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Comparison of Foreign Fighter Model in Syria and Iraq with Kenya's Schematic Model of Radicalization of Youth: The Role of Education a Second Political Socialization

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Abstract: This note compares the Brookings Institution framework of foreign fighter radicalization with Kenya's framework. Unlike the Western model based mainly on precedents in Iraq and Syria, the radicalization of non-Somali Kenyans is taking place inside the home country through political/terrorist youth groups and at mosques.

Keywords: Foreign fighter; radicalization; socialization

1. Schematic Model of Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq

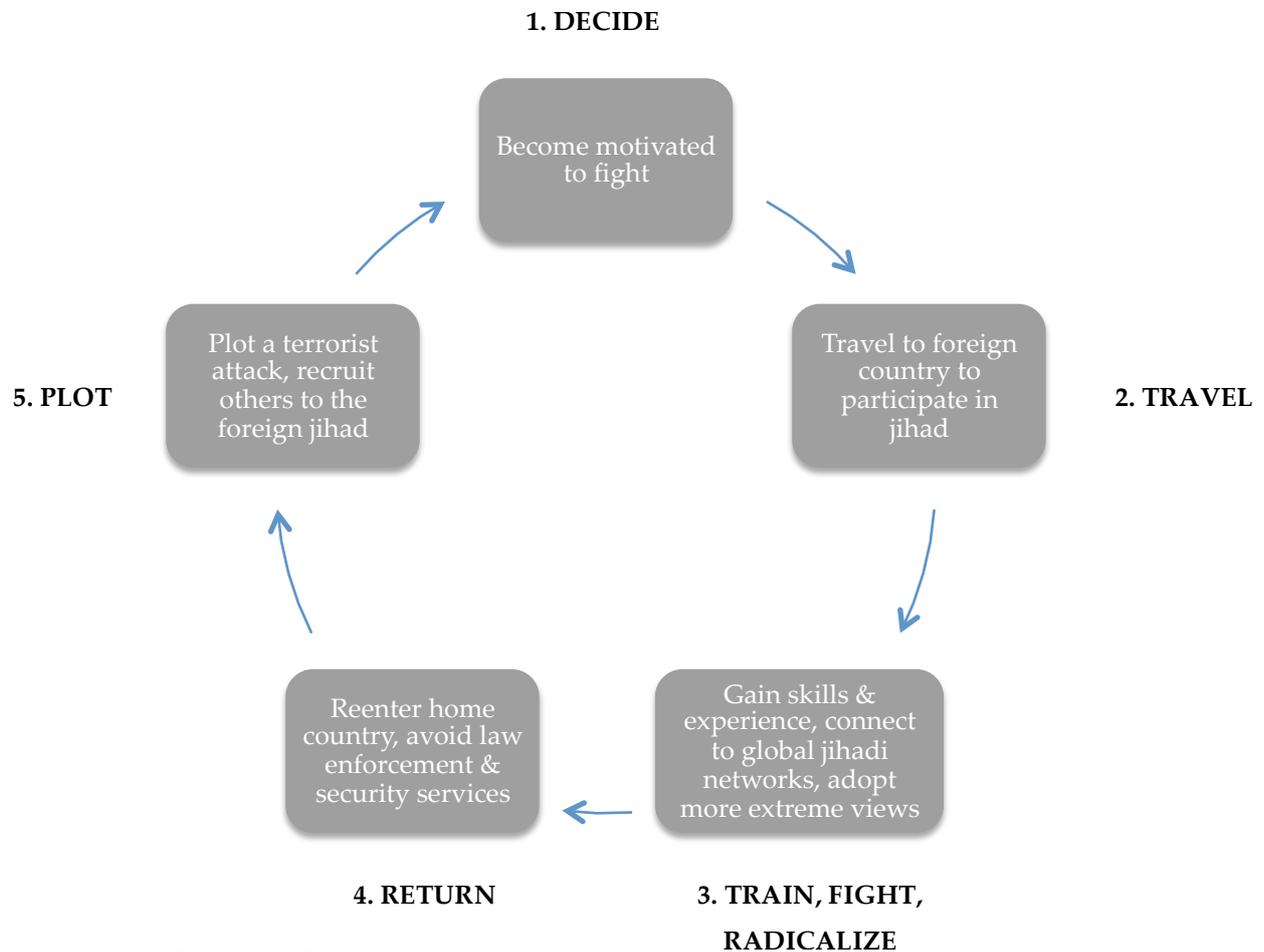
In 2014, there were a few cases of senseless gun violence such as a man walking into the Jewish Museum in Brussels and opening fire. The alleged perpetrator, Mehdi Nemmouche was a French citizen who had spent the previous year fighting as a foreign fighter in Syria. This is a classic case of a European citizen who was trained in a foreign battlefield and came back to his home country to stage an act of local terrorism. The diagram shown in Figure 1 is a schematic framework that captures the process through which foreign fighters are radicalized.

