

# PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

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from the Editorial Team

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## Welcome from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume IX, Issue 1 (February 2015) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* at [www.terrorismanalysts.com](http://www.terrorismanalysts.com). Our free online journal is a joint publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), headquartered in Vienna, and the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies (CTSS), headquartered at the University of Massachusetts' Lowell campus.

Now in its 9th year, *Perspectives on Terrorism* has almost 4,900 regular subscribers and many more occasional readers worldwide. The Articles of its six annual issues are fully peer-reviewed by external referees. Its Research Notes, Book Reviews and other sections are subject to internal editorial quality control.

The first of four **Articles** in this issue is an evaluation of the effectiveness of targeted killings as a counter-terrorism tactic, written by Ophir Falk and based on rigorous empirical testing in the case of Israel. Second comes an article, written by Dina Al Raffie, focusing on militant Egyptian extremists who were said to have de-radicalised, but have in fact changed less than assumed. Next we have an article by Cristina Archetti on the role of the Internet in radicalization and the problem of developing counter-narratives. Our fourth article by Lee Jarvis, Stuart Macdonald and Andrew Whiting, deals with cyber-terrorism, or rather the construction of this security threat, as seen by various news media.

Our **Research Notes** section begins with a perceptive analysis from Judith Tinnes on the strategy behind ISIS' video-taped beheadings. Her analysis is followed by a Research Note on the tacit, tactical alliance of Syria's president Assad with jihadist extremists, authored by Michael Becker. Our third item, written by Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz, offers suggestions how the study of organized crime gangs can contribute to a better understanding of terrorist groups.

In the **Bibliographic section**, the reader will find a literature list on terrorism in Russia with a focus on the Caucasus, again from the hand of Judith Tinnes. There is a short bibliography by Eric Price, dealing with the phenomenon of foreign fighters. In the **Reviews section**, there is a combined book review of two studies focusing on ISIS. This is followed, as usual, by a series of brief reviews from our book review editor, Joshua Sinai.

Finally, we draw the readers' attention to some of the activities going on in TRI's **National Networks of PhD thesis writers**. We also remind those PhD thesis writers who have completed and defended their theses successfully last year to submit them before 31 March 2015 for the competition for the TRI Award '**Best PhD Thesis in the Field of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies**'. There is also a **Note of Thanks** to our external peer-reviewers who help us make the journal what it is.

The current issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* has been prepared by Alex Schmid from TRI's European office in Vienna. Co-editor of this issue is Dr. Paul Gill, University College London, who is also a member of our Editorial Board. The April issue will be prepared by Prof. James J. F. Forest, our journal's American co-editor at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell.

Sincerely,

Professor em. Alex P. Schmid, Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Paul Gill, Guest, Co-editor of this issue

## I. Articles

### Measuring the Effectiveness of Israel's 'Targeted Killing' Campaign

by Ophir Falk

#### **Abstract**

*With targeted killing long becoming a key and perhaps primary counterterrorism measure used by a number of States in their confrontation with lethal terror, this article looks at the pros and cons of this method of warfare while focusing on the underlying justification for its use—namely its objective driven effectiveness. Israel's use of targeted killing, intended to mitigate Palestinian suicide terrorism during the first decade of the 21st century, serves as the key case study in this article. A quantitative approach was adopted, using growth model analysis, and isolation of designated area, to demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted killing in reducing fatalities caused by suicide bombings. The period examined was from 2000 to 2010, with a key finding being that targeted killings of ideological leaders, primarily in Gaza, were more effective than operative level targeted killings in the context of confronting suicide bombing fatalities.*

**Keywords:** Targeted Killing; Effectiveness; Quantitative analysis; Suicide bombings; Counter-terrorism

#### **Introduction**

Terrorist organizations and states choose methods of terrorism or counterterrorism based on the expected effectiveness of those methods. For that ostensible rationale, suicide bombings were adopted by over 30 different terrorist organizations, with attacks carried out in more than 30 countries on four different continents[1]. Based on the same logic of expected effectiveness, targeted killing, a “premeditated act of lethal force employed by a state to eliminate specific individuals outside their custody”[2] became a prime method applied by Israel during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in its efforts to confront suicide bombings.

It is fully acknowledged that counter terrorism policy is often complex and that multiple measures are often used. At the same time, when assessing the effectiveness of counter terrorism, although difficult, it is imperative that the effectiveness of a specific countermeasure be examined and not only an entire policy. This has been done before in regards to the effectiveness of house demolition mitigating.[3]

In light of the fact that targeted killing has become a prime measure used by a number of states, it is important that its effectiveness, as it relates to the goal for which it is used, be addressed. This is possible and important. Its importance is more vehemently recognized today in such theaters as North West Pakistan, where the US primarily relies on targeted killing to curb the threats on its interests. Aside from targeted killing, other tactical counterterrorism measures, such as arrests, check points and house demolition were also used by Israel to confront suicide terrorism. However, it is argued that targeted killing was the prime, perhaps strategic measure used by Israel against the suicide bombing phenomenon, certainly in Gaza during the time in question.[4]

Targeted killing is not a new phenomenon. However, in recent years it has become a key part of many operational security doctrines. What was once a highly controversial and seldom-used tactic has become a widely accepted and applied policy. In the course of four years (2001 to 2005) Israel carried out over 160 targeted killings [5]. During the course of the subsequent six years (2006-2012) targeted killing became

the most widely used counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency tool in America's military campaigns in Afghanistan and Pakistan [6]. Further, Russian forces targeted Chechen "rebel warlords"[7], Sri Lankan forces targeted Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leaders and the LTTE targeted Sri Lankan leaders [8], and the US has targeted al-Qaeda's alleged terrorists.[9]

From an Israeli perspective, targeted killing, as Moshe Yaalon, Israel's Minister of Defense has explained, disrupts the daily routine of terrorists: "The potential target tries to avoid being seen in public, doesn't use means of communication since he understands we're listening. He is forced to rely on messengers and face to face meetings".[10] In other words, the threat of targeted killing forces the terrorist to become preoccupied with survival instead of attacks. Wisely selected targeting lowers the terrorists' morale, reduces their cumulative operational capabilities and, of course, increases morale on the attacker's side.

On the other hand, targeted killing may create new "martyrs", evoke feelings of revenge in the Palestinian street, and involve risk to innocent civilians' lives.[11] Above all, targeted killing has one central weakness: the inability to produce additional information from the operation. One of the most important principles in terror prevention is "the translation of information into more information". The arrest of an operative and his interrogation lead to more arrests, which in turn lead to more exposures and arrests. Targeted killing prevents a specific attack or chain of attacks, but it can also leave a void in intelligence. [12]

Targeted killing is viewed by many as an unethical and, at times, illegal tactic.[13] Others view it as the least of all evils under certain circumstances intended to serve the common good.[14] Despite the aforementioned disadvantages of targeted killing, Israel applied an extensive targeted killing policy during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Shortly after the outbreak of the Second Intifada in October of 2000 – characterized by an escalation in Palestinian suicide terror bombings – the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) carried out their first targeted killing in the territories. On November 9, 2000, Hussein Abayat was targeted in Palestinian Authority-controlled Bethlehem.[15] In 2002, shortly after an unprecedented wave of Palestinian suicide bombings, targeted killing became a declared Israeli policy in confronting this lethal form of terrorism. This declared policy and associated doctrine is part of the Israeli Securities Authority (ISA), IDF and Israeli police's counter-terrorism doctrine.

Views vary as to the rationalization of targeted killing, yet ultimately, the "*effectiveness in the short and long term remains the lynchpin of any justification for named killing*".[16] The alleged effectiveness of targeted killing is the rationale for its use.

This article quantitatively examines the effectiveness of targeted killings carried out by Israel during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in its confrontation with Palestinian suicide bombings.

### ***Why Suicide Terrorism and Targeted Killing***

The focus of this article is on suicide bombing and targeted killing, primarily because suicide terrorism became the main and most significant form of terrorism applied by Palestinian terrorist organizations against Israel during the time in question. This, in turn, resulted in targeted killing becoming the main and most significant form of counter terrorism measure applied to confront the said suicide bombings in the period under consideration here [17]. It may be argued that if there were no suicide bombings there would probably be no Israeli targeted killings in the territories. On the other hand, if there were no targeted killings, Israel may very well still have to face Palestinian suicide bombings. And yet, the effectiveness of targeted killing in this region, during this disputed period, has not been quantitatively assessed.



