How jihadist networks operate: a grounded understanding of changing organizational structures, activities, and involvement mechanisms of jihadist networks in the Netherlands

Bie, J.L. de

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Universiteit Leiden

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Chapter 4:

Shifting Modus Operandi of Jihadist Foreign Fighters: A Crime Script Analysis

Abstract

This chapter describes the development of foreign fighters' preparatory modes of operation between 2000 and 2013, based on an analysis of 17 closed police investigations and 21 semi-structured interviews with police investigators, public prosecutors, and lawyers. Through the use of grounded theory methods and a crime script analysis, we find that the phenomenon is not as new as is often portrayed. It changes over time as changing opportunity structures have an impact on the activities foreign fighters undertake during the preparation phase. We demonstrate how geopolitical changes, social opportunity structures, and technological developments affect the modus operandi over time. One of the implications of our findings is that the dynamic nature of the foreign fighting phenomenon requires flexible and tailored prevention measures.

4.1 Introduction

Since the eruption of the Arab Spring in 2011, numerous Muslims from Western European countries have sought ways to assist fellow Muslims in their rebellion against oppressive regimes (Zelin, 2013). This also includes nationals from the Netherlands, of which the number of "foreign fighters" in Syria and Iraq was estimated to be around 220 in November 2015 (NCTV, 2015b). Responding to the scope of the phenomenon, the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism raised the level of terrorism threat from limited to substantial in March 2013, mainly out of concern for the return of potentially traumatized and well-trained militant foreign fighters who may plan attacks in Western Europe (NCTV, 2013). Consequently, policy makers are increasingly seeking new intervention methods, in particular to prevent departure (NCTV, 2014).

Despite the steep increase in attention, which suggests a unique situation, the phenomenon of foreign fighting is far from new. Prior to the Arab Spring, numerous individuals travelled to foreign countries in order to participate in or facilitate a conflict (Hegghammer, 2011; Malet, 2013). Although these endeavors have been studied by different scholars, we argue that most studies mainly focus on the *why* of foreign fighting. As a result, the *what* and *how* of foreign fighting remains relatively underexposed.

This chapter aims to paint a more long-term picture of the operational aspects of foreign fighting in order to understand how the manifestation of jihadist foreign fighting has developed over time. We thereby explicitly focus on the *modus operandi* of jihadist networks in the Netherlands during the preparation stages of foreign fighting. We try to discover how operational aspects and considerations of individuals within these networks either change or coincide by focusing on three episodes between 2000 and 2013. Therefore, the central research question in this chapter is: *How do jihadists prepare their foreign fighting attempts and has their modus operandi changed over time?* To this end we conducted an in-depth analysis of confidential police investigations, we interviewed key respondents from investigative authorities and legal professions, and we attended several court hearings. Additionally, we used grounded theory methods and applied crime script analysis to highlight underlying opportunity structures that influence the preparation stages. This criminological perspective, which is often lacking in the current terrorism discourse (Freilich & LaFree, 2015), may contribute to the development of intervention and disruption policies. We will briefly discuss the current literature in the following paragraph. After that we will describe our methodology, followed by a categorization of the three episodes we have discerned within the timeframe 2000-13. In order to compare those episodes, we study operational aspects by elaborating scripts that prospective foreign fighters follow before and during departure.

4.1.1 Status quo of current foreign fighting literature

The number of foreign fighting studies has increased over the years and has altered in nature. In spite of this increase, studies on foreign fighting appear to predominantly focus on certain issues. A primary theme is the background characteristics of a foreign fighter. Some studies discuss, among other things, the foreign fighters' economic background (Venhaus, 2010; Vidino, Pantucci, & Kohlmann, 2010; Williams, 2011) or their national origins (Hewitt & Kelley-Moore, 2009; Moore & Tumelty, 2009), while others illustrate biographies of actual (Stenersen, 2011) or hypothetical foreign fighters (Weggemans, Bakker, & Grol, 2014). Overall, the backgrounds of foreign fighters are relatively diverse, and there does not seem to be one quintessential foreign fighter profile.

Second, a majority of studies discuss the foreign fighters' goals and the different underlying motivations such as grievances, feelings of revenge, and a search for identity, thrills, recognition, status, security, and money (Felter & Fishman, 2007; Hegghammer, 2013a; Malet, 2013; Moore & Tumelty, 2008; Williams, 2011). In addition, several scholars illustrate the role of the social environment in that regard (Hegghammer, 2013a; Venhaus, 2010), and emphasize the importance of jihadist veterans (Cilluffo, Cozzens, & Ranstorp, 2010; Malet, 2013; Watts, 2008).

Third, many studies emphasize the possible consequences of the influx of foreign fighters in conflict zones. Some raise awareness about possible terrorist threats towards Western states (De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2014) or other countries in the world (Pham, 2011), whereas others demonstrate how foreign fighters can successfully or unsuccessfully influence a foreign conflict (Bakke, 2014; Moore, 2012; Rich & Conduit, 2015). Finally, several academics and consultants have suggested how governments should respond to these developments (Bakker, Paulussen, & Entmann, 2013; Skidmore, 2014).

4.1.2 Limited focus in current literature

The foregoing knowledge is important, but has a limited scope at the same time. The reason for this is twofold. To start, the empirical foundation of most studies is for instance quite minimal. Only a minority of scholars use firsthand data, whereas others base their findings on open and indirect sources. Although open sources are generally accepted, it must be stressed that many studies often lack a systematic and transparent analysis of the data. This makes it difficult to value a study on its genuine merits. A second limitation is the reach of most foreign fighting studies, which is often caused by the lack of engagement with prior academic work. This is unfortunate, because it hampers a developed understanding of the foreign fighting phenomenon. Furthermore, the reach of foreign fighting studies is also limited because many scholars limit their focus to merely understand the *why* behind foreign fighting. Although we have gained a better understanding of *why* people fight abroad and the dangers that may bring; the question of *how* the mobilization of foreign fighters actually occurs appears to be far more difficult to answer. Previous studies based on our data collection showed that situational factors are important in order to understand the development of jihadist movements (De Poot & Sonneschein, 2011). The current literature on foreign fighting, however, is quite limited in that respect. Most studies seem to underestimate the

importance of situational factors and do not fully elaborate how situational factors can influence the modus operandi of foreign fighters over time. This is unfortunate, because such insights may aid policy makers who face the complex task of devising prevention strategies that are robust enough for future developments.

To be more specific, the manifestation of foreign fighting can be shaped and limited by the underlying *opportunity structure*: the complex interplay between the physical and socio-economic environment, the routines of particular actors and the combination of facilitators and limitations, which all combined determine the opportunity for crime (Clarke, 1995). Scholars using a *situational approach* (Clarke, 1995; Cornish, 1994; Felson, 1998) attribute great value to the role of opportunity and less to the dispositional features and motivations of an offender. In this study, "opportunity" refers to access to a suitable environment in order to pursue certain goals (derived from Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). These scholars argue that no single factor can explain the occurrence of a crime, because every criminal event happens under different environmental conditions (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993). In other words, the interaction of the potential offender with his or her environment may have far more impact on the potential occurrence of a crime than individual characteristics. Hence, the analysis of crime conditions should be prioritized over the analysis of offenders' personal traits. The criminological opportunity theories rooted in this approach (e.g., routine activity, rational choice, and crime pattern theory) are usually applied to conventional crimes, although in recent years several studies have successfully used them to help understanding the modus operandi of organized crime networks (Von Lampe, 2011) and terrorist activities (Clarke & Newman, 2006; Freilich & Newman, 2009; Parkin & Freilich, 2015; Perry & Hasisi, 2015).

