

Concept Note
INSIGHT DEBATE - online

**THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS:
Analyzing Dutch policy on counter terrorism and preventing violent
extremism through a gender lens**

Thursday 22nd April 2021
16.00-17.30 CEST
(webinar)

Introduction

After years of keeping ISIS affiliated women and children in detention, the Kurdish authorities recently have decided to set the inhabitants of the Al-Hol camp in Syria free. The Kurdish authorities state that they have no longer the means to detain all ISIS affiliated families. **This recent development demonstrates the urgency for a constructive debate on how to deal with women that joined terrorist organisations.**

Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) have been a key feature of most modern armed conflicts. In recent years this has become a matter of greater international debate and interest, with the influx of FTFs to Iraq and Syria, and concerns around their return to their country of origin.

Globally, countries struggle with developing clear and coherent counter terrorism and de-radicalization policies. European leaders have been hesitant in repatriating many of these alleged FTFs. The past years the political debate on FTFs and their families from Western Europe has mainly focused on short-term nation-state security risks. Many fear attacks in Europe, others cite a duty of care that the countries of origin should have to their citizens and to their allies in Iraq who are currently bearing the burden of containing these FTFs and their families. This debate has been especially fraught as it relates to women designated FTFs and their children. Laws and policies that have been adopted often take a 'one size fits all' approach to women's role in and motivation to support terrorist organizations.

The recent developments surface an urgent need to assess the dilemma and its potential solutions with its wide variety of stakeholders: policy makers, civil society organizations and academia. With this webinar, we aim to provide a safe and open space - under Chatham House Rule – for civil society organizations, policy makers and academia to share knowledge and gain insights on how to design and develop policies on counter terrorism and preventing violent extremism in a holistic and gender competent way.

Background

Many Central Asian countries have repatriated women and children, detained abroad as ISIS foreign terrorist fighters, suspects or their family members, from the detainment camps in northwest Syria. At the same time many Western European countries show unwillingness to repatriate their citizens.

Over the past years, hundreds of women and children have escaped or have been released by the Kurdish authorities. Yet even then, returning to the Netherlands is not always possible and the majority of women and children remain in the region, without any rights nor perspective. Since 2017, the Dutch policy consists of enacted legislation restricting citizenship and passports of known and suspected FTFs. At the same time, the Netherlands supports Iraq with police and judiciary experts, as well as with the promise of the establishment of a regional tribunal in the Kurdish region to prosecute

ISIS suspects.

The focus on state security leaves potential terrorists unprosecuted and leaves suspected FTFs without any human and citizens' rights. Thereby not responding to the state's duty of care for its citizens, including children. The current status quo doesn't consider the option of **repatriation as a way to gain control and insight on how terrorist groups function and grow.**

Despite the differences in their approaches, most countries **lack a clear and coherent policy** on how to deal with the role of women and youth in terrorist organizations. Often, women are perceived as innocent bystanders, victims and witnesses, which makes it difficult to identify their possible role as perpetrators and active supporters of terrorist organizations such as ISIS.

At the same time, there is a **lack of understanding of the gendered root causes of radicalization and how to facilitate the de-radicalisation and rehabilitation processes** of women and children. Recent research has tried to unpack the role that gender plays in the radicalisation process for both men and women. This understanding is extremely important, both in the work on prevention and response.

Clear and coherent policies are urgently needed. How to take the role of the female supporters of ISIS more seriously? What are lessons learned so far, also from other countries? How do we develop responses to FTFs which uphold principles of rule of law and respect the human rights of those accused and those affected - including victims and survivors of IS crimes? How to design and develop a coherent policy that takes into account the notion of **state security**, as well as the perspective of **human security**?

Key questions

1. How does the Netherlands currently engage with female supporters of terrorist groups?
2. What is our current level of understanding gender dimensions of radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism?
3. What specific gender-related issues need to be considered in relation to FTFs, their families, and their repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation?

Organised by:

