paper. These interviews and focus groups were conducted over the course of several projects and some content has featured in publications including an analysis of the U.S. State Department's communications strategies (Ingram 2020), a Department of Homeland Security funded reintegration project (e.g. Doctor et al 2023), European Union projects (2020-2022), and regular engagements with policymakers and practitioners across the Asia-Pacific (e.g. Ingram 2022).

Even within the scholarly literature there are few studies that acknowledge the importance of strategic communications in FTF management (Andrews 2020; Wouterse & Gssime 2020; Radicalisation Awareness Network 2017; Doctor et al 2023). This is despite a significant growth in literature devoted to strategic communications in counterterrorism and PCVE (e.g. Berger 2016; Glazzard 2017; Reed 2017; Reed, Ingram, Whittaker 2017; Whittaker & Elsayed 2019; Glazzard & Reed 2020; Clubb et al 2021; Koehler et al 2023). To understand these trends, it is necessary to take a step back and consider the challenges and complexities seemingly inherent to FTF management. It is arguably these broader challenges and complexities that have worked to compound myths and misunderstandings about the utility of strategic communication in FTF management.

A Wicked Policy Problem?

FTF repatriation and reintegration is a policy field that, in many ways, epitomizes a wicked problem for policymakers. The issue of how best to manage FTF returnees and their families remains a subject of intense debate with conflicting perspectives amongst scholars, policymakers and practitioners driven by not only complexities and contentiousness but concerns about the potential second and third order effects of policy options (Radicalisation Awareness Network 2017; Betts 2022). The *lack of consensus* that remains across the fields of research and practice can fuel uncertainties in policy circles about the most appropriate course of action. These uncertainties are further compounded by the policy cascade and crosscutting nature of FTF management. After all, this is a policy issue that has potentially significant national security (e.g. counterterrorism, PCVE, prison management), legal (e.g. human rights, civil rights, citizenship, immigration), foreign policy (e.g. public diplomacy, interstate relations), and public policy (e.g. social welfare, education) implications. Consequently, FTF management requires careful interagency and multisector (private, civil society) coordination which, in turn, further exacerbates its complexity (Doctor et al 2023).

In addition to these complexities, policymakers and practitioners must also grapple with vulnerabilities that can significantly increase the challenges they face. Two are particularly significant. First is the rapidly evolving security environment. Since the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s, the FTF phenomenon in western policy and research circles has been synonymous with the global jihadi threat which has itself been in a state of flux, especially

since the territorial collapse of the Islamic State's caliphate. The metastasizing of the global jihadist threat, especially across the African continent, could see the emergence of new battlefronts for new generations of FTFs. The Taliban's rise to power and the growing threat of Islamic State's Khorasan province in Afghanistan is a reminder that old battlegrounds may re-emerge for another generation of foreign fighters (Jadoon & Mines 2023). Looking to the future, FTF policymakers must consider the prospect of a more demographically and ideologically diverse foreign fighter returnee threat. For example, the war in Ukraine has attracted foreign fighters, including far-right and far-left extremists, and underscores the potential for such conflicts, driven by global great power competition dynamics, becoming catalysts for new FTF management challenges.

The second vulnerability in FTF management is that it is a controversial issue which inspires high emotions and heated debate. Attitudes to FTF management, particularly amongst senior government leadership, often emerge as the product of tensions between the *politics* of the day, debates about *policy* options, and the ebbs and flows of *public opinion*. Given the controversies associated with FTF repatriation and reintegration, this is a policy field ripe for exploitation by politically inspired or simply attention-seeking actors – from politicians and journalists to malign influence actors. The intense media attention to FTF related issues and, particularly, the agenda-setting impact of *cause célèbre* cases disproportionately skewing public perceptions, contributes to an already difficult problem set (Andrews 2020). It is important to briefly consider what issues and concerns are front of mind for policymakers and practitioners.