4.2 Approach

4.2.1 Grounded theory

The present chapter seeks to analyze the modus operandi of foreign fighting preparations over time through the use of a *grounded theory approach*. Grounded Theory is an alternative for a positivist methodology that aims to test and verify hypotheses from prior research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theorists, try to inductively (and in later versions abductively) generate a theory through the unprejudiced analysis of emergent categories from the data. The grounded theory approach, which is iterative, draws on a *comparative method* and *theoretical sampling*. The comparative method involves comparison between data and emerging concepts during each stage of the analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 106), while theoretical sampling means that emerging categories direct the process of data gathering or sampling over time (Morse, 2007). In order to adhere to these premises, the procedures of sampling, coding, categorizing, analyzing, and theorizing need to be conducted simultaneously and continuously throughout the research.

4.2.2 Crime script analysis

Since we aim to illustrate the foreign fighters' modus operandi, we have slightly modified the grounded theory approach to make it more fit to our purposes. In contrast to the grounded theory approach of Glaser & Strauss, we did not generate an abstract theory in this chapter but formulated a *crime script* instead. Crime scripts are schemata that can generate, organize, and systematize our knowledge about the procedural aspects (so-called *script actions*) and requirements of criminal acts (Cornish, 1994, p. 160). It does so by breaking down a criminal endeavor into functionally, spatially, and temporally defined events (so-called *script scenes*) which may or may not follow a strict sequential order (Levi, 2008). In that respect, foreign fighting should be regarded as a *criminal event*, which is the termination point of *criminal involvement*.[29] Criminal involvement includes a sequence of stages in which a potential offender chooses to desist from or continue with a crime (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993). A *crime script analysis* enables us to explore these different stages or "scenes", which may reveal procedural aspects of foreign fighting and the underlying opportunity structures. We therefore argue that generating a crime script is far more useful than generating an abstract *theory*. Moreover, combining this procedural blue-print with the social network analysis from Chapter 3 will aid the development of disruption strategies of jihadist networks, because it will give a better understanding about who to remove. This will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 7.

4.3 Data and Methods

4.3.1 Data

Grounded theory methods and crime script analysis are very suitable to study the *how* of a social process and are less aimed at the *why* (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). In order to conduct this research, we had access to 28 voluminous confidential police investigations into jihadist terrorism between 2000-2013. This admission was part of a larger research project on jihadist networks in the Netherlands, focusing on 14 different jihadist networks and involving 209 individuals.[30] The 28 police investigations were purposefully selected with

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[29] In December 2014, the Dutch Criminal Court convicted one man for his participation in the conflict in Syria. He was sentenced three years imprisonment (ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2014:14652). Also, in October 2013, another man was convicted for his intention to join the conflict in Syria. He was convicted for attempted murder under Articles 46 and 289 of the Dutch Penal Code, because of his intention to kill Assad (Criminal Court Rotterdam, October 23th 2013, ECLI:NL:RBROT:2013:8265). We therefore regard foreign fighting as a criminal offence. It is labeled as such by the investigative authorities in the Netherlands, unlike in some other jurisdictions. As this is to some extent speculative, we regard most subjects in our analysis as prospective foreign fighters.

[30] These 209 individuals consist of radicalized persons (and their facilitators) who lived or regularly resided in the Netherlands. Some subjects did not live or regularly reside in the Netherlands, but played an indispensable role in the network nonetheless.

the help of terrorism experts from different investigative authorities. Criteria of inclusion were variation and richness of the data. This is in accordance with grounded theory methods, which stimulate to seek for optimal experiences. Through purposeful sampling, the scope of the phenomenon can be determined and variation can be maximized (Morse, 2007). In accordance with the two *grounded theory* premises, the data was gathered during different periods and was directed by emerging concepts in later periods. The first tier of data, yieldeding 12 police investigations, was gathered between May 2006 and May 2008 (see also De Poot & Sonneschein, 2011). Based on preliminary findings from the first tier, a second tier of data was gathered between July 2012 and December 2013 and entailed 16 police investigations. In total, 17 police investigations concerned actual foreign fighting activities. A data collection sheet was used to gather information from the police files. This sheet contained several items and open questions, concerning group structure, activities, ideology, etc., which provided structure while gathering data from the voluminous police files. It must be stressed that the data collection took several years to complete due to the volume of the police files. These investigations yielded rich data based on original wire taps of both telephone and internet communication, recordings of in-house wire taps, transcripts of suspect interrogations, witness statements, observation reports, forensic reports, house searches, expert-witness reports, but also (when archived correctly) the complete and *verbatim* court transcripts and lawyers' statements.

While coding and analyzing the data from the police investigation, several questions came up due to the emergence of categories and concepts. After the initial document analysis, we therefore also conducted 28 semi-structured interviews with key respondents, of which 21 interviews were related to foreign fighting. As we were unable to gain access to cooperative former foreign fighters, we relied on key informants such as leading police investigators, public prosecutors, and several lawyers who defended various suspects in the 17 police investigations. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviewing this diverse group of respondents enabled us to place the documentation into context, and to reshape the initial emerging categories. Additionally, we attended several court sessions of the criminal cases that were still (or again) under the court's review, gathering additional information on the cases. Just like the document analysis, attending court sessions and conducting interviews occurred during different stages of the research. In sum, this triangulation of sources formed an important aspect of the research conducted. The collaboration with practitioners provided valuable insights, which fill a lacuna in the current terrorism discourse (Sageman, 2014).

Overall, we found 51 unique subjects out of a total of 209 subjects in our dataset, who attempted to leave the Netherlands between 2000 and 2013 in order to train for, participate in or facilitate participation in foreign conflicts. Nine subjects were hindered in their attempt, whereas 42 subjects actually succeeded in leaving the Netherlands once or more often. In total, 26 subjects eventually reached their intended destination, and 16 subjects were forced to stop along the way. As our focus is on the modus operandi during the preparation stages, successful, failed, and not completed journeys are equally relevant.

4.3.2 Analysis

During and after the collection of data, the information was coded with the help of a software program (MAXQDA) for qualitative analysis.[31] We started with an *open* or *initial coding* procedure, which in this study was the *incident-by-incident coding* (Charmaz, 2006, p. 53). While comparing different incidents (segments of texts) of alleged terrorist activity, relevant codes of jihadist involvement emerged. *Focused coding* was then applied to assess the initial codes' adequacy and depth (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Through this procedure, initial codes developed into categories and sub-categories with associated properties. By repetitively comparing data with data (incidents with incidents), data with codes and categories, and re-examining the properties of the initial (sub-) categories, theoretical saturation was eventually achieved. This meant that no new properties or dimensions of the categories emerged from the data (Holton, 2007, p. 278). Next, the relationship between the categories was specified and elaborated. This way a grounded understanding could be developed.[32]

4.3.3 Categorization

Since we aim to illustrate a development of the foreign fighters' modus operandi over time, we compare *script actions* from different episodes. In order to do so, we have categorized the different foreign fighting attempts from the police files into different episodes based on (1) the chosen destination by (potential) foreign fighters and (2) whether the initiative to depart was initiated top-down or bottom-up. Firstly, focusing on the intended destinations of all 51 subjects, we found that between the year 2000 and the first half of 2011, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Chechnya were the most popular destinations. Between the second half of 2011 and 2013 this shifted towards Syria and the previous theatres fell out of favor. Secondly, focusing on the direction of initiation, between 2000 and 2002 there was an explicitly organized top-down initiation, which depended on direct links to the conflict areas. From 2003 the phenomenon of home-grown radicalization arose, and the initiation process became more bottom-up. Networks of home-grown radicals predominantly proceeded without the operational help of an international network. The subjects did have relevant international contacts, but they took the initiative.

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[31] Due to the volume of the data we were not able to apply inter-coder reliability, which may have increased the possibility of errors. However, because GT methods forced the coder to recode the data multiple times, coding errors were reduced.

[32] For a more extensive outline of the used GT methods, see Chapter 2.

Table 4.1 shows the three episodes based on these distinctions. The subject numbers are sorted per attempt, which means that several subject numbers are recurrent because they travelled multiple times. The first episode pertains to 2000-2002 because of its organized structure with a top-down approach and its focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan. The second episode, between 2003 and the second half of 2011, concerns the same destinations but with a different initiation process. Finally, the third episode, between the second half of 2011 and 2013, has a similar initiation process as the previous episode, but the subjects now mainly aim for Syria.

4.3.4 Limitations

It must be kept in mind that our data have certain limitations. Police investigations only cover a certain proportion of jihadist activities that can only be analyzed from the start of an investigation. This means that we do not know everything about the 51 subjects and our findings cannot be extrapolated to a broader perspective. Furthermore, the initial goal of the investigations as laid down in files is to inform and convince a judge, which may lead to a certain bias. Althoff (2013, p. 397) states that "court files are constructions of social reality in the context of criminal law". Suspects' statements are the result of "forced" communication which is selectively transcribed, which implies a biased perspective, and therefore the data must be handled with much caution. However, the subjects are unaware of the recorded internet and telephone wire taps, which can therefore not be regarded as "forced communication". Moreover, due to the fact that we had access to the raw data, we were largely able to control the data ourselves, and we did so intensively. As a result, we did not uncritically adopt police choices and categorizations, but relied on our own qualifications. To conclude, despite downsides, these police investigations offer a unique perspective on jihadist networks and their modus operandi as to foreign fighting. Without the realistic possibility of conducting participative observation or to interview the individuals directly involved, there are few alternatives. Moreover, with the combination of a criminological perspective, the triangulation of data sources, and the collaboration with practitioners, we have sought to add to the field of terrorism research.
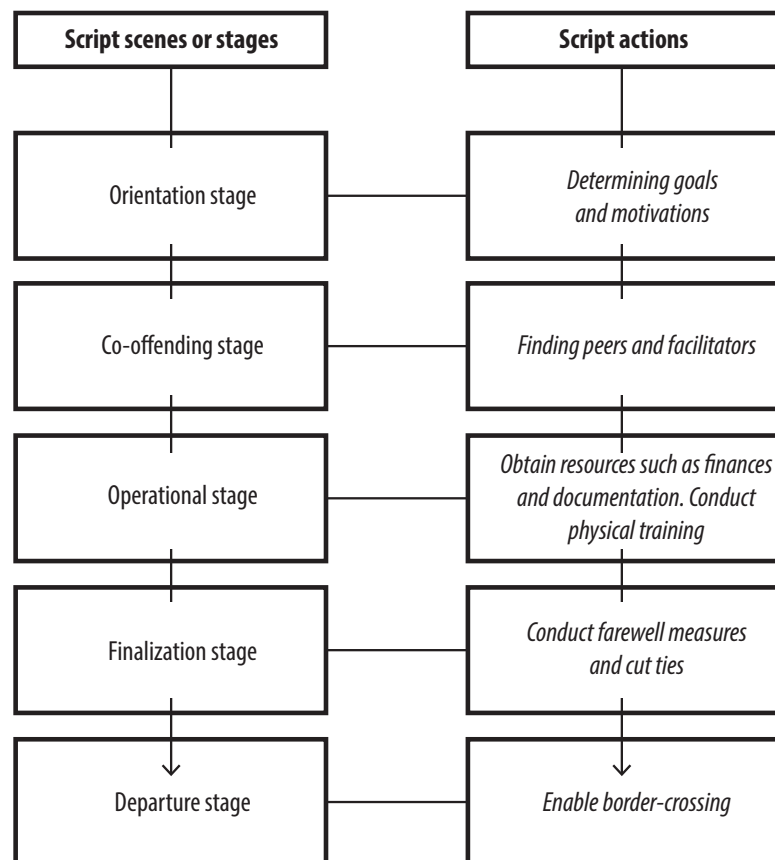
4.4 Results

We can empirically distinguish five preparation stages from the data (Figure 4.1). In the next paragraphs we will compare the three episodes within all preparation stages as outlined in Figure 4.1, by illustrating the different *script actions*. We will focus on both the differences and similarities between the three episodes. It should be noted that in reality, the separate stages are not always as distinct from each other as they appear, but are defined as such for analytical reasons. We will first briefly introduce the subjects.

Table 4.1: Mobilizations of jihadist foreign fighters from the Netherlands. Directions indicated with * are indistinct, because the data are not as abundantly clear about the initiation as other mobilizations.

Episode	Subject no.	Year	Goal	Initiative	Left?	Arrived?	Intended destination
	1	2000	Training	Top-down	Yes	Yes	Afghanistan
	2	2001	Training	Top-down	Yes	yes	Afghanistan
	3	2001	Facilitation	Top-down	Yes	Yes	Chechnya + Bosnia
	4	2001*	Facilitation	Top-down	Yes	Yes	Afghanistan
	5 & 6	2001	Facilitation	Bottom-up*	Yes	No	Afghanistan
1	7	2002	Fighting	Top-down	Yes	No	Afghanistan
	8	2002	Fighting	Top-down	No	No	-
	9	2002*	Facilitation	Top-down	Yes	Yes	Afghanistan + Pakistan
	10	2002	Facilitation	Top-down	Yes	Yes	Pakistan
	11	2002	Fighting	Top-down	No	No	-
	12	2002	Fighting	Top-down*	Yes	Yes	Pakistan + India
	13	2002	Fighting	Top-down*	Yes	Yes	Pakistan + India
	14	2003	Fighting	Bottom-up	Yes	No	Chechnya
	6	2003	Training	Bottom-up*	Yes	Yes	Pakistan
	15	2003	Training	Bottom-up*	Yes	Yes	Pakistan
	16	2003	Training	Bottom-up	No	No	Afghanistan + Pakistan
	15 & 17	2003	Training	Bottom-up	Yes	Yes	Pakistan
	18, 19, 20	2005	Fighting*	Bottom-up*	Yes	No	Chechnya
2	21, 22, 23, 24	2006	Fighting	Bottom-up	No	No	Afghanistan + Iraq
	25	2006	Training	Bottom-up	Yes	Yes	Pakistan
	3 & 26	2006	Facilitation	Top-down	Yes	Yes	Afghanistan
	3 & 26	2008	Facilitation	Top-down	Yes	Yes	Pakistan
	18, 27, 28, 29	2009	-	Bottom-up	Yes	No	Somalia
	19, 30, 31, 32	2009	-	Bottom-up	Yes	-	-
	33-41 (9x)	2010	Fighting	Top-down	Yes	No	Chechnya
	27, 31, 42, 43	2011	Fighting	Bottom-up	Yes	Yes	Pakistan
	44 & 45	2011	Fighting	Bottom-up	Yes	Yes	Libya + Iraq
	44	2012	Fighting	Bottom-up*	Yes	Yes	Syria
	46	2012	Fighting	Bottom-up	Yes	No	Syria
	47, 48, 49	2012	Fighting	Bottom-up	No	No	Syria
	6	2013	Fighting	-	Yes	Yes	Syria
	19	2013	Fighting	Bottom-up*	Yes	Yes	Syria
3	27	2013	Fighting	Bottom-up*	Yes	Yes	Somalia
	28	2013	Fighting	-	Yes	Yes	Syria
	31	2013	Fighting	Bottom-up*	Yes	Yes	Syria
	32 & 42	2013	Fighting	Bottom-up*	No	No	Syria
	48	2013	Fighting	-	Yes	Yes	Syria
	50	2013	Fighting	-	Yes	Yes	Syria
	51	2013	Fighting	Bottom-up*	Yes	Yes	Syria