**Research Question.**

This paper addresses the question: *Was the Israeli use of targeted killing effective in its effort to mitigate suicide bombings during the first decade of the 21st century?*

Prior to addressing this question, a working definition of 'effectiveness' is provided, as it applies to this study, followed by a review of the available literature on the effectiveness of counter-terrorism in general, and targeted killing in particular. Subsequently, relevant data on targeted killings in territories and suicide bombings in Israel during 2000-2010 are presented and discussed.

**Effectiveness**

Different researchers define 'effectiveness' in various manners, using different criteria to measure success or failure. For example, Amos N. Giora suggests a conceptual definition that *"Effective counterterrorism causes the terrorist infrastructure to suffer serious damage—including damage to finances, intelligence, resources, or personnel—thereby preventing a particular, planned attack from going forth and/or postponing or impacting plans for future attacks while minimizing collateral damage, exercising fiscal responsibility, and preserving civil liberties."*[18]

Giora's far reaching definition takes into consideration several factors, some of which are difficult to quantify and assess. A narrow, more limited yet more measurable and operational working definition, defines 'effectiveness' as "adequate to accomplish a purpose; producing the intended or expected result." [19] That is, *effectiveness* is the capability of producing a desired result. Simply framed, when something is deemed effective, it means it has achieved an intended outcome.[20] In the context of this study, which evaluates the effectiveness of one factor, namely targeted killing, in confronting one type of terrorist tactics, namely suicide bombings, it is more appropriate to adopt a narrow definition of effectiveness.

In the context of this study, it is important to determine Israel's strategy vis-à-vis its targeted killing program. That is, what was the State's desired effect of its counter-terrorism measure (targeted killings). Israel used targeted killing in the designated territories/Gaza [21] during the years 2000 to 2010, to prevent suicide terrorism.[22] For the purpose of this study, 'effectiveness' relates to Israel *achieving a goal set by its decision makers in terms of mitigating the threat of suicide bombings.*

**Literature Review**

Most studies examining counterterrorism effectiveness are qualitative in nature; very few are quantitative. This study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Few studies look at the specific effectiveness of a particular counter-measure[23], and fewer yet examine the indirect effectiveness of targeted killing in combating a specific terror tactic such as suicide bombing.[24] Some studies attest that no direct causal relationship can be proven between targeted killing and the decline in terror,[25] while others support such a relationship and point to a cause and effect pattern in the conflict.[26] The explicit effectiveness of targeted killings in reducing suicide bombings has received little attention.[27]

This section briefly discusses the main findings of key studies on a) counterterrorism effectiveness in general; b) the effectiveness of targeted killing on mitigating terror in general; and c) the effectiveness of targeted killing on mitigating suicide terrorism in particular.

*Counter-terrorism effectiveness*

The assessment of counter-terrorism effectiveness has proven to be a challenge.[28] For example, while some authors have used incidences and fatalities as outcome measures, [29] Spencer suggests that for countermeasures to be effective, they must reduce the *fear* of terrorism among the general population,[30] highlighting the importance of perception.

In an effort to learn lessons for confronting al Qaeda, Seth Jones and Martin Libicki analyzed a list of 268 defined terrorist groups that existed between 1968 and 2006 and tried to identify which counter-terrorism policies (if any) brought an end to the violent activity of terrorist organizations.[31] According to the authors, terrorist organizations ended their activities due to two main reasons: they were either penetrated or eliminated by local police and intelligence agencies (40%), or they reached a resolution with their government (43%). In 10% of cases, terrorist groups disbanded because they achieved victory and reached objectives. Military force led to the end of terrorist groups in only 7% of cases.[32] This study examined the effectiveness of counter-terrorism in general and did not address targeted killing in particular.

Richard J. Chasdi's *Counterterror Offensives for the Ghost War World*[33] is a comprehensive quantitative analysis of counterterrorism effectiveness. Chasdi analyses the counterterror systems of seven different states (the UK, US, France, Israel, Turkey, the Russian Federation and Peru). In an effort to depict what works and what does not, Chasdi provides an empirical analysis that uses historical and theoretical data to explore five broad categories, or "action types"[34] as he depicts them: disruption, cooptation, destruction, preemption, and repression. Chasdi concludes with mixed results: more often than not, and depending on context and idiosyncrasies of regime types, "hard line" policies of disruption, preemption and repression were found to be more effective than "soft line" policies such as cooptation.[35]

Ami Pedahzur analyzed the effectiveness of intelligence-based defensive and offensive means used by Israel to confront terrorism and argued that over-reliance on offensive measures, including targeted killings, was flawed and that defensive measures should be preferred, inter alia, so that future reconciliation could be more plausible.[36] On the other hand, in 2007, Hillel Frisch evaluated the effectiveness of the security fence in Judea and Samaria and compared it to the effectiveness of defensive and offensive counter-terrorism strategies.[37] Frisch concluded that offensive measures are the most effective way of reducing casualties in Israel's conflict with the Palestinians and that the fence can only serve as a supplement that will eventually become ineffective.[38]

Haushofer et al. examined the causal factors that perpetuated the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By applying econometric techniques to empirical data they concluded that between January 2001 and April 2008, Palestinian violence (but not necessarily Israeli fatalities) significantly increased following Israeli attacks.[39] The authors did not distinguish between various forms of Israeli attacks, nor did they distinguish between the various forms of Palestinian violence. The number of attacks were the key variable examined. On the other hand, using number of casualties or fatalities as the key outcome variables, Golan and Rosenblatt reached different conclusions; namely, that fatalities decreased over time.[40]

While the above studies examined the effectiveness of counter-terrorism in reducing terrorist activities in general, they did not specifically focus on the confrontation with a specific form of terrorism tactic, namely, suicide bombings. With approximately 50 percent of Israeli casualties between 2000 and 2010 being caused by suicide bombings,[41] this form of terrorism and the specific tactics used to confront it, merit specific examination.



Suicide terrorism results in minimal fatalities on the terrorists' side while maximizing injuries and fatalities on the targeted side.[42] It has therefore become the terrorists' method of choice.[43] Addressing this tactic, Hillel Frisch[44] and Boyden and colleagues[45] concluded that over time, Israel's general counter-terrorism measures considerably reduced Palestinian suicide bombings. However, they did not examine the effectiveness of targeted killing in particular.

#### *Targeted Killing Effectiveness vis-à-vis Terrorism in general*

Studying 19 different movements and 35 case studies drawn from more than 40 countries from as far back as 1780, Langdon et al. examined what happened to militant movements after the death or arrest of their leader.[46] They concluded that in most cases where the leader is killed by an external force, the group de-radicalizes. In some cases it even disbands. In none of the examined cases did a group become more radicalized after its leader was killed.[47] Perhaps most noteworthy, the authors conclude that movements of which the leader is killed appear to be more likely to fail than movements of which the leader is arrested. Moreover, movements in which the leader dies of natural causes appear to be the most resilient to a crisis in leadership.[48] It was noted that while the loss of a leader does not necessarily cause the group or movement to fail, it often leads the group to become less radical.[49] From that respect, this study supports the effectiveness of the targeted killing of militant movement leaders. One limitation of this study is that only one organization of the groups reviewed was of Muslim origin.[50]

In 2006, Byman argued that Israel's targeted killing policy was effective in that, although the number of Hamas attacks grew steadily as the Intifada progressed, the number of Israeli deaths they caused plunged, suggesting that the terror attacks became far less effective.[51] That is, the number of attacks increased but their lethality decreased.

In mid-2008 Avi Kober argued that the targeted killing – or as it is often referred to, the decapitation – of Hamas's political and spiritual leaders between September 2000 and April 2004 seemed to account for the organization's decision to suspend lethal hostilities against Israel. This decision, in his view, essentially meant the end of the second Intifada. Therefore, Kober argued, targeted killing was effective.[52] More specifically, Kober stressed that targeting military leaders and operatives proved to be ineffective, whereas decapitation of Hamas's political and spiritual leaders was effective.[53]

Jenna Jordan examined 298 targeted killings of leaders in different places in the world from 1945 to 2004 and concluded that the "decapitation" of terrorist leaders is effective under certain circumstances but can often be counterproductive under different circumstances.[54] Jordan suggests that an organization's age, type, and size are critical in determining whether or not decapitation will result in the cessation of terrorist activity. As an organization matures and increases in size, it is much more likely to withstand attacks on its leadership. Jordan's underlying conclusion was that decapitation is not only ineffective against religious, well-established, or large groups, it is often actually counterproductive. Moreover, going after the leader may strengthen such a group's resolve, result in retaliatory attacks, increase public sympathy for the organization, or produce more lethal attacks.

In contrast to Jordan's suggestions, Bryan C. Price argues that the sustainability of terrorist groups is very sensitive to the decapitation of their leaders.[55] Price concluded that: a) decapitated terrorist groups have a significantly higher mortality rate than non-decapitated groups; b) the earlier leadership decapitation occurs in a terrorist group or large group, the more effective it is; c) killing, capturing, or capturing and then killing the leader, significantly increases the "mortality rate" of terrorist groups; and that d) any type of leadership turnover, not just decapitation, increases the mortality rate of terrorist groups.

In *How Terrorism Ends*, Audrey Kurth Cronin examined possible factors, including “decapitation” that caused terrorist organizations to stop functioning as such over the last two centuries. Cronin notes that the effectiveness of decapitation depends on the structure, size, age and motivation of the organization: those organizations that ended through decapitation tended to be hierarchically structured, young, characterized by a cult of personality and were lacking a viable successor.[56] In a more recent paper that discussed the effectiveness of the U.S. use of drones, Cronin concluded that “although drones can protect the American people from attacks in the short term, they are not helping to defeat al Qaeda, and they may be creating sworn enemies out of a sea of local insurgents. It would be a mistake to embrace killer drones as the centerpiece of U.S. counterterrorism.”[57]

Patrick B. Johnston took an in-depth look into the effectiveness of the targeted killing or capturing of enemy leaders in the context of counterinsurgency campaigns.[58] His findings were based on 118 publicly reported decapitation attempts of insurgent organizations’ leadership by government forces in a variety of countries from 1974 to 2003. Johnston’s findings suggest that leadership decapitation can be very effective as campaigns are more likely to end quickly when counterinsurgents successfully target enemy leaders. It was further concluded that conflict intensity is more likely to decrease following leadership removals.

While many of the above studies examine the effectiveness of targeted killing in reducing terrorist activities or in disbanding a terrorist organization, not all studies are in agreement on conclusions or key elements. Notably, these studies examined the effect of targeted killing on a terrorist organization’s capabilities, motivation, or violence in general, but did not specifically examine its effect on suicide terrorism. Furthermore, most if not all of these studies are qualitative in nature and are not always supported by empirical data.

It is most noteworthy that none of the studies overviewed above specifically examined the effectiveness of targeted killing vis-à-vis suicide terrorism.

#### *Targeted Killing Effectiveness vis-à-vis Suicide Terrorism*

Edward Kaplan et al. examined the effects of targeted killings over a three year period (2002-2005) in Israel and suggested a terror-stock model that treats the suicide bombing attack rate as a function of the number of terrorists available to plan and execute suicide bombings.[59] Interestingly, their main conclusion was that preventive arrests, rather than, or to a greater degree than targeted killings, result in a reduction in the suicide bombing attack rate.

David Jaeger and Daniele Paserman carried out causal studies on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, concentrating on events that took place between September 2000 and January 2005.[60] Looking at the number of deaths (rather than attacks) occurring each day, one key conclusion reached was that there was unidirectional Granger causality[61] from Palestinian violence to Israeli violence, but not vice versa, and that a “tit-for-tat” violence cycle is technically not evident. Another conclusion reached in this study was that successful Israeli targeted killings do reduce the number of subsequent Israeli fatalities.[62] Jaeger and Paserman looked at terror-related fatalities in general, in a study emphasizing the fatalities caused by suicide bombings. In a subsequent paper (2007), Jaeger and Paserman concluded that targeting low-level operatives (as opposed to high ranking operatives) results in an increase in intended Palestinian violence.[63]

Daniel Jacobson and Edward Kaplan suggested a sequential game model of Palestinian suicide bombings and Israeli targeted killings and reached the conclusion that targeted killings may decrease motivation of suicide

bombings, and that over time, the minimization of civilian casualties increases targeted killing effectiveness. [64]

As evident from the above, a number of studies have examined the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures in general but few have focused on the effectiveness of targeted killing. Those that have examined the effectiveness of targeted killing did not specifically evaluate its effectiveness as it directly relates to suicide bombings. Considering the latter was the method of choice for Palestinian terrorist organization for many years, the objective of this study is to examine specifically whether targeted killings were effective in confronting suicide bombings, in terms of mitigating the number of fatalities resulting from suicide attacks. This is done by looking at the Israeli experience of using targeted killing during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in designated areas (i.e., Gaza) where that was the primary or only offensive counter-terrorism measure applied. The effectiveness of Israeli targeted killings was evaluated by analyzing the number of suicide bombings and the number of fatalities subsequent to the targeted killings. Additionally, the effects of targeted killings particularly in Gaza, as well as the effects of the targeted killings of key ideological leaders compared to operatives were examined.

### **Methodology**

The number and results of targeted killings carried out by Israel in the territories in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was gathered by reviewing leading media sources (by means of LexisNexis and other search engines such as Google for Scholars), governmental sources, non-governmental organization sources and data attained through personal communication with other researchers (Asaf Zussman and Noam Zussman[65] and Ariel Merari[66]). Most of the data on targeted killing was collected from publications made by the following organizations: the Israel Security Agency, the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group; the International Policy Institute for Counterterrorism; B'tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories; the Public Committee against Torture in Israel; and the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment. Recorded data includes the date and location of the targeted killing event, political association of the target and his seniority within his organization, as well as other personal characteristics, such as level of education, marital status and place of residence.

Information on suicide bombings carried out by Palestinians against Israel was mainly gathered from Israeli Security Agency Reports, Israel's office of Foreign Affairs, and detailed databases, including those concerning suicide attacks worldwide compiled by Ami Pedahzur [67]. These databases were consolidated with the database generously provided by Prof. Ariel Merari. The latter database includes data on suicide bombings carried out by Palestinians against Israeli targets between the years 1993 and 2009.[68] Some of the data have been previously analyzed and published in *Suicide Terror: Understanding and Confronting the Threat*[69]. Recorded data include the date and location of the suicide bombing, its origin and the number of resultant fatalities.

In addition to written sources, scores of interviews were carried out with high ranking Israeli operational officers and decision makers in order to understand the objectives and operational effectiveness of Israel's targeted killing policy.[70] Data obtained from the above mentioned sources were researched again and their accuracy was verified by reports appearing in the news media and professional literature. Those sources are referred to in this paper, specifically in the discussion section.

*Statistical Analysis [71]*

Using the gathered data, an empirical model was built for this study that tested the hypothesis stating that Israel's use of targeted killing was effective in its effort to mitigate suicide bombings fatalities during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The model also facilitates the examination of the effect of targeted killings in Gaza, as well as the effect of targeting one type of targets (i.e. ideological leader) in comparison to a different type of target (i.e. militant leader).<sup>72</sup>

The hypothesis-testing model was designed as a panel of suicide bombing fatalities posterior (subsequent) to targeted killings. In other words, the model examines suicide bombing fatalities that occur subsequent to designated targeted killings. For this purpose, the unit of analysis is a month along the time period from late September 2000 to early March 2009. While previous studies examined the relationship between suicide bombings and targeted killings as a cyclic phenomenon, this study measures a latent individual trend (slope) across suicide bombing fatalities subsequent to targeted killings. A latent slope means that there is a trend that represents suicide bombing fatalities subsequent to targeted killings. The latent slope may be positive or negative, depending on the individual case. This can conceptually be described by the following equations:

$$(1) SB_{it} = SLOPE_{it} * T + b1 * TKi0 + \varepsilon_{it};$$

$$\text{and (1a) } SLOPE_{it} = c0 + b2 * GAZA + b3 * POLITICAL + \xi_{it}.$$

Where  $i=1,2,\dots,101$  months as unique observations;  $t=0,+50,+100$ ;  $c0,b1,b2,b3$  are estimated coefficients;  $SB$  is number of suicide bombing fatalities;  $TK$  represents number of targeted killings carried out during a specific month  $i$ ;  $GAZA$  is an observed variable that takes the value of "1" if any  $TK$  was carried out in Gaza in the particular month and "0" otherwise;  $POLITICAL$  is an observed variable that takes the value of "1" if a political/religious leader was targeted during that month and "0" otherwise;  $SLOPE$  is an unobserved (latent) individual slope with respect to time post- $TK$ ;  $T$  stands for linear time points (0,1,2), and  $\varepsilon$  and  $\xi$  are residuals for the observed and unobserved parts of the model, respectively.

Conceptually, the model provides a latent individual slope which is based on the evaluation of three different suicide bombing time periods. This model is also referred to as a longitudinal model.[73] Thus, a slope reflects the effect of targeted killings over time. If the slope is positive, it indicates that suicide bombing fatalities increase subsequent to targeted killings, and vice versa if the slope is negative.

For the purpose of this analysis, the targeted killing events were clustered into months. That is, the number of targeted killings within a specific month is recorded as one observation. The suicide bombing fatalities following each targeted killing month during the first 50 days ( $SBs$  at  $TK0$ ), from 50 days to 100 days ( $SBs$  at  $TK+50$ ), and from 100 days to 150 days ( $SBs$  at  $TK+100$ ) are examined. For example, the effectiveness of targeted killings that were carried out during September 2002 is examined in relation to suicide bombing fatalities in September and half of the month of October ( $SB$  at  $TK0$ ); suicide bombing fatalities in late October and November ( $SB$  at  $TK+50$ ); and lastly, suicide bombing fatalities from December to mid-January ( $SB$  at  $TK+100$ ). In total, there were 101 non-zero months (months in which targeted killings were carried out) out of the total 111 months from 2000 to 2009. A graphical example of selected trends can be seen in Figure 1 (see explanation below).

As a specific example, the targeted killing of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin took place on the 22nd of March, 2004. In that month three additional targeted killings were carried out. In terms of suicide bombings, there were 14 fatalities caused by six suicide bombing events from March 22nd to the end of April (50 days,  $TK0$ ). From May 2004 until mid-June 2004 (50 to 100 days after Yassin  $TK$ ,  $TK+50$ ), another two suicide bombings were carried out, which caused no fatalities. Later, from mid-June to the end of July ( $TK+100$ ), no suicide

bombings were carried out. Our objective in this modeling strategy is to describe and explain this change in suicide bombing events and fatalities over time across the targeted killings and suicide bombing events.

Different time intervals can clearly be applied in this model. A 50 day time interval was used in this study, primarily due to the assessment, based on interviews with experts in the field, that during the relevant years that this study evaluates, it took Hamas and other relevant organizations approximately a month and a half to recruit, train and dispatch suicide bombers. Thus, a specific suicide attack that is carried out a month and a half or more after a specific targeted killing was carried out, cannot be attributed to that targeted killing. [74]

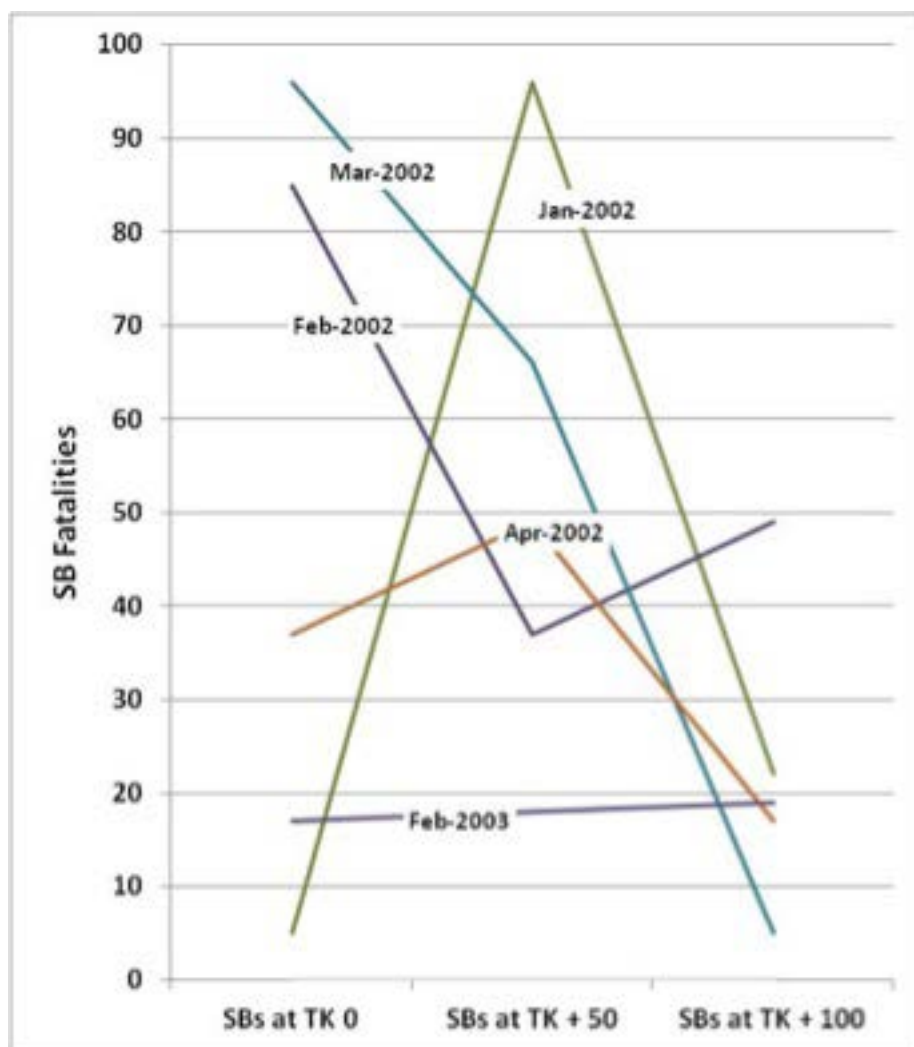


Figure 1: Individual SB fatality trends over time as a response to TKs, selected trends

Figure 1 illustrates the number of suicide bombing fatalities following selected targeted killing months between 2000 and 2009 and how this number changes across the three periods (TK0, TK+50, TK+100). These targeted killings were selected only to demonstrate the different types of subsequent suicide bombing patterns observed in the present study. In some cases, the number of fatalities decreases and then rises, and in others, different trends are observed. For example, following the targeted killing which occurred in January 2002, there were 5 suicide bombing fatalities in the subsequent 50 days (TK0), rising to 95 fatalities in the 50-100 subsequent days (TK+50), and then decreasing to 21 fatalities in the 100-150 subsequent days (TK+100). On the other hand, during April 2002, 5 targeted killings were carried out, and Israeli fatalities subsequent to these TKs (T0) were 37, increasing to 49 (T+50), but then decreasing to 17 (T+100). In February 2002, 2 targeted killings were carried out, whereby T0 was 85, decreasing to 37 at TK 50 and rising to 49 at TK 100. In March 2002, T0 was 95 decreasing to 66 at T50 and to 5 at TK 100.



Figure 2 (see results section) shows the number of targeted killings, along with the number of suicide bombing fatalities (at TK0) across time from 2000 to 2010. From the end of 2006, both the suicide bombing fatalities and the number of targeted killings decrease, but earlier, especially in 2002, numbers of events and fatalities are relatively high altogether, but not always during the same month. This lack of *obvious* patterns or associations between targeted killing and suicide bombings over time, prompted our individual growth model for analysis.

The advantage of this methodology is that it allows the examination of different trend lines for each set of observations, as described above, while also determining an overall trend. In addition, the effects of specific TKs can be further described/quantified by adding dummy variables which provide further information about each TK event. We added two dummy variables mentioned earlier: the first distinguishes between TKs that were carried out in the Gaza strip and TKs that were carried out elsewhere—94 TKs out of total number of 213 TKs (44%) were carried out in Gaza strip. There were 54 months (53.4%) in which TKs were carried out in the Gaza strip, across the 101 months in the final dataset. The second dummy variable distinguished between a target that was an ideologist or political leader, versus other militants. About 8% of the months with TKs included either political or ideological targets—those targets will be detailed below. Finally, we added to the model a variable identifying the number of TKs in each month. A unique aspect of this longitudinal modeling framework is the identification (or inclusion) of relationships between the time-dependent variables, in this case, the correlations between measurement errors of the three time points.[75]

### **Results**

With the primary goal of curbing suicide terror,[76] Israel carried out 213 targeted attacks in the territories between 2000 and 2010, killing 239 people.[77] These targeted killings were meant to mitigate the number of suicide bombing fatalities.

Figure 2 demonstrates all the suicide bombings and targeted killings that took place in Israel and the territories since the Palestinian suicide bombing phenomenon commenced in June 1993 until 2010.



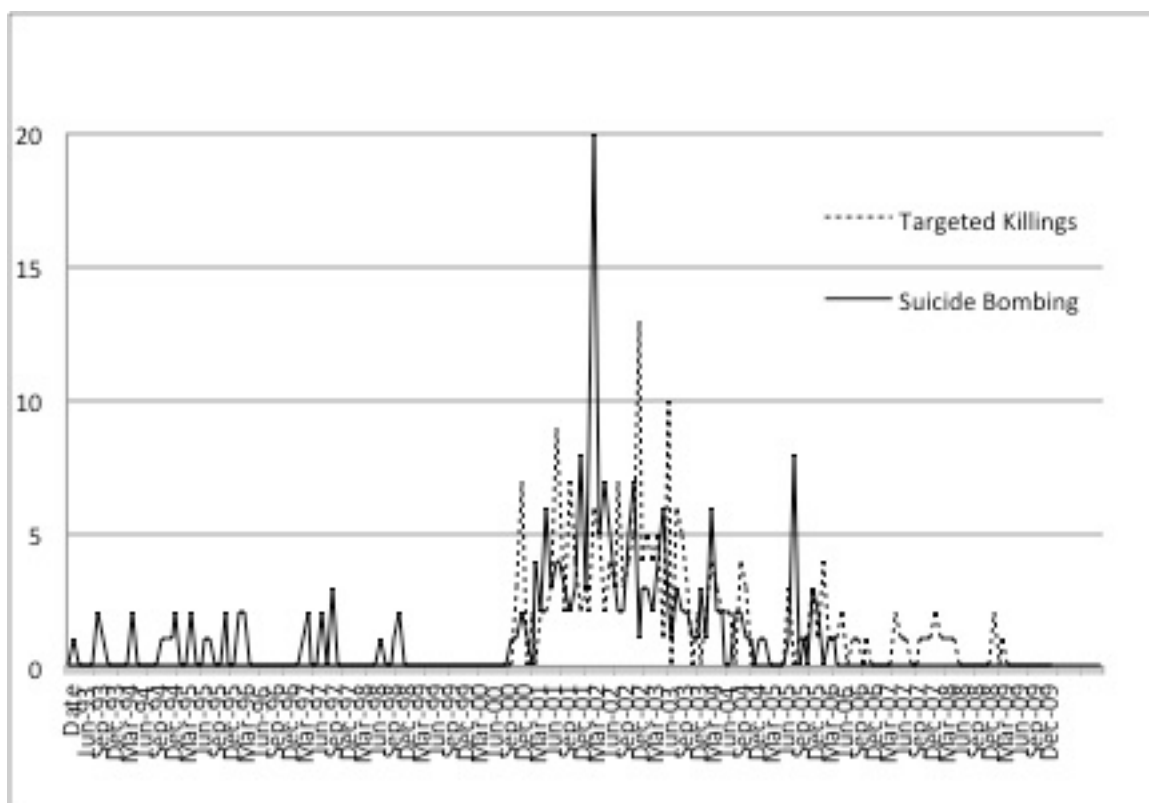


Figure 2: Suicide Bombings and Targeted Killing Comparison

Figure 3 illustrates the targeted killings carried out in Gaza and suicide bombings originating from Gaza, September 1993 to 2010.

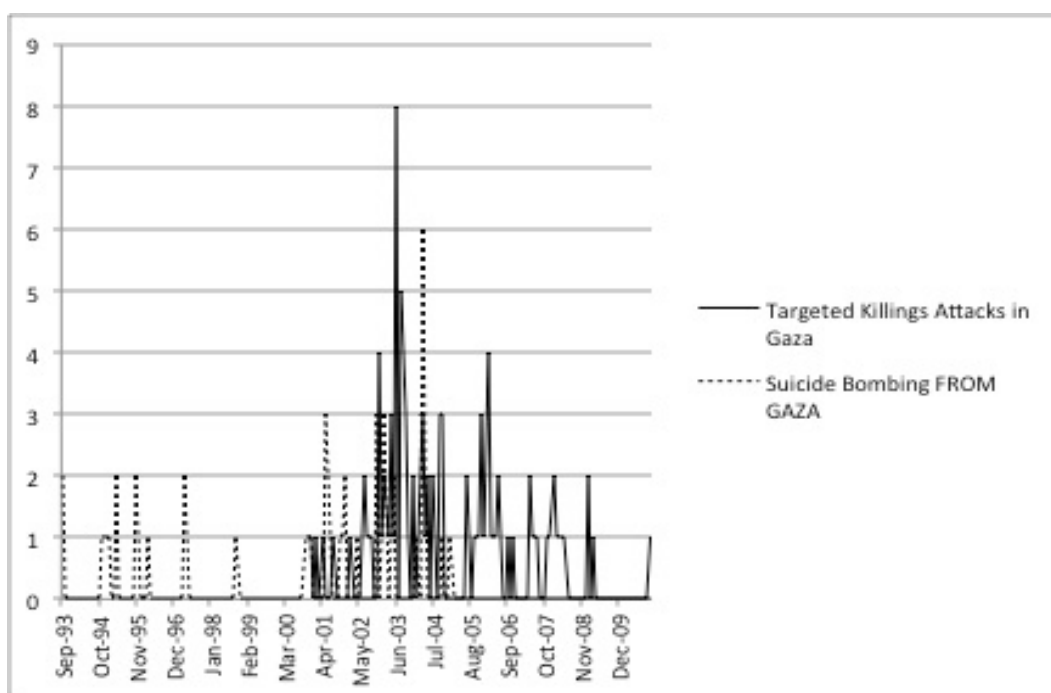


Figure 3: Israeli Targeted Killing in Gaza vs. Suicide Bombings originating from Gaza

Figure 4 illustrates TKs and SBs aggregated over the specific time frame used in the present study (i.e. TK + 50 days) from 2000 to 2010.