The first step happens when fighters from a foreign country decide to join a conflict. At the start, the motivation for the fight abroad is usually specific and local, i.e. fighting against the invader or

oppressor, rather than struggling against injustices at home. At this step, security officials believe that the decision to go fight in a foreign conflict is usually less an act of religious commitment than of rebellion and thirst for adventure by young males.¹

In the second step, the foreign fighters travel to a war zone. The aspiring jihadi makes contact with recruitment networks and begins a journey to the foreign field of battle, as he is put into contact with a fighting group.

¹ "Be afraid. Be a Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." Brookings Institution, 2015.

Figure 1: Schematic Framework of Foreign Fighter Radicalization in Syria and Iraq

Source: Brookings Institution

In the third step, the journey transforms as the recruits train and carry out jihad, which becomes the training ground for foreign fighter mobilization. At this step, the war volunteers develop a deep sense of loyalty to their fellow al-Qaeda soldiers. The larger jihadist network and the associated bonds can be invoked when extremist groups seek to foment violence in their home countries. Some returned fighters might simply commit violence on their own, without any central direction, having been radicalized or psychologically disturbed by fighting in Syria or Iraq. In the fourth step, the fighters return to their home

countries, often in the West, and keep the circle turning as returned foreign fighters have gained a status to recruit and radicalize others.

Some scholars, however, believe that the danger presented by foreign fighters is exaggerated, despite the fears and the real danger that motivates them mainly because transporting the young fighter's radicalized view into a terrorist act in his home country can be harder than it seems. Conversely, the head of MI-5, Jonathan Evans, said in September 2010 that "a significant number of UK residents" were training in Al Shabaab camps in Somalia. He stated, "I am

concerned that it's only a matter of time before we see terrorism on our streets inspired by those who are today fighting alongside al-Shabaab" and warned that "Somalia shows many of the characteristics that made Afghanistan so dangerous a seedbed for terrorism in the period before the fall of the Taliban."²

2. Schematic Framework of Kenyan Youth Radicalization

In the Kenyan case, the October 2011 attacks came only two days after the United States warned of "imminent" terror attacks. The U.S. warning had implied that Al-Shabaab would carry out reprisals in response to Kenyan troops' incursion into Somalia in mid-October. Elgiva Bwire Oliacha, a recent Kenyan Muslim convert, was arrested in connection with the two blasts and was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty to all charges. Many attacks claimed by Al Shabaab followed and continued throughout 2012 and 2013. In 2014 alone, there were 13 acts of extremism and terrorism.

At the urging of Al-Shabaab, an increasing number of terrorist attacks in Kenya have been carried out by local Kenyans, many of whom are recent converts to Islam. Estimates in 2012 placed the figure of Kenyan fighters at around 10% of Al-Shabaab's total forces. Referred to as the "Kenyan Mujahedeem"

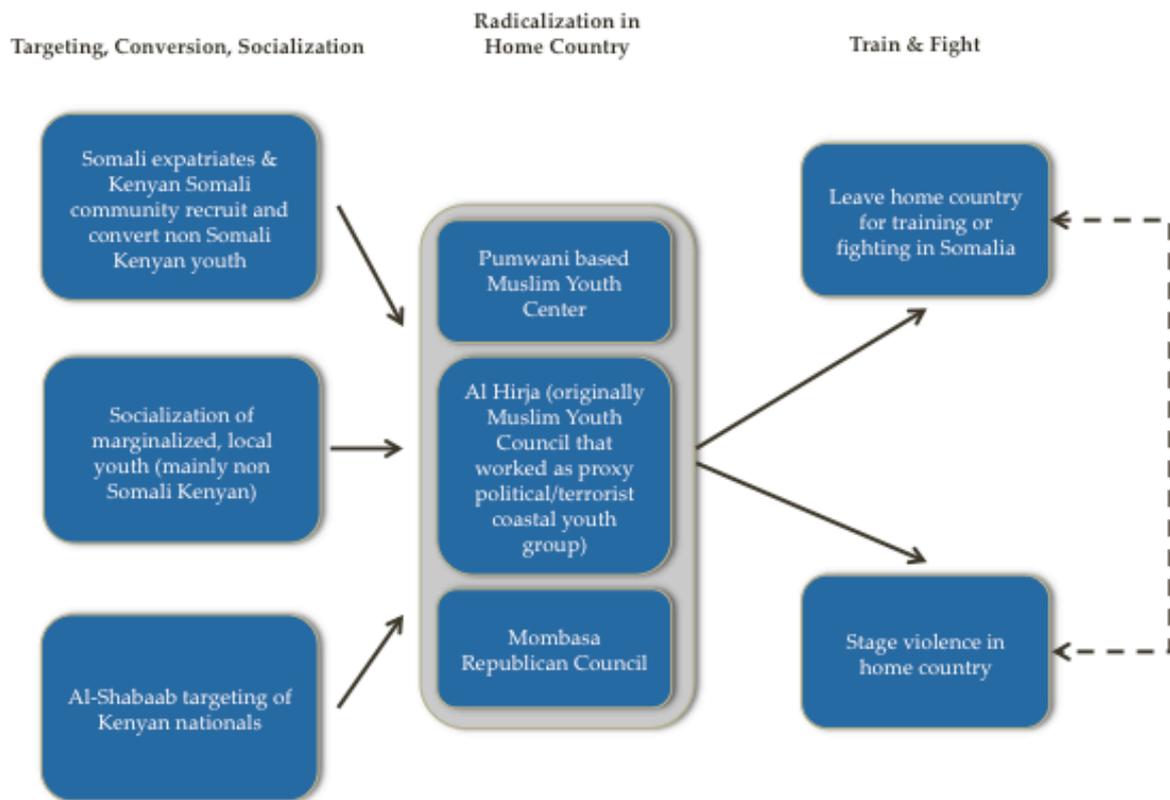
by Al-Shabaab's core members, the converts are typically young and overzealous youth. Unemployment and economic hardship makes them easy targets for the outfit's recruitment activities. Figure 2 below is the schematic framework for radicalization of non-Somali Kenyan youth toward extremism in Kenya.