Figure 4.1: Crime script analysis of foreign fighting.

Table 4.2: Personal traits.

	Total number	Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3
Age[34]				
Average	24.7 years	26.6 years	23.4 years	27.1 years
14 – 20	16 (33%)	3 (25%)	11 (35%)	2 (14%)
21 – 30	22 (45%)	4 (33%)	15 (52%)	3 (53%)
≥ 31	11 (22%)	5 (42%)	3 (13%)	3 (33%)
Total	49 (100%)	12 (100%)	29 (100%)	8 (100%)
Gender				
Male	50 (98%)	13 (100%)	29 (97%)	8 (100%)
Female	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Total	51 (100%)	13 (100%)	30 (100%)	8 (100%)
Education				
In secondary school	3 (6%)	-	3 (10%)	-
Finished secondary school	9 (17%)	-	7 (23.3%)	2 (25%)
Drop out	11 (22%)	2 (15%)	7 (23.3%)	2 (25%)
Completed tertiary education	2 (4%)	-	1 (3.3%)	1 (13%)
Unknown	26 (51%)	11 (85%)	12 (40%)	3 (37%)
Total	51 (100%)	13 (100%)	30 (100%)	8 (100%)
Origin[35]				
Algerian	5 (10%)	5 (38%)	-	-
Moroccan	28 (55%)	3 (23%)	24 (80%)	1 (12.5%)
Turkish	5 (10%)	1 (8%)	1 (3%)	3 (37.5%)
Other[36]	13 (25%)	4 (31%)	5 (17%)	4 (50%)
Total	51 (100%)	13 (100%)	30 (100%)	8 (100%)

4.4.1 Personal traits of subjects in the sample

The police files enabled us to identify background characteristics and personal traits of most subjects (Table 4.2). Firstly, the ages vary between 14 and 43 years old and the average age on a first attempt is 24.9 years.[33] As Table 4.2 shows, the average age in episode 2 appears to contain a somewhat younger sample of subjects compared to the other episodes. However, a Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in age between the episodes (χ^2 = 1.665, df = 2, p = 0.435). Secondly, episode 1 mainly contains first generation migrants from Middle Eastern and Northern African countries, whereas episode 2 predominantly contains home-grown second generation Moroccan immigrants. Episode 3 is more mixed in this respect. Thirdly, based

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[33] Based on 49 out of 51 subjects.

[34] We only included a subject's information about age, gender, education, and origin during his/her first attempt. If they attempted to leave again in the same or succeeding episodes, this information is not included. All percentages are rounded.

[35] Refers to the country that someone actually is closely related to given their own country of birth or that of their parents (Statistics Netherlands, 2014).

[36] Afghan, Dutch, Egyptian, Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Pakistani, Rwandan, and Tunisian origin.

on information about education, employment, and criminal history, most subjects in this study were found to have a low socio-economic status in all three episodes. Despite the fact that jihadists are often depicted as well educated, Table 4.2 shows that many subjects dropped out during or right after secondary school. Their employment history consists mainly of low-paid and untrained jobs in call-centers, supermarkets, security jobs, and gardening stores. They are mostly temporarily employed, and some receive a monthly state benefit. Additionally, although this information was not available on all subjects, at least 17 out of 51 subjects have a criminal history in petty theft, violence, burglary, and in some cases extortion and possession of child pornography. Information on criminal histories is mostly lacking in episode 1, but the files document that core activities of the jihadist networks in this episode are drug trafficking and passport forgery. Fourthly, we found signs of psychological issues among subjects in mainly episode 2 and 3. Several respondents claim that episode 1 contains subjects with psychological issues, but we found no evidence of that in the selected cases. Several subjects in episode 2 experienced traumatic events, which clearly affected their personality. They also demonstrate violent behavior. Six out of 15 subjects in episode 3 have mental issues according to health care professionals, varying from moderate mental instability to serious psychiatric disorders. In sum, besides a minor difference in country of origin, we did not find major differences between the subjects active in the three episodes. The same cannot be said about the modes of operation, as we will illustrate below.

4.4.2 Orientation stage

In the orientation stage, subjects set their goals and develop motivations to engage in a conflict abroad. Table 4.1 shows that in all episodes the initial goals of the subjects are training, facilitation, and fighting, of which the latter is the sole remaining goal in episode 3. We noticed that in some cases the situation or environment supplied the motivation to travel, which is called *situational induced motivation* (Wortley, 1997). If the environment induces motivation, this also means that situational or contextual changes can influence the type of motivation. This may be uncovered by focusing on the dynamic ideological rhetoric that is used by foreign fighters to condemn and target their enemies.

Our data suggest that most subjects in episode 1 value the target areas purely from a religious-moral perspective. Inspired by videos, media reports, and other propagandistic material, their main goal is to establish an Islamic state in at least all Muslim countries. Many claim that their aspiration is opposed by the current rulers, who threaten the Islam and suppress the Muslim inhabitants. A violent uprising against these Western-influenced unbelievers is necessary and legitimate according to religious scripts, in order to install a real Islamic state, which is governed by sharia law. Furthermore, Western influences are mocked because of their despicable nature that contradicts Islamic precepts. Many blame the West for secularization and other pernicious developments

in Muslim countries, and accuse the West of unjustly claiming ownership over several praiseworthy inventions and developments.