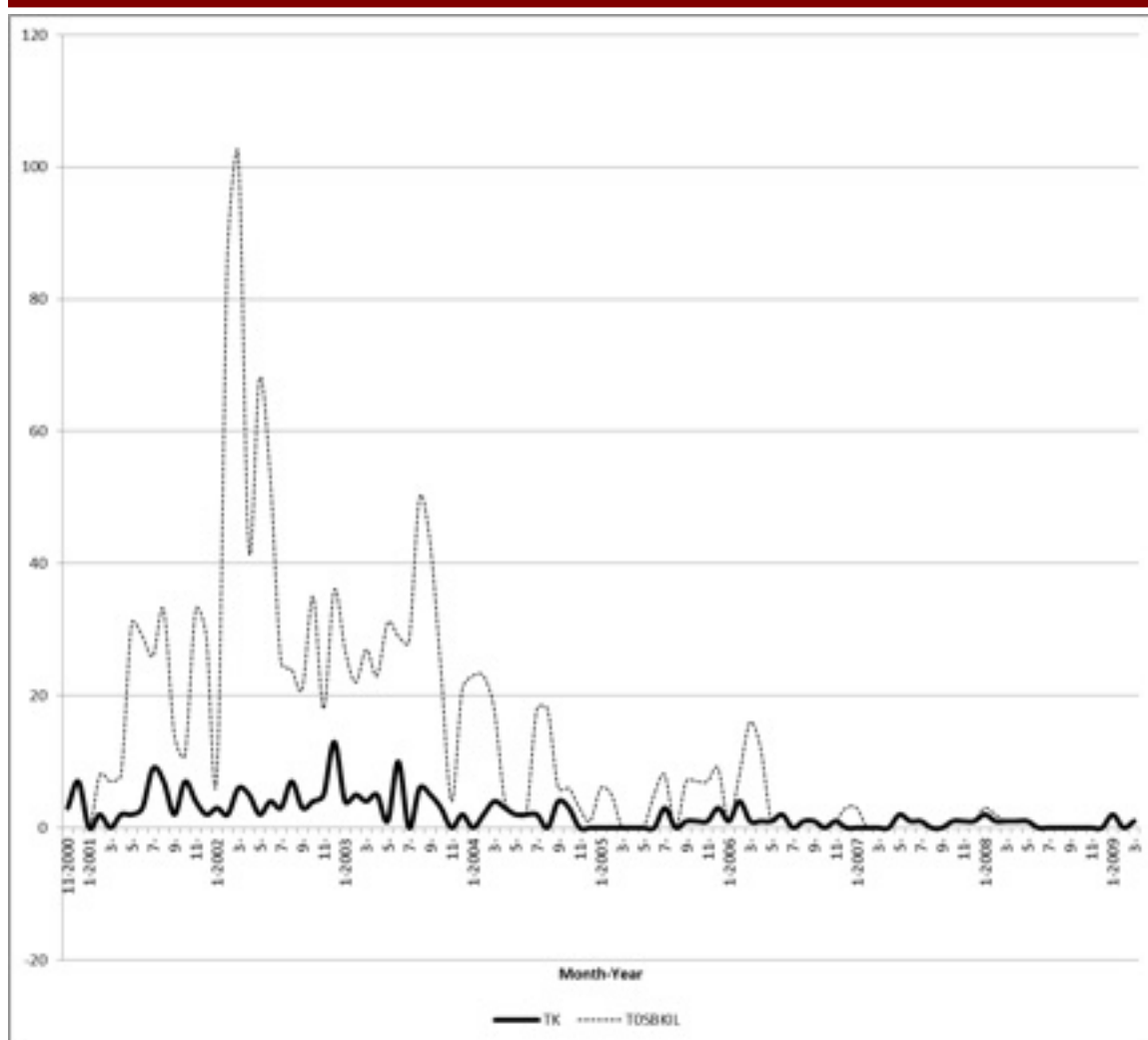


Figure 4: The distribution of suicide bombing fatalities and targeted killing events over time

Figure 4 displays the suicide bombings fatalities and targeted killings that were carried out in Israel and the territories between the years 2000 and 2010. The year 2002 was the year of most suicide bombings, followed by a peak in targeted killings. Both suicide bombings and targeted killings can be seen as campaigns or policy rather than sporadic single attacks. From this figure, it is difficult to determine that one specific or even a series of targeted killings effectively mitigated suicide bombings. However, it is clear that Israel's targeted killing campaign or policy began subsequent to and superannuated Palestinian suicide bombings. It should also be noted that more people were killed in suicide bombings than by targeted killings.

### Key Targeted Killings

In the course of Israel's targeted killing campaign, there were a number of targeted killings that were considered to be key attacks because targeted individuals were considered either spiritual leaders or high-level operational leaders.[78] Below is a list and short description of key targeted killings that were carried out by Israel between 2000 and 2010[79].

2000:

- The first targeted killing of 2000 was carried out on November 9<sup>th</sup>. The target was Hussein Abayat, the head of the Fatah's military wing in Bethlehem, who was responsible for a shooting in Jerusalem's southern neighborhood and the murder of several Israelis. Based on intelligence reports, he was plotting an imminent suicide bombing as well.[80]

2001:

- Abu Ali Mustafa, head of the Palestinian Popular Front, in August 27, 2001. [81]

2002:

- Raed Karmi, head of Fatah's Tulkarm terror network, in January 14, 2002.[82]
- Salah Mustafa Shehadeh, head of Hamas' military wing, in July 22, 2002. In addition to Shehadeh, 14 civilians were also killed in this incident.[83]

2003:

- Dr. Abraham Makadme, one of Hamas' founders and third-in-command in the organization, in March 8, 2003.

2004:

- Founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, in March, 2004
- Less than a month later, Yassin's successor, Dr. Abed el-Azziz Rantisi, in April, 2004.

*Note: The number of suicide bombings began to decline after mid-2004.*

2006:

- Jama Abu Samhadana, the commander of the Popular Resistance Committees, in June 2006

2009:

- Said Siam, former Hamas Interior Minister, in June 2009
- On that same day, Salach Abu Shraich, former head of Hamas' interior security, in June 2009.

2010:

- There were two targeted killings in November of that year (Muhammad a-Namnan on November 3<sup>rd</sup> and Islam al-Hamid Yasin on November 17).

The results of the empirical modeling are presented in two parts. The first part describes the results in general, while the second looks at individual predictions of trends over time. Table 1 displays the results of our growth model analysis. It demonstrates that the number of TKs across all events affects the SB fatalities, but this effect slightly decreases over time. The effect of TKs on number of SB fatalities during the same time period (50 days) is higher than it is after 50 days and after 100 days, ( $\beta=0.52$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\beta=0.48$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\beta=0.33$ ,  $p<.05$ , respectively). This suggests that both TK events and SB fatalities are associated, but the strength of this relationship decreases with an increase in duration from TK. Table 1 also shows that there is a positive relationship between the SB fatalities and the latent slope, suggesting, the effectiveness of targeted killing in decreasing fatalities caused by suicide bombings. Lastly, we see that whenever TKs were carried out in the Gaza strip, it tended to reduce the slope. In other words, for Gaza TKs this trend tends to change from positive value, which means an increasing number of fatalities in response to TKs, to a negative slope, a decreasing number of SB fatalities in response to TKs.

Independent Variables:	Dependent Variables:	SBs at T=0	SBs at T+50	SBs at T+100	Latent Slope
Latent Slope		0.44 *** (.06)	0.42 *** (.06)	0.62 *** (.07)	
Gaza TKs					-0.23 ~ (.14)
Political TKs					-0.05 (.14)
TK Number		0.52 *** (.07)	0.48 *** (.08)	0.33 * (.10)	
Model Fit Information:	CFI = .85; TLI = .78; RMSEA = .007; SRMR = .06; N=101				

p<.05 \*, p<.01 \*\*, p<.001 \*\*\*, p<.1 ~; standard error of the coefficient in parentheses.

*Table 1: Model Coefficients (Standardized)*

The individual estimates of the slopes show interesting patterns. Table 2 shows a comparison between the most positive and most negative slopes. The value of the slope reflects a change in the number of SB fatalities in each time unit (50 days). That is, a slope of -9 means a drop of 9 fatalities during the next 50 days. The highest positive slopes (increases in SB fatalities following TKs) occurred in 2001-2002. On the other hand, the greatest decreases in the number of SB fatalities were more spread out (from 2000 to 2007).

	Observed								
Month, Year	N u m b e r TKs	Prior Fatalities	SB fatalities at TK0	SB fatalities at TK+50	SB fatalities at TK+100	G a z a Yes/No	Political Yes/No	Predicted Slope	
									Negative
M a r - 2004	4	21	14	0	0	1	1	-10	
J u l - 2001	9	26	17	12	3	0	0	-5	
N o v - 2000	3	-	0	0	6	1	1	-3	
J u n - 2003	10	30	19	44	21	1	0	-3	
D e c - 2007	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	-3	
									Positive
F e b - 2002	2	5	85	37	49	1	0	27	
N o v - 2001	4	4	29	5	81	0	0	26	
D e c - 2001	2	29	27	85	15	0	0	19	
J a n - 2002	3	27	5	96	22	0	1	16	
M a r - 2002	6	85	96	66	5	0	0	16	

Table 2: A comparison between highest positive and negative trends (slopes) over time with respect to observed SB fatalities and TKs