Policymaker & Practitioner Perspectives

In interviews with a variety of policymakers and practitioners, there was a shared sense that the interplay of complexities and vulnerabilities that fuel FTF management challenges more broadly had played a significant role in the absence of, or limited role afforded to, strategic communications specifically. To paraphrase a common response from policymakers, their leadership often felt that FTF management is complex enough without further amplifying those complexities by also engaging in the 21st century information environment. Policymakers pointed to other factors that had contributed to risk aversion about engaging in strategic communications such as a sense that government credibility and public

trust had declined in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and that government priorities were shifting to great power competition issues. Where messaging was considered, senior leaders tended to limit the role of strategic communications in FTF management to counternarrative and alternative narrative efforts. Many policymakers lamented that in addition to a lack of high-level policy cover they typically received little to no guidance or formal training in strategic communications.

Yet, many policymakers said that their units were often expected to engage in varying degrees of public messaging around FTF management issues. This varied from formal and direct engagements in public messaging, such as spokespeople delivering press briefings and liaison officers speaking with local communities, to indirect engagements via briefings to public figures responsible for public communications. However, it would be incorrect to assume that these efforts were ad hoc or ill-informed. Indeed, policymakers and practitioners who were given public messaging tasks, with few exceptions, spoke of taking it upon themselves to develop communication plans, engage with experts, and draw on the latest research to inform their messaging. For example, practitioners spoke about strategizing what themes should be explicitly (i.e. carefully explained in detail) or implicitly (i.e. meaning and implications assumed) communicated and which persuasive tools (e.g. repetition of key themes and messages) should be applied. While this is admirable, it highlights the need for a transformation in the way that strategic communications are perceived in FTF management policy circles *and* the necessity of providing guidelines to support practitioners.

Reflections on the State of the Field

The challenges associated with FTF management are exacerbated by an interplay of complexities and vulnerabilities that have arguably amplified misunderstandings within policy circles about the utility of strategic communications. Some of the most persistent myths about strategic communications are that its practice is inherently risky, that actions speak louder than words rendering messaging obsolete so long as policy is strong, and that its utility is limited to counter and alternative narratives. To varying degrees, these misunderstandings were highlighted by the policymakers and practitioners interviewed by the author. The first step to remedying such perceptions in FTF management policy circles is to offer a more holistic approach to strategic communications so that it is seen as an essential tool precisely

because of the challenges, complexities, and vulnerabilities that characterize this policy field. The second step is to offer policymakers and practitioners a framework of broad guiding principles from which they can selectively draw to inform their efforts. These two objectives are the focus of the remainder of this policy paper.

A Road Map for Strategic Communications in FTF Management

The previous section presented a picture of FTF management as a policy field that is *multidimensional* and *crosscutting* in its scope requiring an approach by policymakers that is *integrated* and *adaptable*. If policymakers and practitioners are to appreciate and harness public messaging in FTF management, their approach to strategic communications will also need to be multidimensional, integrated, adaptable, and crosscutting. This section offers an understanding of strategic communications that encapsulates these four characteristics.

Multidimensional

The multidimensionality of strategic communications refers to *what* its various roles and applications can be in FTF management. First and foremost, strategic communications in FTF management should be seen as a multidimensional tool for not only helping to achieve policy objectives but manage risks and expectations. To these broad ends, messaging can be deployed for the full gamut of FTF repatriation and reintegration related objectives. On the foreign policy stage, public messaging can help to build consensus on repatriation and reintegration policy, humanitarian and security requirements in camps, and the need for a united front in achieving justice for victims of terrorism. It can also be used to mobilize efforts to increase convictions against returnees who have committed crimes and prevent supporters from traveling to support terrorist groups. Domestically, strategic communications can be deployed for a whole host of goals from managing the willingness of communities to accept returnees, confronting malign influence activities, and championing a unified interagency and multisector FTF management response. The multidimensionality of strategic communication in FTF management is broad and varied, extending well-beyond simple counternarrative and alternative narrative efforts. Indeed, its multidimensionality lends itself well to a diverse interagency and multisector landscape.

Integrated

The integration of strategic communications into FTF management is that crucial *why* mechanism that synchronises actions and words to narrow say-do gaps that erode credibility. Ideally, this is achieved by affording strategic communications a centralized role in FTF management in which communicative considerations are integrated into every appropriate stage of policy and practice. There are various aspects to the integration of strategic communications in FTF management. At the top level, strategic communication needs to be appropriately acknowledged in overarching government policies. At the practitioner level, personnel need to have access to guidance and training to support their planning, implementation, and evaluation activities as communicators. The formal integration of strategic communications in FTF management has important implications for creating a mentality in individuals and a culture in teams that appreciates the value of a methodical and evidence-based approach to persuasive messaging. This also helps to support policymakers who are already engaged in strategic communications in FTF management receive the recognition, support, and upskilling necessary to adapt with an often rapidly evolving field.