A contextual change, however, alters the target suitability in episode 2. Due to the American invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan, the argument that the Islam is under threat by unbelievers is now embodied by explicit military force. The invasion was a major televised conflict, leading to high conflict visibility and awareness among subjects. The growing use of internet during episode 2 also removes communication constraints, because the virtual community enables many subjects to inform each other about the atrocities and fuels discontent about the enemy. "The West" becomes the prioritized target that is valued differently than before as political motivations come into play. The perceived animosity between Muslims and unbelievers is fueled by the desire for revenge and a state of emergency, because most subjects are willing to defend themselves in a state of war. Moreover, some subjects want to expand the battlefield to European states that ally with the United States and are believed to have condemned Islam after 9/11. According to some, the apostates who verbally attack the Islam and the prophet have to be liquidated:

> *"We have indeed slaughtered a lamb in accordance with the true Islamic way. This will be the punishment of all in this country who miscall and defy Allah and his messenger. Tomorrow you will be next, you […]. Inshallah, Allah Akbar, the Islam will prevail. We will hunt you down, you the enemy of Allah."* (Wiretap, subject 6, 2003)

As most subjects want to defend the Islam, practical military training by jihadists in Afghanistan and Pakistan is necessary. External motivation to engage in fighting is visible in all subjects' appeal to Muslim morality, stating that one is obliged to help other Muslims in need and to defend Islam. The statement of "*fard al ayn*" is heavily emphasized in that regard, which many subjects explain as an obligation for every Muslim to conduct jihad and to be prepared to take up arms:

> *"I don't do this because I like it, but because the Almighty has ordained it."* (Wiretap, subject 15, 2003)

Internal motivation is illustrated through foreign fighters' solidarity with oppressed Muslims with whom they claim to share feelings of pain. Many subjects argue that they cannot sit still and enjoy the fruits of life while their fellow Muslims are discriminated, murdered and raped. Another internal motivation comes from the status that can be gained by joining a foreign conflict and dying for a higher cause. Martyrdom is perceived by many as the most acclaimed sign of devotion towards the Islam, which will be rewarded by admission to paradise.

Changes in the geopolitical landscape, caused by the Arab Spring, alter the target value in episode 3. Western states are no longer prioritized as target, but dictators in

Muslim countries such as Syrian President Assad must be violently deposed. The Syrian conflict is also a major televised event, and the use of internet and social media in episode 3 as primary communication resource among all foreign fighters highly contributes to the conflict visibility. This fuels similar external and internal motivations as noted in episode 2. The underlying ideological rhetoric is furthermore reinforced by prophetic predictions. The Arab Spring is regarded as a sign of the forthcoming Armageddon that is preceded by the appearance of the antichrist and its fight against Isa, which will take place in the geographical area of Syria. Some subjects believe that the conflict in Syria is the pinnacle in this epic battle in which they want to take part. Others use less prophetic arguments, but clearly reject a secular regime. Hence, they want to join jihadist groups instead of the secular Free Syrian Army.

> *"Even if every soul in Syria is exterminated and no sole escapes! Do not let any Kuffar get involved as happened in Libya. Blood in Libya was spilled because a Taghut was replaced with a Taghut."* (Farewell letter, subject 47, 2012)

In sum, the main episodic difference is the target suitability decision, which is always clearly influenced by geopolitical changes and military interventions. Target selection moves from Middle Eastern leaders to the West and back to Middle Eastern leaders. At the same time, this alters the ideological rhetoric from a religious-moral perspective towards a more defensive militant stance with a religious coating over time. In addition, the geopolitical changes in episode 3 also enhance the accessibility of the conflict theatre because Syria is easier to enter than Afghanistan. A similarity in this stage (mainly visible in episode 2 and 3) is conflict visibility through media exposure, which has a compelling impact on the motivations. Media sources shift from conventional sources to a combination of television, internet, and social media, which increases the scope of conflict exposure over time.

4.4.3 Co-offending stage
In the co-offending stage, we found that subjects build instrumental or trustworthy social ties with so-called *social facilitators (*Ekblom, 2003). Due to diverging *social opportunity* structures (Kleemans & De Poot, 2008), the subjects connect with different social facilitator types per episode,[37] who can facilitate, stimulate or legitimize the planned journey.

   The first social facilitator type is the *heartland-oriented* (see also De Poot & Sonneschein, 2011) who leads relatively well-organized jihadist networks in episode 1.[38] The heartland-oriented type actively searches for potential foreign fighters in the Netherlands, triggers their motivations, prepares them for combat and matures them for leaving. Furthermore, the heartland-oriented type uses his instrumental contacts in his country of origin and in places he previously fought jihad, in order to pave the way to go abroad. He thus actively creates opportunities.

> *An international network recruits over 30 Muslims and prepares them for battle in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Scanning potential recruits during soccer matches and in local mosques is the starting point of top-down recruitment. A recruiter's notebook reveals that recruiters focus specifically on length, age, religious devotion, employment, possession of a car, and location for prayers.* (Wiretap & house search, subjects 7 to 13, 2002)

The second social facilitator type is the *senior jihadist*, who mainly appears in episode 2 and 3. Partly due to the arrests and deportations of the heartland-oriented type, the presence of relatively well-organized networks diminishes after episode 1. They are replaced by home-grown radicalization networks that are less formally organized and in which the initiative to leave the Netherlands is bottom-up. A large group of subjects look up to senior jihadists and seek their operational assistance due to their knowledge and experience. Several senior jihadists who just returned from jihad theatres in Pakistan and Afghanistan now explicitly look for radicalized Muslims who are interested in their stories and willing to follow their example.

   A third social facilitator type is visible when some foreign fighters function as an intermediary or a *broker* between different areas. Potential foreign fighters in the Netherlands contact these brokers and consult them about possible destinations, routes, permits, and more (see also *departure stage*). Some of the heartland-oriented type also function as brokers, while others leave the Netherlands as "regular" foreign fighters in episode 1 and 2 and become brokers during successive episodes. See also Chapter 3 where the role of a broker was identified based on a subject's centrality metrics. In addition, some brokers function as intermediaries within the hierarchical international networks we mostly found in episode 1. Similarly in episode 2, 2 appointed local leaders – of 2 foreign fighter cells in Belgium and the Netherlands – are the chosen and sole messengers between their cells and higher ranked intermediaries. They cannot, however, communicate with the heartland-oriented type ranked above the intermediaries.

   The final social facilitator is the *fellow foreign fighter* type with whom subjects appear to connect in most cases in order to travel in small groups and share knowledge and expertise. Table 4.1 shows that many attempts are conducted collectively. Although

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[37] The co-offending stage outlines the importance of social ties with social facilitators, although such ties remain important in the other scenes as well.

[38] See also the *international jihadists* or core members in network 1 in Chapter 3.

[39] Given the scope of this chapter, we do not discuss radicalization and peer pressure extensively. See for instance Chapter 6.

media reports indicate attempts by entire families (Groen, 2014), we did not find such evidence in the selected cases. In the first episode all new recruits are clustered together by the heartland-oriented type, which results in interrelations that are useful and trustworthy during their journey. The home-grown subjects in episode 2 and 3, however, meet their companions at religious demonstrations and in mosques where their aspirations are shared.[39] Moreover, the rapid emergence of internet and social media during these episodes facilitates the search for co-offenders and senior jihadists. Some subjects in episode 3 for instance appear to have no contact with senior jihadists at all and merely consult fellow Muslims in the Netherlands online. They brainstorm about their future trips via chat boxes and discuss the correct interpretation of Islam.