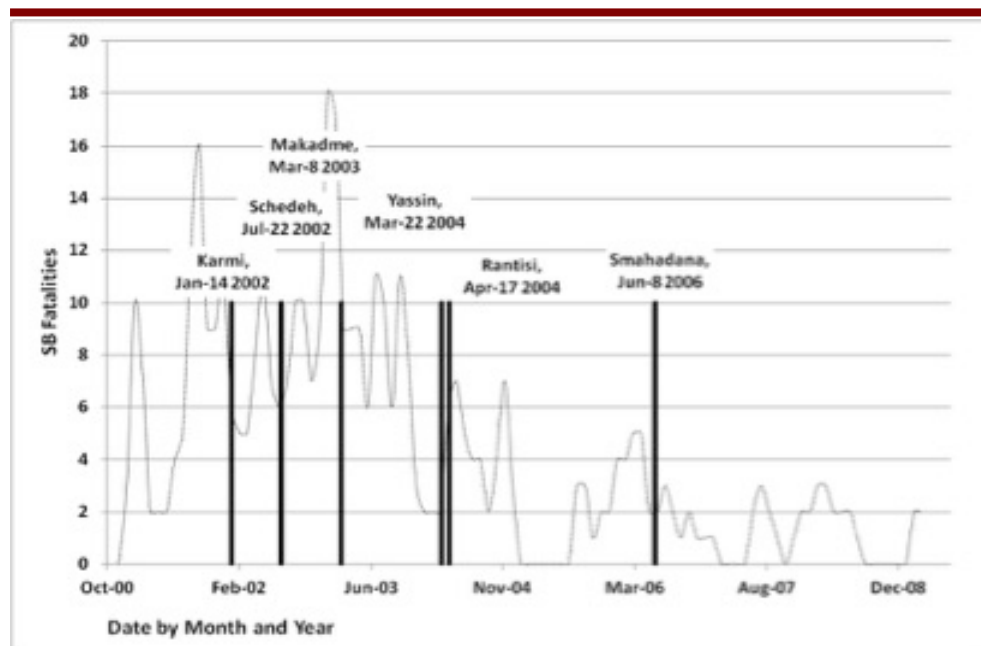


Figure 5: Key TK and subsequent SB fatalities over time

Figure 5 illustrates the number of fatalities resulting from suicide bombings from 2000 until 2010. Key targeted killings are highlighted (black vertical lines). The figure demonstrates that following most of the key targeted killings, there was an evident decreasing trend in suicide bombings fatalities.

The number of fatalities following each key targeted killing were analyzed in 50 day intervals, with key results appearing in Table 3 below. For example, a key targeted killing event was that of Schedeh, on July 22, 2002. There were 8 SB fatalities in the 50 days prior to this event. Following the TK, there were 5 SB fatalities in the first 50 days (TK0), 7 fatalities in the subsequent 50-100 days (TK+50), and 7 fatalities in the period 100-150 days post the TK (TK+100). This would suggest that the Schedeh TK had a positive effect on mitigating SB fatalities, whereby positive effect means a decrease in SB fatalities. This is reflected by a positive slope. As demonstrated in the Table below a positive slope, reflecting an overall decrease in SB fatalities was associated with each of the key targeted killings, with only one exception. That is, the Makadme, Yassin, Rantisi and Smahadana targeted killings mitigated the number subsequent SB fatalities.

The TK of Raed Karmi, on January 14, 2002 presents a different pattern. During the 50 days prior to this TK event, there were 11 SB fatalities. Subsequently, there were 11 fatalities at TK 0 and 25 fatalities at TK+50 and 7 fatalities at TK+100. Thus, it can be suggested that the Karmi targeted killing had a negative effect on mitigating suicide bombings, whereby negative means an increase in SB fatalities.

Notwithstanding the Karmi case, the key targeted killings noted in Figure 5 and Table 3 below, all of which were carried out in Gaza, had a positive effect on mitigating suicide bombing fatalities. That is, they were followed by a decrease in SB fatalities subsequent to the TK. All of the noted key targeted killings were carried out against ideological or political leaders except for Karmi who was an operational leader. Interestingly, this conclusion is somewhat in contrast to that of Noam and Assaf Zussman, who evaluated the effect of targeted killings on the Tel Aviv stock market and concluded that "...The market reacts strongly, to the assassinations of senior leaders of terrorist organizations: it declines following assassinations targeting senior political leaders but rises following assassinations of senior military leaders"[84].

If that is the case, one could observe that the targeted killings were not effective as far as the stock market was concerned, but were effective in relation to subsequent suicide bombing fatalities.



Table 3 shows key targeted killings and the number of Israeli fatalities resulting from suicide bombings in the period before the targeted killing, the 50 days after the targeted killing (TK0), 50-100 days after the targeted killing (TK+50) and the 100-150 days after the killing (TK+100). The effect of the key targeted killing (positive or negative) is reflected by the slope, where a positive slope reflects a mitigating effect on subsequent fatalities.

Key Targeted Killing	SBs prior	SBs at TK0	SBs at TK+50	SBs at TK+100	TK effect (slope)
Schedeh, July 22, 2002	8	5	7	7	+
Makadme, Mar 8, 2003	4	5	3	3	+
Ahmad Yassin March 22, 2004	4	7	4	0	+
Rantisi April 7, 2004	7	4	0	2	+
Smahdana June 8, 2006	7	5	2	1	+
Karmi January 14, 2002	11	11	25	7	-

*Table 3 Key targeted killings and the number of Israeli fatalities resulting from suicide bombings (See text for further explanation)*

It is evident that the targeting of high value ideological leaders, primarily in Gaza, were usually effective in decreasing subsequent suicide bombings fatalities. The key targeted killings noted in Gaza, had a positive effect on mitigating suicide bombing fatalities.

### **Discussion**

One clear conclusion that can be drawn from an examination of Israel's experience with Palestinian suicide bombings is that the frequency and lethality of the bombings declined over time, from a peak of 60 attacks in 2002 to eight in 2005, one in 2007 and zero attacks since 2009. The discussion below addresses the role that the targeted killings played in reducing suicide bombings, as well as other factors and events which may have influenced the turn of events.

As demonstrated in Table 2 and the results of the growth model analysis, there was a close association between targeted killing and the fatalities resulting from suicide bombing. And that association was strongest immediately after the targeted killing, gradually decreasing over time. In other words, the number of fatalities resulting from suicide bombing decreased after targeted killing events. This was particularly evident for cases of targeted killing in Gaza and subsequent suicide bombing originating out of Gaza.

The targeting of senior political figures was most effective [85, 86] as the targeting of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and Dr. Abed el-Azziz Rantisi by the IDF in 2004 show. Yassin, the founder and leader of Hamas, was targeted in March 2004 and less than a month later Yassin's successor, Dr. Abed el-Azziz Rantisi, was targeted. Both leaders were charismatic, spiritual and very influential Hamas leaders. In contrast, the targeting of operational commanders had a different effect.

After the targeting of Yassin the motivation to carry out attacks against Israel was very high[87], but those attacks did not materialize. The main reasons for that were not just diminished capabilities, but more importantly the fact that the leaders who succeeded the targeted leaders did not want to become subsequent targets.[88]

The results of the present study are in line with Former IDF Chief of Staff and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz' comments on targeted killing effectiveness. In the course of a live television interview he stated that "In 2004–2005, as Defense Minister, I led an operation coined 'Anemone Picking' which targeted 14 or 15 key terrorist leaders in Gaza and brought an end to the suicide terror phenomenon. It did not put an end to terror but it mitigated suicide bombings".[89]

Aside from targeted killings, other actions were taken by Israel to mitigate suicide bombing. In fact, it may be argued that it is difficult to isolate the effect a specific measure. However, in this particular case, it should be noted that during the period in question, in Gaza, targeted killing was the prime measure used by the IDF to confront suicide bombings. Unlike in the West Bank, a Gaza fence was in place before the examined period, very few arrests were carried out in the area during that time and targeted killing was used practically in isolation as a counter-measure for suicide bombings[90]. Therefore, by focusing on Gaza, this study can examine the specific effectiveness of targeted killing on suicide bombing.

When looking at the factors that helped decrease attacks, specifically those originating from Gaza, it is clear that alongside offensive measures such as targeted killings, Israel deployed a number of defense measures. [91] One such measure was a security fence around Gaza. Such a fence separates Gaza and Israel proper.

### ***The Gaza Barrier***

The Gaza Strip borders Egypt on the southwest and Israel on the south, east and north. It is about 41 kilometers (25mi) long and between 6–12 kilometers (4–7.5mi) wide, with a population of about 1.5 million people. Construction of the first barrier–60 kilometers (37mi) long between the Gaza Strip and Israel began in 1994 following the signing of the Oslo Accords. The barrier was completed in 1996. The focus of this study is the years 2000 to 2010 which is after the initial Gaza barrier was erected.

After being largely torn down by the Palestinians at the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, the Gaza barrier was rebuilt between December 2000 and June 2001. A one-kilometer buffer zone was added, in addition to new high-tech observation posts. There are three main crossing points in and out of the Gaza Strip: the northern Erez Crossing into Israel, the southern Rafah Crossing into Egypt, and the eastern Karni Crossing used only for cargo.