Adaptable

Strategic communication is an adaptable tool that policymakers and practitioners can flexibly deploy as organizational, policy, and strategic requirements change. This adaptability refers to *how* persuasive messaging can be deployed by the full spectrum of interagency and multisector partners in ways that are appropriate to their unique bureaucratic, legal, administrative, and strategic considerations while still contributing to a unified front on FTF management. Indeed, leveraging the adaptability of strategic communications is a potentially useful mechanism to better harness the diverse range of partners involved in FTF management rather than seeing this diversity as a liability. Strategic communication is also adaptable in the sense that messaging can and should appropriately evolve with shifting policy requirements and strategic conditions. It is this adaptability that needs to be acknowledged and embraced by policymakers and practitioners.

Haroro J. Ingram: Strategic Communications in FTF Repatriation & Reintegration

Crosscutting

While the crosscutting nature of FTF management is an unavoidable reality for the policy field, strategic communications can help to manage the associated challenges and complexities by addressing *who* is involved in these efforts. A whole of government approach to FTF policy requires a whole of government approach to strategic communications in FTF management. To this end, a shared overarching narrative or central message can work as a compass cohering the messages and actions of the interagency. Of course, each agency will need to communicate in a way that reflects their own specific roles and responsibilities but as a contribution to the overarching mission. Consequently, strategic communications can be used to breakdown silos across the interagency and with multisector partners. Indeed, a shared method of strategic communications and, ideally, training in that method, can contribute to an overall more coherent approach to FTF management.

Guiding Principles for Policymakers & Practitioners

A comprehensive approach to strategic communication in FTF management requires policymakers and practitioners to consider several key components: overarching method, partnerships, risk and expectation management, media strategy, crisis communication, evaluations, and practitioner considerations. This section outlines some important guiding principles within each of these categories for the consideration of policymakers and practitioners. While time and space constraints limit its scope and detail, the framework seeks to capture the fundamentals of a holistic approach to strategic communication in FTF management. To ensure that the framework is applicable to a diverse spectrum of potential practitioners in FTF management, it is purposely broad and avoids engaging with repatriation and reintegration specificities that may have only narrow relevance.

1. Overarching Method

1.1 An <u>overarching method</u> of interlocking campaign, message, rollout, and evaluation principles should underpin a holistic approach to strategic communications in FTF management that is methodical, evidence-based and persuasive. There are fundamentals in strategic communications that all messaging efforts need to incorporate to some degree. These

Haroro J. Ingram: Strategic Communications in FTF Repatriation & Reintegration

include the importance of clear, concise, and timely messaging that deploys a range of communication mediums, uses credible and trusted messengers, and ensures that target audience perceptions and motivations are integrated into campaign, message, rollout, and evaluation design.[3]

1.2 A methodical approach to strategic communications should be <u>process-focused</u> offering practitioners a systematic way to integrate campaign, message, rollout, and evaluation activities into a coherent whole. Such an approach also provides practitioners with the opportunity to assess the comprehensiveness with which they have applied the method as an evaluation mechanism. Strategic, psychosocial, bureaucratic, and architectural nuances must be appropriately incorporated into the approach of practitioners to maximize the impact and reach of communication activities.

1.3 <u>Evidence-based</u> decisions draw on the best available information *and* adherence to the overarching method. It is this combination of evidence and methodology underpinning decisions that encourages a systematized approach to persuasive communications and learning lessons for improved future performance.

1.4 Strategic communications should always have a <u>persuasive intent</u> whereby messages seek to achieve an attitudinal and/or behavioral objective. Purely informational messages that are deployed without a persuasive intent is lazy practice that increases the risk of misinterpretation by target audiences and manipulation by spoilers.

2. *Partnerships*

2.1 In FTF management policy, strong professional <u>relationships</u> with key stakeholders both within and outside of government, across the community and the media landscape, are invaluable for improving the practice, reach, and impact of strategic communication activities. Mapping these networks of potential partnerships is a useful way to fully harness opportunities in the information theatre.

