



**Remarks for the  
United Nations Security Council**

Special Meeting of the Counter-Terrorism  
Committee on “Security Council Resolution  
2396 (2017): Review of the Madrid Guiding  
Principles”

**By Mr. Ali H. Soufan  
Founder of The Soufan Center  
Thursday 13 December, 2018  
ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters**



## **About Ali Soufan**

Ali Soufan is the Founder of The Soufan Center. Mr. Soufan is a former FBI Supervisory Special Agent who investigated and supervised highly sensitive and complex international terrorism cases, including the East Africa Embassy Bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, and the events surrounding 9/11. He is the Chief Executive Officer of The Soufan Group and Founder of The Soufan Center.

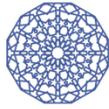
## **About The Soufan Center**

The Soufan Center (TSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving as a resource and forum for research, analysis, and strategic dialogue related to global security issues and emergent threats. TSC fills a niche-role by producing independent, quality research and hosting proactive conversations in order to effectively equip thought leaders, policy makers, governments, bi- and multilateral institutions, media, and those in the non-profit and academic communities to engage in strategic security-related practices. Our work focuses on a broad range of complex security issues—from international and domestic terrorism, to humanitarian crisis analysis, to refugee and immigrant issues, and more.

The Soufan Center is a 501c3 non-profit organization

## **About The Forum on Returning Foreign Fighters**

The *Forum on Returning Foreign Fighters: Policies and Actions to Address the Threat and Protect Vulnerable Communities* took place from 30-31 October in Doha, Qatar. For more information, please visit <https://foreignfightersandreturnees.com/> and <http://thesoufancenter.org/foreign-fighters-forum/>.



**FORUM ON RETURNING FOREIGN FIGHTERS**  
Policies And Actions To Address The Threat  
And Protect Vulnerable Communities

**Ali Soufan, Founder of The Soufan Center**  
**Remarks at the Special Meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee**  
**on “Security Council Resolution 2396 (2017): Review of the Madrid**  
**Guiding Principles”**

*Thursday 13 December, 2018*  
*ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters*

Excellencies and distinguished guests. I am honored to be here with you today, representing my organization, The Soufan Center, a think tank that focuses on the nexus between security, human rights and humanitarian crises. I thank the Security Council and CTED for the invitation.

That foreign terrorist fighter flows to Syria and Iraq have slowed substantially in recent times does not in any way lessen the urgency behind the implementation and application of the Madrid Guiding Principles. The need for practical approaches to managing the movement and the ultimate disposition of foreign terrorist fighters, or FTFs, is even more acute, now, as we are in a phase where more FTFs might be looking to depart conflict zones.

Recognizing the continued importance of the FTF phenomenon to the global community, on October 30 and 31 of this year, The Soufan Center, with our partners, Georgetown University Doha, Qatar University, and the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS), were privileged to organize a conference called the *Forum on Returning Foreign Fighters* in Doha, Qatar.

The *Forum* aimed to identify practical ways to implement United Nations resolutions adopted by both the Security Council and the General Assembly focused on the foreign fighter phenomenon, and to convene the foremost experts in the field to discuss related issues, including terrorist financing, prison radicalization, and strategic narrative campaigns. Throughout the two-day conference, the concept of a “whole of society” approach to solutions, which engages governments, civil society organizations and bi- and multi-lateral institutions, was emphasized.



The *Forum* convened officials and experts from over 60 countries, and included Ministers, Ambassadors, heads of intelligence agencies, counter-terrorism practitioners, policy analysts, human rights experts, academics, researchers, internationally recognized journalists, and members of the film industry. It was a truly multi-stakeholder event. It was streamed live by Al Jazeera: a first. The entire event was simultaneously translated between Arabic and English; we thought it was important to have this conversation in the region and for it to be accessible to those in the region. We were told by numerous people based in the Arab World that our *Forum* was the first time they heard diverse perspectives on terrorism. Individuals were present from Mali to Malaysia, China to Canada, and everywhere in between.

With six panels, two film screenings, and a special session co-hosted with **CTED** featuring some of their key Global Research Network (GRN) members from around the world, there is much to share about the *Forum* itself. The *Forum* had participation from members of the United Nations, the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We had current and former government officials from Qatar, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union, among others. Event moderators were award-winning journalists from CNN, The New York Times, The Atlantic, The New Yorker, and Bloomberg.

The following are some of the major trends identified and recommendations made during our Forum:

1. The first, and perhaps most important recommendation, is that **good policy is informed by good data**. During the first panel of our *Forum*, we had world-renowned terrorism experts – including the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Fionnuala D. Ní Aoláin; former National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) head Nick Rasmussen; and the European Union’s Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove – point out how little we actually know when it comes to numbers and data. Crucially important points, including precise numbers of how many FTFs have died, how many have returned to their home countries, how many have exited to another location, and how many remain a true threat, are unknown. Researchers based in the regions where the threats are greatest, like many in CTED’s Global Research Network, are an **essential** component for providing governments and multi-lateral bodies like the United Nations with the data and numbers they need to enact smart and effective policies.
2. The second point is that terrorism, and the foreign fighter phenomenon – which the world saw on an unprecedented scale with the rise of the so-called Caliphate – are **complex issues requiring nuanced responses**. In other words, they are **global** problems but require **local** solutions. Further, these are **whole of society** problems that require **whole of society** responses. That means interventions at the individual, family, community, city, and nation-state levels are necessary. Governments must do their part, researchers theirs, non-



governmental organizations theirs, and multi-lateral bodies, theirs. In the case of multi-lateral bodies, codifying international norms that work to beat terrorist groups while respecting the balance between security and human rights, is key. Encouraging compliance by leading by example is crucial for individual member states.

3. Third, **narratives resonate when people feel like their own experience bears them out**. In order for extremist narratives to **not** hold sway, a focus on good governance, equality and equity, along with top-down and bottom-up approaches to creating integration and resulting societal cohesion, are necessary.
4. Fourth, the **principles surrounding the exchange of FTF-related information among governments are of particular importance** at this junction, as are the principles related to the prosecution and/or rehabilitation of FTFs. Even with much discussion of this issue at international levels, including the importance of advances in biometrics and related efforts at reducing the prevalence of fraudulent travel documents, many member states still have insufficient tools to address the problem of inadequate information sharing.
5. The last main point to come out of our Forum **regards the cyclical nature of terrorism**. While counter-terrorism professionals might prefer to view the threat as linear, the reality is often much more complex. For example, the ways in which family members of foreign fighters, particularly women and children, are stigmatized, should be of deep concern to the international community. The categories “perpetrator” and “victim” are reductionist and often not useful in tackling the issue of women and children effectively. Relatedly, while the international community is focused – rightly – on returning and exiting foreign fighters, there are thousands of people **from** Iraq and Syria who fought for or otherwise supported the Islamic State **who will remain** in Iraq and Syria. Their situations—the extent to which they are being incarcerated and/or rehabilitated— should be of paramount interest and importance to the global community, considering their current and future impact on global security. The twin problems of stigmatization and sectarianism, both of which fragment society, are rife in present-day Iraq and Syria. In order to stem the cycle of violence and eliminate the push and pull factors of radicalization, this fragmenting of society must stop.

Thank you.