According to the Kenya authorities, because the Kenyan insurgents have a different profile from the Somali and Arab militants that allows them to blend in with the general population of Kenya, they are also often harder to track.

Reports suggest that Al-Shabaab is attempting to build an even more multi-ethnic generation of fighters in the larger region. The new face of terrorism is represented by young men from different Kenyan ethnic groups, which is a departure from the typical profile of an Al-Shabaab member from Somalia. It is also a marked difference from the youth originating from Mombasa and other coastal towns who are attracted to the jihadist ideology.

² Quoted in Richard Norton-Taylor, "MI5 chief warns of terror threat from Britons trained in Somalia," *The Guardian*, September 16, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/sep/17/mi5-chief-somalia-terror-threat>.

Figure 2: Schematic Framework of Radicalization of Non-Somali Kenyan Youth



Source: Sochin Research Institute³

³ The final curtains on controversial Muslim youth centre. September 2011.
<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/lifestyle/article/2000135687/thefinal-curtains-on-controversial-muslim-youth-centre>

3. Role of Education as Second Socialization

Political socialization refers to: The way society transmits its political culture from generation to generation. This process may serve to preserve traditional political norms and institutions. In contrast to that, when secondary socialization agencies inculcate political values differently from those of the pastor when children are raised with political and social expectations different from those of their forebears, the socialization process can be a vehicle of political and social change. Political socialization is the process, mediated through various agencies of society, by which an individual learns politically relevant attitudinal dispositions and behavior patterns. These agencies include environmental categories such as the family, peer group, school, adult organizations, and the mass media.⁴

This note argues that education can take up the role of providing politically relevant attitudinal dispositions and behavior patterns that are necessary to provide the de-radicalization and a new socialization of the Kenyan youth. Using the framework posited in Figure 2, policy recommendations for the government side would naturally focus on trying to identify opportunities to encourage potentially dangerous individuals to take more peaceful paths and to help determine which individuals deserve arrest, visa denial, preventive detention, or other forms of disruption. However, government cannot perform the de-radicalization and a new socialization role single handedly. Steps include

increasing community engagement efforts through local churches and education communities to dissuade potential fighters from going to the battle ground; working more with the international intelligence community to disrupt transit routes; improving de-radicalization programs to “turn” returning fighters into intelligence sources or making them less likely to engage in violence; and avoiding blanket prosecution efforts.

As for Kenya, the education community with support of the government needs to launch a “public diplomacy 2.0” form of outreach program. The community needs to find the online platforms that emphasize the following themes:

- Challenging the perceptions of Kenyan foreign policy in regard to the Kenya Defense Forces;
- Stating that Kenya is supportive of the Muslim Coast region’s civic interests;
- Stressing that Kenya is at war with Al-Shabaab, not with Kenyan Somali citizens;
- Stressing Kenyan multiculturalism and religious tolerance;
- Presenting Islam as a religion of compassion and describing Islamic extremists as foreign to Islam and to what most Muslims think;
- Demystifying myths and conspiracy theories and calling youths with extreme views radicals but claiming to enjoy engaging with youths who post objective views.

⁴ K.P. Langton, *Political Socialization*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969, 4–5.



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