2.2 Bureaucratic <u>structures and processes</u> can be the lifeblood of public messaging efforts. Harnessing the legal and bureaucratic architecture within and across organizations is crucial for maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of strategic communications in FTF management. Legal and bureaucratic constraints will differ across the interagency

---

[3] For example, the SCCB-Linkage Method® of Strategic Communications.

and this mix of opportunities and limitations offer vital parameters and pathways for strategic communicators.

2.3 Strategic communications can play an important role as a <u>synchronizing mechanism</u> of interdepartmental and multisector FTF management activities. Different interagency and multisector actors will inevitably need to engage in different public communications activities reflective of their unique roles and responsibilities. However, a shared method of strategic communications allows for a common lexicon and understanding of the "tradecraft" of persuasive messaging which naturally opens opportunities for shared lessons learned and better synchronicity of effort.

2.4 <u>Forums</u> for interagency and multisector training and/or dialogue are crucial for partnership building and synchronizing action and messaging. For example, access to shared training can be an opportunity for policymakers and multisector FTF management practitioners to adopt a shared method, engage with the latest research and best practice, and create forums for interdepartmental and/or multisector network building and information sharing.

3. Risk & Expectation Management

3.1 Strategic communication should be seen by FTF management policymakers and practitioners as a <u>risk management</u> tool. After all, persuasive messaging can play a central role in shaping how target audiences perceive potential hazards, their probability and potential impact. Perceptions of risk can rapidly change for a variety of reasons, especially with an issue as controversial and complicated as FTF management. Strategic communications should play a proactive role in realistically and factually managing perceptions of risk. Spoilers may seek to exploit perceptions of risk regarding FTF management issues and it will be important for policymakers and practitioners to posture for responsiveness.

3.2 Strategic communication is also an <u>expectation management</u> tool. Managing public expectations "up" and "down" depending on policy and contextual factors is crucial to manage risks and achieve policy goals. However, to avoid being perceived as an inconsistent messenger, it is important for the central policy message and related talking points to be broadly consistent over time while the specific communicative tools are appropriately adapted for changing conditions.

Haroro J. Ingram: Strategic Communications in FTF Repatriation & Reintegration

3.3 Narrowing perceived <u>say-do gaps</u> boosts the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of actors responsible for FTF management. Strategic communication in FTF management is an opportunity for policymakers and practitioners to narrow the gap between what they do (policy and programmatic action) and what they say. When the issue of concern is as potentially controversial and contentious as FTF management, it is the politics of dashed expectations – almost always emerging from perceived say-do gaps – that can be readily exploited by a range of spoilers.

3.4 <u>Credibility</u> is vital for being an effective strategic communicator, especially in a risk and expectation management sense. To be perceived as credible, messaging efforts must be timely and accurate, deploy messengers that are trusted, while remembering that any differences between the message and reality as experienced by target audiences will erode credibility. Put another way: Credibility = Speed + Accuracy + Messenger – Say-Do Gap.

4. Media Strategy

4.1 Traditional and non-traditional media may have an <u>agenda-setting impact</u> on how FTF management issues are perceived. Mapping the media landscape to assess media reporting trends, survey and polling data, as well as identifying traditional and non-traditional influencers is vital for understanding the information environment, its opportunities and challenges. Beyond mapping, relationships with journalists and key media actors are vital for practically managing the flow of information to the public.

4.2 Building relationships of <u>trust and transparency</u> with key media actors is crucial for ensuring the flow of accurate and timely information on FTF management issues. One of the most important ways in which media relations can improve is through the timely and accurate dissemination of information by government and non-government organizations. Media relationships will be crucial for mutually beneficial exchanges that ensure public perceptions are not being disproportionately skewed by fixating attention on certain cases and issues over others.

4.3 <u>Contingency planning</u> for policy shifts or crisis communications scenarios should incorporate roles for a variety of media actors. FTF management practitioners will need to prepare for a range of potentialities reflective of the risk profile associated with their scope of work. An overreliance on communication networks internal to the organization, especially

during times of crisis, can significantly reduce the reach and impact of communications efforts.