Regardless of social media's potential, the search for social facilitators is not always successful. Some subjects have the ambition to travel to Syria, but do not know whom to consult specifically. They therefore make a public appeal to brokers in conflict areas by posting a call for help on social media and even by approaching them directly by email:

"Peace be with you, I want to "activate" with the Almajahidin in the land of Damascus and Inshallah I'm on my way to Turkey. Can you help me and Allah will reward you" […] Are you from the land of Damascus, because I look for someone who can direct me to Syria from Turkey. Do you know someone who can help me get into Syria?" (Wiretap, subject 46, via Twitter, 2012)

"Give me advice where I can go to when I arrive in Bagdad. In which neighborhood can I find the Mujahedeen? I will tell them that I have emigrated. Do you think it is a good idea when I go to a Sunni Mosque and that I ask for the road to Allah? What do you advise me?" (Wiretap, subject 44, via Internet forum, 2011)

These seemingly impulsive attempts are unsuccessful, and both subjects initially fail to leave the Netherlands. In other cases the alleged broker did not live up to expectations:

Subjects 21 to 24 are determined to defend fellow Muslims in Afghanistan. They seek assistance from an alleged senior jihadist (subject 50), who has been collecting jihad money for years. He sets up a meeting with a passport and visa facilitator, but despite several meetings the required documents are never delivered. In addition, he also promised the necessary finances but he did not even exceed the amount of €100, whereas the required amount was €900. (Subjects 21, 22, 23, and 24, 2006)

Besides the failure to connect to a broker, social ties with fellow foreign fighters can just as well hamper preparations. Conflicts appear to be the rule rather than the exception, and the most important obstacle we observed is where a subject is too talkative about his jihadist ambitions. Subject 47, for example, brags about his plans to female Muslims in order to seduce them. His companions, subjects 48 and 49, think he thereby jeopardizes

their plans. Another example is where a subject informs unsuitable co-offenders and therefore discloses too much private information:

"You only send jokers. I bet none of them actually goes. You are telling too much about me, which isn't necessary. Agi, you bring the entire group into jeopardy because of all your talking. How can you trust people you have never seen?" (Wiretap, subject 14 to subject 15, 2003)

A final and rather common example is when subjects differ in their interpretation of the Jihadi-Salafist ideology. The consequences of such conflicts can be the dissolution of the group or the failure to travel to a conflict area. For instance, subjects 48 and 49 decide to head for Syria without subject 47. They reschedule their flight to a month earlier without informing subject 47, literally leaving him behind because they do not agree with him.

To conclude, the main difference between episodes is the changing *social opportunity structure*. The heartland-oriented type and the relatively well-organized networks in episode 1 (and partly episode 2) disappear and are replaced by senior jihadists and more loose collaborations of home-grown radicals in episode 2 and 3, sometimes resulting in less efficient or conflicting social ties. On the other hand, while some social facilitator types disappear and emerge over time, others, such as fellow foreign fighters and brokers, are permanently present. Also, social media and the internet function as an alternative environment for the lack of organized networks in episode 2 and 3, enabling potential foreign fighters to find, gather and communicate with these different social facilitators in a virtual community.

4.4.4 Operational stage

In the third script scene, subjects perform concrete actions in preparation for their trip. An important requirement is to find ways to obtain resources as this largely shapes the opportunity to become a foreign fighter. Organized criminals and terrorists are often presumed to be more resourceful than "regular" criminals, which makes them less dependent on a given opportunity structure (Von Lampe, 2011, p. 21). Ekblom (2003, p. 250) states that they create their own opportunities because they are more determined and equipped to utilize different resources, and consequently may adapt more easily to situational changes. The question arises to what extent foreign fighters are indeed resourceful in this respect.

The first necessary resource is *financial*. We observed that the networks during episode 1 mainly acquire their money through organized crime. Typical are theft and forgery of passports (the latter also allowing them to travel),[40] transnational drug smuggling, and frontier-running (De Poot & Sonneschein, 2011, p. 108). Jihad journeys

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[40] See Chapter 5.

are also financed through other means, such as selling a house, collecting money, or by committing insurance fraud. Overall, the journeys to conflict areas in episode 1 are both organized and financed by the network. However, this changes during episode 2, when subjects more often (partially) organize and finance their own journey. Organized forms of crime seem to disappear. Instead, the individual subjects seek more practical solutions to make money, depending on the opportunities they encounter. The subjects during this episode are mainly young home-grown radicals who keep low-paid jobs on the side. The estimated costs of a journey in episode 2 amount to €1,000 - €2,000, which several subjects attempt to acquire by borrowing money, selling commodities, using personal savings or asking for donations. Subjects 21 to 24, for example, collect money under false pretenses: allegedly in the name of *zakat*, they intend to spend it on airplane tickets. In episode 3 we observe an identical estimation of costs and similar forms of acquisition, such as selling personal possessions like furniture or electronic goods. However, in contrast to episode 2, collecting money also happens more professionally, with the help of accessible tools:

> So-called "benefits" are organized wherein subjects lecture a group of Flemish Muslims in Belgium via Skype in return for money. They even advertise for these benefits via custom-made and graphically designed flyers on which one subject is presented as the "guest speaker". (Wiretap, subjects 47, 48, and 49, 2012)

For both the online streamed lecture as well as the designed flyers, the subjects have modern software and devices at their disposal that were not easily accessible in previous episodes. Such devices facilitate intensified communication and orientation, but also provide additional functionalities or opportunities to collect money. Some subjects for instance purchase products from online web shops with a credit card but before the money due is actually debited from their bank account, the subjects have already resold the products and left the Netherlands. Another criminal activity to make money is a single case of extortion:

> Subject 44, who has a reputation for not returning borrowed money, secretly filmed his intimate moments with a girl. He threatened to publish the material, unless she transferred a few hundred Euros. (Police respondent 15, subject 144, 2011, interview March 2013)

A second necessary resource is *travel documentation*. During episode 1 the forgery of documents satisfied the need for money as well as for passports. In episode 2 and 3 some subjects are told to hold on to their current Dutch passport as it will prove helpful at foreign borders. As a minority of subjects does not own a Dutch passport, they look for a forged one. As the subjects are not equipped with skills to forge documents – unlike subjects in episode 1 – they obtain the forgery via an intermediary.

In addition, the subjects mainly apply for visas and other permits through the regular (legal) channels. In some cases they decide to apply for permits during their transit stop in Egypt or Turkey. Also for the purchase of transportation tickets we observe a similar process in episode 2 and 3 (information on episode 1 is scarce in this respect). Some self-appointed intermediaries claim to arrange the tickets and permits, but more often we observe that subjects look for tickets simply through local or online travel agencies. From the extensive internet wiretap transcripts we were able to see how many different destinations and flights are considered, and how the search often leads to the cheapest option with alternative routes, and transportation as a result. Concrete opportunities and actual costs eventually determine the destination, route, and means of transportation.

