



KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

UNOCT

PRESIDENT RESEARCH PACKET

Fares Alarifi

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters



KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

President's Letter:

Dear Delegates of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism,

It's truly a privilege to welcome you to KAMUN 2026. In this committee, we'll be diving into some of the toughest questions surrounding global peace and security. These are not easy topics, but that's exactly what makes this committee exciting. I also hope you'll see it as more than just a debate, it's an opportunity to show how cooperation, resilience, and even creative thinking can grow out of global challenges.

My name is Fares Alarifi, and I'm a senior at King's Academy. This year, I have the honor of serving as President of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). For a long time, I've been fascinated by the intersection between global security, diplomacy, and human rights. What excites me most about this committee is seeing how each of you will bring your own perspectives, background knowledge, and ideas into the room.

UNOCT itself is a unique part of the UN system. Unlike some other bodies that react after crises happen, UNOCT focuses on prevention, long-term strategies, and building the capacity of member states to face terrorism in ways that last. As delegates, you'll be challenged to find the balance: how do we protect security while respecting humanitarian concerns? How do countries pursue their own interests while still recognizing the responsibility they share with the rest of the international community?

For this year's session, we'll be focusing on two main issues. The first is the rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). The second is developing international strategies to track and block terrorist financing, especially through cryptocurrencies and other underground networks. Both topics are complex and will require more than just a security-focused mindset. They ask us to think through the social, economic, and human dimensions of terrorism as well.

As you prepare, I encourage you to read carefully, question deeply, and debate with passion. But above all, remember that collaboration is key. This committee is not about "winning" or proving someone wrong, it's about building practical, innovative solutions that reflect the shared responsibility of the global community. I'm genuinely looking forward to seeing the discussions unfold and to the ideas you'll put forward under pressure.

Best regards,

Fares Alarifi

President of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Introduction:

The challenge of dealing with foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) has become one of the biggest security concerns of the past decade. After the rise of extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, it's estimated that nearly 40,000 people from over 120 different countries traveled to conflict zones, especially Iraq and Syria, to fight. Now that many of those areas have been retaken, governments are left with a difficult question: what should be done with the fighters who survived, as well as their families and children, many of whom remain in prisons or detention camps under harsh conditions?

Most of these fighters came from regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and Central Asia, though the scale of the outflow has not been the same everywhere. The problem goes beyond just security concerns—it raises tough legal and humanitarian issues as well. Should these people be given a second chance through rehabilitation and reintegration programs? Or should countries strip their citizenship and keep them detained abroad? For many governments, balancing international obligations with domestic politics has proven to be extremely difficult.

One of the biggest fears is that if reintegration is done poorly, former fighters might fall back into extremist networks and violence. But completely avoiding reintegration also comes with risks, particularly for the children and families caught in these situations, who may become trapped in cycles of radicalization for generations. Because of this, the issue has drawn the attention not only of national governments, but also of regional organizations and human rights groups. Its consequences reach far beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria.

Some recent developments show how urgent this debate has become. For example, in 2023, several European countries sparked heated public discussions when they allowed small groups of women and children to return home from Syrian detention camps. Critics worried about security and identity, while others argued the decision was necessary on humanitarian grounds. In contrast, Central Asian states like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have taken more proactive steps by setting up reintegration programs that mix psychological support, education, and community involvement. These programs are still small in scale, but they highlight how coordinated and thoughtful approaches could help the global community tackle the challenge of FTF rehabilitation.

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

Definition of Key Terms:

- **Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs):** People who leave their own countries to join terrorist groups abroad. Most often, they travel to conflict zones such as Iraq and Syria to fight alongside organizations like ISIS or Al-Qaeda.
- **Rehabilitation:** The process of helping former fighters recover—mentally, socially, and even morally—so they don't fall back into extremist behavior.
- **Reintegration:** Bringing former fighters back into society in a safe and structured way. This usually includes providing education, job opportunities, counseling, and monitoring to help them adjust and live lawfully.
- **Extremist Groups:** Violent organizations that rely on radical ideologies to achieve their political, religious, or ideological goals. ISIS and Al-Qaeda are two of the most well-known examples.
- **Conflict Zones:** Regions where armed conflict is ongoing and unstable. Iraq and Syria have been the main destinations for FTFs in recent years.
- **Detention Camps/Prisons:** Facilities where captured fighters, along with their families and sometimes children, are held. Conditions are often harsh, with limited access to food, healthcare, or basic safety.
- **Radicalization:** The process by which someone adopts extreme political, religious, or ideological views. In some cases, this path leads individuals to justify or even commit violence.
- **Recidivism:** A term used to describe when former criminals—or in this case, fighters—return to the same violent or extremist behaviors after being released or reintegrated.
- **International Law:** The set of rules and obligations that guide how countries interact with one another, including how they must treat their citizens, detainees, and human rights issues.
- **Humanitarian Conditions:** Refers to the standard of living in detention centers or conflict areas, including access to food, clean water, shelter,