5. Crisis Communication

5.1 The <u>mantra</u> of crisis communications is that "the right message, from the right person, at the right time can save lives." This is equally applicable in reverse: the wrong message by the wrong messenger at the wrong time can cost lives. Building a rigorous approach to crisis messaging must be conducted during the pre-crisis planning and preparedness phase.

5.2 <u>Crisis communications planning</u> are crucial in FTF management given the potentially catastrophic impacts of FTF returnees threatening or committing acts of terror or being the targets of violence themselves. Indeed, there are an array of potential "crises" that need to be taken into consideration from missteps in policy implementation to the leaking of sensitive information. Strategic communications should be afforded a central role in leading through a crisis response into the recovery phase.

5.3 A comprehensive approach to crisis communications requires careful consideration of the <u>4 Cs of crisis communications</u>: coordination (the management of the messaging response and the flow of information), comprehension (understand and map target audiences, core capabilities, and the key issues), clarity (use simple and direct messaging, regularly repeated to communicate to highly stressed audiences), and confidence (lead through the crisis to show that the problem is not representative of a systemic problem or failure).

6. Evaluations

6.1 Evaluation mechanisms should be <u>integrated</u> across all aspects of campaign, message, and rollout efforts as part of a holistic and methodical approach to strategic communications. There are an enormous variety of evaluation methods available for measuring the reach and impact of strategic communications. Given that the purpose of public messaging is to shape attitudes and behaviors regarding certain issues and/or policies, *change* is often the crucial factor that is being measured with most evaluation activities.

6.2 Given the persuasive intent of strategic communications, the establishment of <u>baseline metrics</u> associated with key attitudinal, behavioral, reach and impact indicators is an

essential first step in a comprehensive approach to evaluations. It is only by establishing baseline measures that change can be monitored across time, location, and audiences.

6.3 Target audience evaluations can take the form of interviews, focus groups, surveys, observational studies, and data analyses but, ideally, a combination of these methods will be applied. Careful audience segmentation helps to provide strategic communicators with a nuanced understanding of the who, when, what, where, and why of their persuasive messaging.

6.4 Monitoring and evaluating spoiler influence activities is important for providing policymakers with a comprehensive understanding of the information environment and target audiences. For example, developing a nuanced picture of the campaign strategies, thematic trends, and other influence efforts of violent extremist actors will be essential for policymakers in FTF management strategic communications.

6.5 By adopting a coherent strategic communications method, policymakers can implement comprehensiveness as an evaluation metric. A methodical approach to strategic communications will be characterized by a suite of interlocking guiding principles that are articulated within a process-driven framework that is persuasively oriented. Amongst other things, such an approach offers opportunities to improve future performance by assessing campaign, message, rollout, and evaluation activities based on the criteria of the strategic communications method being applied. Where the method was not applied comprehensively, there lies opportunities for improvement.

7. Practitioner Considerations

7.1 Counter and alternative narrative activities are an important consideration for FTF management practitioners. Trends in the propaganda output of violent extremists should be regularly assessed with key findings disseminated to policy makers and practitioners involved in FTF management particularly public messaging efforts. At a local level, it is vital to regularly monitor violent extremist messaging related to returnees and identify what is resonating in communities. Moreover, the gendered propaganda appeals of violent extremists pose unique challenges for the management of female returnees (Ingram 2021a, 2021b). Assessing how violent extremists are exploiting gender differences

amongst returnees will help to inform better targeted preventative and counter-messaging efforts.

7.2 The <u>semantic challenge</u> should be an ongoing consideration for strategic communicators in FTF management. For example, the term "FTF returnee" associates any returnee with a proscribed terrorist organization. Yet there is no singular profile of a returnee *and* travelers may have engaged in a range of different roles. With the prospect of a more ideologically diverse returnee problem in the future, strategic communication efforts would benefit from a broader term like "foreign conflict returnee" as a generic reference to travelers with the term "FTF returnee" only being used in reference to someone who joined/supported a proscribed terrorist organization or engaged in terrorist violence.

7.3 A <u>public messaging plan</u> that provides a simple guide for intergovernmental (and even multisector) efforts should be disseminated prior to the commencement of a strategic communications campaign. The basic features of the public messaging plan include:

- *The main policy message*: A fact-based and logical explanation of the FTF management policy, its legal basis, and government responsibilities.