> Subjects commonly plan to travel from Amsterdam to Gaziantep (near the Syrian border) directly. The route is often altered to an alternative place of departure such as Zaventem (Belgium) or an alternative place of destination such as Georgia. All because the total transportation costs to Syria may possibly drop a few hundred Euros, varying between €500 and more than €1,000. (Wiretap, subjects 46, 47, 48, and 49, 2012)

A third necessary resource is the *preparedness and ability to fight or train abroad*. While they prepare for departure, most subjects typically conduct physical exercises, which were relatively similar between episodes. In one network in episode 1, the leading heartland-oriented type organized survival camps for 21 recruits[41] who are brought to outdoor areas where they canoe and throw tree trunks to gain stamina and strength. During episode 2 and 3 we observe similar organized outdoor activities for large groups of 30 recruits.[42] However, we also notice that the secretive nature of the training activities in episode 3 is less prominent than during episode 1 and 2, as subjects openly make use of public opportunities to train. For example, in one case they sign up for survival contests in Belgium where they publicly attend outdoor running competitions under their own name. They even publish official contest photos online, accompanied with propagandistic battle slogans. On the other hand, a more low-profile kind of training of small groups is also visible in both episode 2 and 3. All subjects are limited in their resources, and visiting an official gym with professional equipment is deemed too expensive. Cheap alternatives are exercising in the local woodland, running up and down hills while carrying a heavy backpack, lifting weights at a friend's house, or doing pull-ups using an overhanging bridge while standing in the middle of a ditch. In addition to these straightforward methods, there are some cases of more advanced

[41] These 21 recruits are not all part of our dataset of 209 subjects. Unfortunately, we did not find any personal information on these persons.
[42] Ibid.

forms of training, such as droppings in remote areas and simulating combat situations through paintball games while singing jihad songs. Subjects 28 and 30 are trained by a former professional soldier from the Dutch Marine Corps, who now moves within a jihadist network. He is regularly spotted with known jihadists, exercising in the dunes. Some subjects advise each other to join a local rifle club, although we cannot confirm actual membership. Finally, subjects repeatedly talk about martial arts and the anatomy of the human body in order to understand how an assault can cause most damage. The experience of some subjects with street fighting seems to give them confidence and power in this context.

To conclude, we noticed that organized criminals are initially better equipped than others. The organized networks in episode 1 enable all subjects to obtain and utilize financial and documentation resources because of their links to organized crime, whereas subjects in episode 2 and 3 cannot fall back on such an environment. Nonetheless, most subjects in episode 2 and 3 seize opportunities to collect money and prepare their journey. They become pragmatic – conducting regular petty crime and using regular channels for documentation – and creative – conducting cybercrime and utilizing modern software and devices – in order to create similar opportunities. Secondly, all episodes show similar types of physical training activities, although they differ significantly in the degree of openness. The training activities during episode 1 and 2 are mainly secretive, whereas the subjects in episode 3 are not afraid to publicly train and thereafter to promote their activities on social media in order to get attention and support. The – somewhat speculative – reason for this could be that subjects have learned from previous episodes where people were arrested but never convicted for merely training.

4.4.5 Finalization stage

During the finalization stage, subjects take different measures to say farewell and cut off social and administrative ties right before departure. Here we can differentiate between emotional and pragmatic measures. During episode 1, most subjects make both written and audio recorded martyr testaments, at the urging of a heartland-oriented type or fellow foreign fighters. Foreign fighters are explicitly guided through this process, and not making such recordings does not seem to be an option. The testaments have a clear emotional but primarily ideological character, in which subjects bid their loved ones farewell and explain the ideological purpose and consequence of their journey. They legitimize their future actions by appealing to a higher cause and citing phrases from the Quran. Their appeal indicates a form of mental or spiritual preparation, which can give them a final push. The testaments furthermore serve a pragmatic purpose, as they function as propaganda material, and as proof that the subjects committed themselves to the ideological cause, thus hindering their withdrawal.

In the second and third episode we observe similar measures, but the recordings seem to disappear. The subjects shift to merely written farewell letters in which their aspirations are outlined and legitimized. Other emotional measures are physical goodbyes

and reconciliations, where the subjects visit relatives and show an unusually affectionate side of themselves.

In some cases they cuddle their little brothers, hug their parents, and tell their relatives they love them and they might never see them again. One subject wants to take his girlfriend out to a place of her choice just before he leaves. He is considerate and sweet in that stage, while he often used to be rude and obnoxious. (Witness statements & wiretap, subjects 18, 19, and 20, 2005; subject 33, 2010)

Their reconciliation with family members is not self-evident though. Subject 14 and his unknown associate explicitly discuss how to avoid their parents, with whom they live, during their last night before departure. They want to leave the house undetected. It shows the youthfulness of some endeavors, now that their seemingly heroic and holy journey might be jeopardized by the fact that they need to sneak out of their parental home. We also observe pragmatic measures during both episodes 2 and 3, such as closing bank accounts, ending insurance policies and telephone subscriptions, or quitting a job, giving away or selling one's belongings, deregistering oneself from the municipal registration, and terminating accommodation leases. Additionally, equipment such as outdoor clothing, camping tents, first aid kits, army boots, and outdoor jackets, to name a few items, are purchased by some after actively searching for the cheapest options in online web shops. Even if the purchase requires manual modification:

A purchased inferior outdoor-jacket turns out not to be waterproof. The subjects then make it water proof by covering it with silicon spray and testing it with tap water from the kitchen. The same subjects consider the possibility of pre-fab housing in Syria in order to improve the comfort of their accommodation. (Wiretap, subjects 47, 48, and 49, 2012)

The most pragmatic measure that we noticed is when subject 18 reports himself to the police before he leaves the Netherlands, because he still has a 30 days outstanding imprisonment that could jeopardize his departure.

We can conclude that, unlike episode 1, episode 2 and 3 show a wide variety of typical emotional and pragmatic measures. Such measures may also have existed in episode 1, but these data are scarce. All episodes do show subjects' (emotional) leave-taking. The use of written messages in episode 2 and 3 seems odd compared to the recorded statements in episode 1. Technological developments would suggest the opposite. Possibly, the thoroughly ideological nature of the travel attempts in episode 1 requires an official martyr's statement. By contrast, the travel attempts in episode 2 and 3 are more ad hoc, politically inspired and less ideologically driven, which diminishes the time and need for recorded ideological statements. Written statements may have a lower threshold. The operational stage already illustrated that most subjects in episode 3 are technologically well-equipped.

4.4.6 Departure stage

In the final stage the subjects depart for their intended destinations. The accessibility of a conflict area in this stage mainly depends on specific social facilitators, such as the brokers who prepare recruits for foreign fighting and enable border-crossing. Below, we will discuss a number of typical broker type examples.

From all 51 subjects, we found 5 subjects (5, 10, 19, 27, and 42) who first travelled to conflict zones and later became a broker, paving the way for future foreign fighters. Some of them become intermediaries between the Netherlands and conflict zones; others become so-called *fixers* on the spot who enable border-crossing. During episode 1, subject 5 travels to Turkey and Syria in 2001 where he tries to obtain a visa for Iran. While in Syria he facilitates other jihadists by picking them up and taking them to other fixers who are located at the train station in Damascus and who are able to smuggle jihadists across the Iraqi border. He claims to have helped 15 to 20 jihadists who were all alleged suicide bombers. In addition, subject 10 travels to Iran in order to help other jihadists cross the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. He facilitates the jihadists with safe houses in Iran, and arranges tickets, money, and transportation. During episode 2, subject 19 travels to Turkey with subjects 30 and 31, but then stays behind in Turkey while the others return to the Netherlands. Allegedly he was supposed to function as a broker between the Netherlands and Pakistan, but was arrested by the Turkish police for his connections with Al Qaeda. Brokers can also adapt to problematic situations they may have encountered during earlier attempts:

Subject 27, residing in Waziristan, informs a potential foreign fighter to scout for Afghan fixers in a particular neighborhood in Istanbul first, before attempting to continue to Iran and Afghanistan. This advice probably stems from his own previous failure to travel to Tehran directly from Istanbul with subject 32, 42, and 43, when they were forced to go back three times in a row due to incorrect visas. In addition, he advises her not to travel on a student visa to Pakistan but to travel via Iran. He advises her to pretend to be a Shiite while in Iran and claim to be a visitor to the grave of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. She is allowed to lie under the pretext of taqiyya according to subject 27, which refers to the possibility to hide one's religion as a defense strategy. (Wiretap & police respondent 22 , subject 27, 2009, interview November 2013)

The example above shows how subjects cope with complications, but also how flexible they deal with their own ideology, since Shiites are normally despised by jihadists. A final broker type we found is subject 42. He was arrested and detained in Iran for 8 months for his attempt to reach Waziristan during episode 2, which gained him significant status upon his return to the Netherlands. He then becomes the main broker between Netherlands and Syria during episode 3.