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

healthcare, and overall safety.

- **National Identity:** A sense of belonging or shared identity within a nation. The return of former fighters can sometimes raise debates about who belongs and how identity is defined.
- **Coordinated Global Approaches:** Strategies that involve multiple countries and international organizations working together to address the challenges of rehabilitating and reintegrating FTFs.

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

Major Parties Involved:

Iraq and Syria:

The primary conflict zones where most foreign fighters traveled to join ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates. Both countries currently host thousands of detained fighters and their families, often in overcrowded prisons or camps such as Al-Hol. Their fragile security situations make reintegration and repatriation especially difficult.

European Union (EU):

EU member states are deeply divided on the issue of repatriation. Countries like France and the United Kingdom have frequently revoked citizenship from FTFs, while Germany and Belgium have pursued selective repatriations, especially for children. The EU has also supported deradicalization initiatives and intelligence cooperation.

United States:

The U.S. has pressured allies to repatriate their nationals held in Syria and Iraq, while also supporting the prosecution of foreign fighters in domestic courts. Washington has emphasized the security risks of leaving FTFs in unstable regions.

Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan):

These states have implemented large-scale repatriation and rehabilitation programs, particularly for women and children. Kazakhstan's "Operation Zhusan" is widely recognized as a model for balancing humanitarian and security concerns.

Turkey:

As a key transit point for many FTFs entering Syria, Turkey has been heavily involved in the detention, monitoring, and transfer of suspected fighters. It continues to face challenges managing its borders and repatriating foreign nationals.

United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT):

The lead UN body for coordinating international efforts in counter-terrorism. UNOCT supports states through technical assistance, best practices, and promoting human-rights-based reintegration strategies.

Civil Society and NGOs:

Organizations such as the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR), Save the Children, and local community groups play a critical role in counseling, rehabilitation, and facilitating reintegration at the grassroots level.

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Timeline:

2011–2014:

The Syrian Civil War begins, and ISIS grows in numbers. About 40,000 foreign fighters travel from more than 120 countries to join the war. Many governments begin to worry about the security risks rising from the fighters returning home.

September 2014:

The United Nations Security Council passes Resolution 2178. The resolution makes it illegal to travel abroad for terrorism, recruit others, or fund extremist groups. It is an early attempt to slow the movement of foreign fighters.

2015–2017:

ISIS loses much of its territory in Iraq and Syria. Thousands of fighters are captured or displaced. Some try to return home, but this creates challenges for their governments and raises difficult problems about security and responsibility.

June 2017:

The UN establishes the Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). Its purpose is to help countries deal with terrorism and consider safe ways to handle returning fighters.

2018–2019:

As the ISIS “caliphate” falls, tens of thousands of fighters and their families are detained in camps like Al-Hol in Syria. Conditions are horrible and harsh, and the situation becomes a humanitarian concern.

2019–2021:

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and other Central Asian countries begin programs to bring back their citizens. These programs provide education, support, and help people return to their communities. Women and children are especially given special attention.

2022:

European countries face public pressure over repatriation. Some start bringing back children of fighters, while others continue to keep families abroad. The approaches are different from country to country.

2023–2025:

UNOCT and the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee provide new guidance on rehabilitation and reintegration. Countries are asked to work together and find ways to protect security while supporting those who return.

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

Implications:

Reintegrating foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) into society is one of the most complex challenges facing both national and international security today. If efforts are mishandled, former combatants may return to extremist activities, threatening local communities and broader public safety. European governments, in particular, face difficult decisions about repatriation, citizenship, and legal accountability—issues that have sparked ongoing debate and concern.