- *Key talking points*: These are the basic who, what, when, where, how, and why of FTF issues and policy responses.

- *Terminology and definitions*: A list of words to be used and avoided in public messaging.

- *Rollout schedule*: The dates of expected policy or communication releases with clarity around what details are for public release.

- *Key Media Contacts*: A list of those in the media who are prioritized to receive press releases and other messaging.

- *Dissemination List:* The interdepartmental and multisector representatives who received the public messaging plan.

- *Crisis Response:* Contact details for the individual and/or department responsible for crisis response.

7.4 Strategic communications in FTF management must <u>complement</u> broader CT and PCVE strategic communication activities. Given that FTF management is part of a potentially much broader set of interconnected national security, foreign policy, and public policy issues, it is essential for policymakers to regularly coordinate with intra and intergovernmental and multisector colleagues to ensure coherent public messaging.

Conclusion

This policy paper began by arguing for the adoption of a more holistic approach to strategic communications in FTF management that is multidimensional, integrated, adaptable, and crosscutting. It then offered a broad framework of guiding principles for strategic communications in FTF management characterized by the following components: overarching method, partnerships, risk and expectation management, media strategy, crisis communication, evaluations, and practitioner considerations. Ultimately, there is a long way to go before strategic communications is adequately acknowledged in FTF management strategic-policy and, of equal importance, appropriate guidance and training is provided to practitioners. This study represents a very modest attempt to move the field of practice in that direction.

References

Andrews, Sam, 2020, 'Prevent Tragedies: A case study in female-targeted strategic communications in the United Kingdom's Prevent counter-terrorism policy', Journal of Deradicalization (Fall 2020). https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/381/237

Berger, J.M. "Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague 7*, no. 5 (2016). https://www.icct.nl/publication/making-cve-work-focused-approach-based-process-disruption

Betts, T.A. 2022. "Resolving the Detainee Dilemma: What Next for the Men, Women & Children of the Islamic State", US Department of State. https://www.state. gov/resolving-the-detainee-dilemma-what-next-for-the-men- women-children-of-the-islamic-state-2/

Clubb, Gordon, Koehler, Daniel, Schewe, Jonatan, O'Connor, Ryan, 2021, *Selling De-Radicalisation : Managing the Media Framing of Countering Violent Extremism*, Routeledge, London.

Cook, Joana, Vale, Gina, 2018, From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State, International Center for the Study of Radicalisation. https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf

Doctor, Austin C., Ingram, Haroro J., Margolin, Devorah, Mines, Andrew, Vidino, Lorenzo, 2023, "Reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighter Families: A Framework of Best Practices for the U.S," *National Counterterrorsm Innovation, Technology, and Education Center*. https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ncitereportsresearch/1

Directive (EU) 2017/541, 2017, Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA. 31 March 2017. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017L0541&from=EN

Eurojust, 2020, *Cumulative prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters for core international crimes and terrorism-related offences*. The Hague. May 2020. Available online: https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Partners/Genocide/2020-05_Report-on-cumulative-prosecution-of-FTFs_EN.PDF

European Commission, 2019, *A Europe that protects: EU cities against radicalization*. 26 February 2019. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/201902_a-europe-that-protects-preventing-radicalisation_en.pdf

European Commission, 2020a, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, The Council, The European Economic & Social*

Haroro J. Ingram: Strategic Communications in FTF Repatriation & Reintegration

Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Security Union Strategy (EU Security Union Strategy 2020-2025). Brussels, 24 July 2020. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0605&from=EN

European Commission, 2020b, "A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Present, Protect, Respond", *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, The Council, The European Economic & Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. Brussels, 9 December 2020. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/09122020_communication_commission_european_parliament_the_council_eu_agenda_counter_terrorism_po-2020-9031_com-2020_795_en.pdf

European Commission, 2020c, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: First Progress Report on the EU Security Union Strategy*. Brussels, 9 December 2020. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication_on_the_first_progress_report_on_the_eu_security_union_strategy.pdf

European Commission, 2021, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Second Progress Report on the implementation of the EU Security Union Strategy*. Brussels, 23 June 2021. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/info/system/files/com2021_440_en.pdf

European Parliament, 2018, "The return of foreign fighters to EU soil: Ex-post evaluation", *European Parliamentary Research Services (EPRS)*. May 2018. Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/621811/EPRS_STU(2018)621811_EN.pdf

European Parliament, 2021, *Strategic orientations on a coordinated EU approach to prevention of radicalization for 2021*. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/2021_strategic_orientations_on_a_coordinated_eu_approach_to_prevention_of_radicalisation.pdf

European Parliament Think Tank, 2019, "EU policies – Delivering for citizens: The fight against terrorism," Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2019)635561

European Union, 2020, *A counter-terrorism agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond*. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/20201209_counter-terrorism-agenda-eu_en.pdf

Glazzard, Andrew, 2017, "Losing the Plot: Narrative, Counter-narrative and Violent Extremism," *International Centre for Counter Terrorism* - The Hague 8, no. 8 (2017). https://www.icct.nl/publication/losing-plot-narrative-counter-narrative-and-violent-extremism

Glazzard, Andrew, Reed, Alastair, 2020, "Beyond Prevention: The Role of Strategic Communications Across the Four Pillars of Counterterrorism Strategy", *The RUSI Journal*, Volume 165, Issue 1: pp.74-88.
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2020.1727165

Ingram, Haroro J. 2020, "Persuade or Perish: Addressing Gaps in the U.S. Posture to Confront Propaganda and Disinformation Threats", George Washington University (February 2020).
https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/Ingram%20Persuade%20or%20Perish.pdf

Ingram, Haroro J. 2022, "Inside the Defector Programs Battling to Keep Peace in the Philippines," *The New Humanitarian* (28 June 2022). Available online:
https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/06/28/MILF-conflict-philippines-extremism-isis

Ingram, Kiriloi M., 2021a, "An analysis of Islamic State's gendered propaganda targeted towards women: From territorial control to insurgency", *Terrorism & Political Violence*.
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2021.1919637

Ingram, Kiriloi M. 2021b, "Centralising women in P/CVE and Peacebuilding Programme Design", *Journal of Deradicalization* No.28.
https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/493

Jadoon, Amira, Mines, Andrew, 2023, *The Islamic State in Afghanistan and Pakistan : Strategic Alliances and Rivalries,* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder (USA).

Koehler, Daniel, Clubb, Gordon, Belanger, Jocelyn, Becker, Michael, Williams, Michael, 2023. "Don't Kill the Messenger: Perceived Credibility of Far-Right Former Extre,osts and Police Officers in P/CVE Communication" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*.
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2166000

Margolin, Devorah, 2023. "The Problem with al-Hol: The Future for ISIS-Affiliated Families", *The Washington Institute*. Available online:
https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/problem-al-hol-future-isis-affiliated-families

Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017, "RAN Manual, Response to returnees: Foreign terrorist fighters and their families", Radicalisation Awareness Network, June 2017.
https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf

Reed, Alastair, 2017, "Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications: Back to the Future – Lessons from Past and Present" in M. Conway et al (eds) *Terrorists' Use of the Internet*, IOS Press: pp.269-278.

Reed, Alastair, Ingram, Haroro, Whittaker, Joe, 2017, "Countering Terrorist Narratives" *European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs*. Available online: https://www.icct.nl/publication/countering-terrorist-narratives

UNSC Resolution 2178, 2014, *S/RES/2178 (2014)*, United National Security Council. 24 September 2014. Available online: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/547/98/PDF/N1454798.pdf?OpenElement

Van Ginkel, Bibi, & Entenmann, Eva (eds), 2016, "The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies", *International Center for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague* 7 no.2. Available here: https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf

Whittaker, Joe, Elsayed, Lilah, 2019, "Linkages as a Lens: An Exploration of Strategic Communications in P/CVE," *Journal of Deradicalization*, Fall 2019. https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/243

Wouterse, Lieke, and Gssime, Yasmine, 2020, "Local Communications for Returning FTFs", *Radicalisation Awareness Network*, 8 June 2020. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-local/docs/ran_local_conclusions_communication_26-25_5_2020_en.pdf

Haroro J. Ingram: Strategic Communications in FTF Repatriation & Reintegration

About the JD Journal for Deradicalization