All subjects who intend to travel to Syria aim for Turkish cities near the Syrian border, such as Gaziantep, Adana, and Antakya. As soon as a foreign fighter reaches Turkey, subject 42 guides him towards the fixer who is located in one of these cities. He communicates with both the foreign fighter and the fixer via telephone, but does not let the fixer and the foreign fighter communicate directly. Subject 42 then contacts another broker on the other side of the border in order to inform him about the approaching foreign fighter who needs to be picked up. The telephones are then shut down, and the fixer takes over. (Wiretap & police respondent 22, subject 42, 2013, November 2013)

The broker is involved throughout the entire process, also when something happens with foreign fighters during battle. He communicates with all parties on a daily basis and uses a separate phone for this communication. Contacting him on a different and personal phone is not appreciated. He makes himself irreplaceable by not sharing the fixers' identities with fellow jihadists, thereby reducing the likelihood of detection.

Finally, the lack of instrumental brokers and fixers obstructs the accessibility of a conflict area and can either cause an immediate withdrawal, or may produce impulsive behavior. Specific behavior that is meant to avoid attention can then paradoxically lead to unwanted attention, detection, and failures. Subjects 18, 27, 28, and 29 for example do not use a fixer at the Somalian border, which results in their arrest in Kenya. Their claim to be on holiday in this dangerous area raised suspicion with local inhabitants, who then informed the police. Others jeopardize their own ambition due to incautious behavior:

The journey of subject 14 to Chechnya is interrupted near the Russian border. In order to avoid border patrol agents, he decides to leave the road and walk through snow-covered fields. Paradoxically, this impulsive escape route completely drenches his clothes and requires him to hide in the nearest village. In the meantime, the border patrol is able to follow his footsteps in the snow, which leads them directly to his hiding place. (Suspect statement, subject 14, 2003)

We conclude that in all episodes, brokers or fixers are important and even indispensable gatekeepers, because they provide vital and up to date (travel) information about various locations.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter tried to answer the research question *"How do jihadists prepare their foreign fighting attempts and has their modus operandi changed over time?"* by analyzing 17 police investigations from the period 2000-2013, supplemented with 21 interviews. We used grounded theory methods and generated a *crime script* to highlight

the opportunity structures within three different episodes. We compared these episodes and found that we could distinguish five important stages that together encapsulate the preparation of a foreign fighting attempt. These stages differed between episode and we found that *geopolitical situation, social opportunity structures*, and *technological developments* are three important situational factors causing the periodic changes and similarities in *modus operandi*.

Geopolitical situation. In all three episodes the contemporary geopolitical situation influences the target suitability decision and consequently determines the foreign fighting theatre. Since the latter is highly context-specific per episode, this alters the ideological rhetoric of the Jihadi-Salafist doctrine, as expressed in the orientation and finalization stage. Although this rhetoric changed from a religious-moral perspective in episode 1 towards a more defensive militant stance in episode 3, the expressed motivations always have an ideological basis or coating. This situational factor is probably the most difficult to tackle when trying to prevent or disrupt potential travels. As long as oppression in Muslim states exists, and as long as Western states interfere with Middle Eastern politics, potential foreign fighters may use this as a legitimization to travel abroad.

Social opportunity structures. All three episodes are characterized by a particular social opportunity structure, which not only determines the social environment of the subjects but also explains the procedural differences between episodes. The heartland-oriented types, for instance, orchestrate most foreign fighting attempts during episode 1. At the same time they lead organized networks that are able to facilitate many practical issues that require specific expertise or manpower. As discussed in the operational stage, the networks in episode 1 conducted different forms of transnational organized crimes,[43] which makes them comparable to regular transnational criminal networks. These networks are replaced by loose collaborations of home-grown radicals over time. As a result, the subjects in episode 2 and 3 could not depend on the organizational benefits and resources, but relied on senior jihadists and fellow foreign fighters, and accordingly became more pragmatic and creative. Despite these differences over time, several social facilitators, such as the fellow foreign fighter and the broker type, were continuously present and often indispensable in the departure stage. Having said that, the best possible chance to disrupt or prevent future foreign fighting attempts is to interrupt interaction between a potential foreign fighter and a broker. Disordering their communication will aggravate accessibility to jihadist groups in conflict areas, which may lead to a decrease in the number of foreign fighters.

Technological developments. The development in conflict visibility, type of communication, and technological devices gradually influences the modus operandi of foreign fighters over time. It correlates with the two aforementioned situational factors and is present in each preparation stage. Firstly, *conflict visibility* significantly impacts the

target decisions of all subjects during the orientation stage. Conflict visibility intensified over time due to the increased use of internet and social media in episode 2 and 3. Secondly, the *type of communication* changes over time. The increased use of internet and social media during episode 2 and 3 enables potential foreign fighters to seek out co-offenders, veterans or brokers in the orientation and co-offending stage. This virtual community is able to replace close-knit groups and creates a platform to discuss political issues and persuade potential foreign fighters. Over time, the changing communication influences both the target suitability and the social opportunity structure. Thirdly, over the course of 13 years' time, new *technological devices* became available. The influence of these devices is mainly visible in the operationalization stage in episode 3. The increased use of smart-phones and laptops with associated new software and functionalities facilitates communication and preparations. It increases accessibility to brokers and conflict areas and facilitates the search for alternative measures after the decline of organized networks. Although technological development seems irreversible, it does not have to be a problem. As long as investigative authorities are able to utilize technological developments as much as it is utilized by the people they are monitoring. Moreover, it is important not to lag behind, but to be a few steps ahead of potential suspects. In other words, investigative authorities must use technological developments to their own advantage in order to disrupt and prevent future foreign fighting attempts. This may require specific training of specialized investigators.

To conclude, policy makers need to have a thorough understanding of the phenomenon they want to prevent. This chapter has offered insight into the foreign fighting phenomenon by thoroughly analyzing empirical data on foreign fighting and by making the data transparent through crime script analysis. Our research has certain limitations as well. Although we take into account a longer period of time than is usually done, our data also reflect a specific time and place due to a selective sample, which limits possibilities for generalization. Secondly, revealing situational factors is allegedly difficult with regard to terrorism and organized crime, due to their complex and rare-event nature, which also limits our results. However, the combination of a crime script analysis, the triangulation of data sources, and the collaboration with practitioners is a valuable method to clarify how developments over time influence changing preparatory stages of foreign fighting. This criminological perspective can add value to the field of terrorism research, which may provide reference points for policy makers as they attempt to formulate tailored prevention measures.

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[43] See also Chapters 3 and 4.