The human side of the issue is just as urgent. Many FTFs, along with women and children connected to them, remain in detention under extremely harsh conditions. Without proper rehabilitation programs, cycles of radicalization can continue, affecting not only the individuals involved but also their families and communities for years to come. Human rights groups argue that it is possible to protect security while still providing humane treatment and meaningful support.

Legal and political pressures make the situation even more complicated. Governments must balance their own citizens' expectations with international law obligations, including the protection of vulnerable populations. Responses differ widely: some countries strip citizenship, others leave FTFs in foreign camps, while a few attempt structured reintegration programs.

Collaboration on an international level is essential. Central Asian countries, for example, have shown that programs combining psychological care, education, and community involvement can work—but these examples are still rare. There is a clear need for broader initiatives that can be adapted to different regions and cultural contexts.

The challenge is also deeply social and economic. Former fighters often face stigmatization, unemployment, and isolation, which can push them back toward extremist networks. On the other hand, well-designed reintegration programs can strengthen communities, prevent future radicalization, and promote long-term stability. How societies address this issue reflects a broader responsibility: to offer both individuals and communities a real chance at recovery and a secure future.

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Proposed Solutions:

1. Urges the United Nations, UNOCT, and Member States with significant numbers of returning FTFs to form a summit directed at creating a comprehensive reintegration program for former fighters, their families, and affected communities;

a. Participating members of the summit must plan their reintegration strategies while respecting international law, human rights, and the sovereignty of other states,

- i. Members of the summit may include psychological support, education, vocational training, and community engagement as part of their programs,
- ii. Members of the summit must address the needs of women and children associated with extremist groups to prevent intergenerational radicalization,
- iii. Members of the summit must coordinate monitoring and evaluation standards to ensure program effectiveness and accountability,

b. A unified framework must be created during the summit to ensure all Member States adhere to the agreed standards,

- i. The framework must include metrics such as recidivism rates, community integration, and access to education and employment,
- ii. Any Member State failing to implement the agreed standards may be referred to UNOCT or relevant UN bodies for review and corrective action,

c. Communities must be actively involved to foster social acceptance and reduce stigma,

- i. Programs may include public education campaigns and local initiatives to integrate former fighters safely into society,
- ii. Communities may provide ongoing support and mentorship for successful reintegration.

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

“Food for Thought”:

- When thinking about foreign terrorist fighters and their families, is it wiser for governments to bring them home, or does revoking citizenship offer a safer path?
- How can programs that reintegrate former fighters carefully balance the need for security with respect for human rights?
- Children of FTFs are in a difficult position—how should we treat them, as victims in need of protection, or as potential security risks?
- What role can local figures—like religious leaders, teachers, and community groups—play in helping people move away from extremist ideologies?
- With countries taking very different approaches, how could UNOCT encourage cooperation and agreement on shared frameworks?
- Should rehabilitation be required for everyone returning from conflict zones, or should it depend on individual risk assessments?
- How can the international community make sure that prisons and detention camps don’t become environments that foster further radicalization?

Citations:

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KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

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www.icsr.info/2020/rehabilitation-foreign-fighters.

“‘When Am I Going to Start to Live?’ The Urgent Need to Repatriate Foreign Children Trapped in Camps in Northeast Syria.” Save the Children, 2022,

www.savethechildren.org/us/foreign-children-repatriation-report.

Appendix:

Appendix A

ISIS Foreign Fighters World Map – The Heritage Foundation, “Worldwide Threat Assessment: ISIS Foreign Fighter Flows,”
www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/~/_media/infographics/2016/sr180/sr-isis-foreign-fighters-map-1-825.jpg.

Visual map illustrating the global origins and movement of foreign terrorist fighters who traveled to Iraq and Syria, showing how more than 40,000 individuals from over 120 countries joined ISIS between 2011–2016.

KING'S ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

MAP 1

ISIS Global Presence

- Countries where ISIS holds territory ■ Countries where local groups have pledged allegiance to ISIS ■ Countries from where large numbers of ISIS supporters have been arrested



Note: "Presence" is defined as ISIS holding territory; local groups having either pledged allegiance or actively cooperated with ISIS; or large numbers of ISIS supporters having been arrested.

Sources: Heritage Foundation research and various media reports.

SR 180  heritage.org