Over the years the security at border crossings became tighter and more sophisticated, in such a manner that bypassing them became very difficult. It can be argued that this increased security measure mitigated the number of suicide bombings. Indeed, Almog argues that it prompted a shift in the tactics of Palestinian militants who commenced firing rockets and mortars over the fence into Israel.[92]

In September 2005, following Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, control of the Philadelphi corridor between Egypt and the Gaza strip was handed over to the Palestinian National Authority. Additionally, after the disengagement there were fewer easily accessible Israeli targets, as the settlements in the Gaza strip and Gush Katif had been evacuated. The crossing of Palestinian workers from Gaza into Israel stopped completely, making it more difficult for terrorists to infiltrate Israel. This could have reduced the opportunities for suicide bombing attempts. On the other hand, the pullout of Israeli forces and residents

simplified accessibility to the Gaza strip from the southern border with Egypt and thus increased the offensive capabilities of the different organizations active in Gaza.[93]

Indeed, on June 25, 2006, Palestinian militants used an 800-meter tunnel dug under the barrier over a period of months to infiltrate into Israel. They attacked a patrolling Israeli armored unit, killed two Israeli soldiers and captured another one—Gilad Shalit.

In June 2007, Hamas took over the Gaza strip, ousting the forces of Fatah – the faction led by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas – and effectively splitting Gaza from the West Bank in terms of its administration. At that time, Hamas' interest in reinforcing its rule may have altered its policy on suicide attacks. During the immediate aftermath of Hamas' rise to power in Gaza, its efforts were focused on consolidating its rule and less on carrying out attacks on Israel. However, the general motivation to attack Israel did not wane. This is evident by looking at the number of missiles that were directed against Israel.[94] The number of suicide bombings declined and the number of rockets fired increased.

The perspective and rationale for the Palestinian policy change is complex. However, it was clear that Palestinian leaders' concern over retaliation or unintended ramifications subsequent to suicide bombing, primarily their own targeted killings, was paramount, and the targeting of political or spiritual leaders was of the highest concern.[95] This is supported by the analysis of Table 1 and can be seen by Hamas' demand to stop targeted killing as a condition for the cease-fire after operations *Cast Lead* and *Pillar of Defense*. [96]

In addition, Palestinian Authority policy changed due to internal considerations. The policy towards suicide bombings and frequent endorsement of such attacks may have changed after the death of PLO leader Yasser Arafat in November 11, 2004. His successor, Abu Mazen, was less enthusiastic about suicide bombings, as compared to Arafat. The new Palestinian leader used a different tone from that of his predecessor and on a number of occasions said that Palestinian acts of violence were counterproductive to the Palestinian cause. This position, however, had very little effect if at all on the Palestinian Authority's rule in Gaza, which, as noted, had fallen into the hands of Hamas in 2007.[97]

What was the key factor that brought about a decline in the number of suicide bombings? Can one key factor be isolated from all others? It is complex and perhaps artificial to isolate targeted killing from other counterterrorism measures that may have also affected the decline in Palestinian suicide bombings. In particular, *Operation Defensive Shield* in mid-2002, wherein Israel regained military control over the West Bank, and the construction of the security fence in the West Bank that began in late 2003, would seem to be other contributing factors. Those two counterterrorism measures, however, are almost irrelevant when evaluating the decline of suicide terror bombings originating in Gaza. A security fence has separated that geographical area from Israel proper well before the year 2000 and *Operation Defensive Shield* was not applied to that area. In fact, targeted killing was the primary counterterrorism tool used during the evaluated time to confront suicide bombings launched from Gaza.

## Conclusions

This article presented a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of Israeli targeted killing in confronting Palestinian suicide terror, specifically suicide bombings originating from the territories in general and especially from Gaza during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Assessing the effectiveness of a counter-terrorism tactic or strategy essentially depends on the objectives set by the decision makers who decided on implementing the said counter measure. In Israel's case, targeted killing, was originally intended to mitigate suicide terror and so measuring the policies effectiveness must

be based on an assessment of whether suicide attacks in general and their consequential fatalities indeed decreased as a result of such targeted killings. This article, for the first time, carried out such a systematic evaluation.

Targeted killing did not end the conflict or achieve peace. A productive political process will probably be needed for that. But it did have a clear effect on subsequent suicide bombing fatalities. Since there may have been other factors contributing to the decrease in suicide bombing fatalities during that period, it is difficult to conclude decisively that a decrease was exclusively due to the targeted killing policy. The unique case of Gaza, however, provides more conclusive findings, since defensive and offensive security measures implemented elsewhere were not relevant in the arena of Gaza, allowing for an isolation of the variables being tested. The strong association between suicide attacks generated from Gaza and targeted killings in the area demonstrate the effectiveness of the targeted killing campaign.

Another key finding of this article is that it is evident that the targeting of high value ideological leaders, primarily in Gaza, were effective in decreasing subsequent suicide bombings fatalities. The key targeted killings noted in Gaza, had a positive effect on mitigating suicide bombing fatalities.

Israel's targeted killing policy, along with other less significant factors during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was effective in mitigating suicide terror attacks generated from the Territories in general and from Gaza most specifically. Israel's targeted killing policy achieved tactical and strategic success. From a tactical perspective, the operations accurately eliminated their targets. From a strategic perspective, the policy was the key factor in stopping or at least mitigating suicide bombing fatalities.

#### *Future Research*

The data presented indicate that over time, Israel's targeted killing policy was effective in mitigating suicide bombings from Gaza. The manner of which the said effectiveness was evaluated as it pertains to Israel, may also be relevant when evaluating the effectiveness of targeted killing campaigns carried out by different states in different theaters. Furthermore, although the targeting of key operational and spiritual leaders seem to be most effective, from the data analyzed it is not completely clear what makes the targeted killing strategy effective. What facets or elements within a targeted killing strategy make it effective and what may make it counterproductive? Does the target selection impact the effectiveness of the policy? Does legal compliance or perceived compliance impact the effectiveness of a targeted killing campaign? Does collateral damage and unnecessary civilian deaths have a negative impact on effectiveness? These research questions are beyond the scope of this study and should be addressed in future studies.

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## Note

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- [2] The definition is contrived from definitions appearing in: Philip Alson, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions," United Nations, Human Rights Council (28 May 2010). Available at [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/Permissibility of Targeted Killing 31314session/A.HRC.14.24.Add6.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/Permissibility%20of%20Targeted%20Killing%2031314session/A.HRC.14.24.Add6.pdf) (accessed 6 August 2013); and other definitions such as the ones provided by Nils Melzer, Targeted Killing in International Law (Oxford: University Press, 2008), pp. 3–5; and W. Jason Fisher, "Targeted Killing, Norms, and International Law," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 45(3) (2006), p. 715.
- [3] See study on effectiveness of house demolition that examines whether house demolitions are an effective counterterrorism tactic against suicide terrorism—["Counter-Suicide-Terrorism: Evidence from House Demolitions"](#) by Esteban Klor with Effi Benmelech and Claude Berrebi *The Journal of Politics*, forthcoming. In this study, Effraim Benmelech et al. examined whether house demolitions during 2000 to 2005 were an effective counterterrorism tactic against suicide terrorism. The authors analyzed the relationship between house demolitions and subsequent terror attacks over time. These associations were examined for distinct districts or localities, while controlling for the curfew days in the distinct districts. The authors argue that punitive house demolitions reduce the number of terror attacks.
- [4] Brig-Gen Mickey Edelstein, the Head of IDF's Gaza Division, when asked by the author what triggered the IDF's targeted killing policy, he replied: "The main trigger for its use, was that we had no other alternative to safeguard the Israeli public from suicide bombings. Targeted Killing was adopted by the IDF after it had withdrawn from the populated Palestinians towns, and its ability to access those areas and arrest terrorists before they attacked Israeli citizens became very limited." Interview February 19, 2011.
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- [19] "Effectiveness", Dictionary.com, Available at: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/effectiveness> (Accessed 6 August 2013).
- [20] For supporting a definition in which effectiveness is the ability to produce a desired result, see Enders and Sandler (1993) who noted that specific counter-terrorism policies may have unintended consequences and may therefore not be effective, but policies that reduce the number of terror attacks or the number of people killed in a specific form of attack can be classified as effective. This view is in line with that of Zussman and Zussman (2006) as well, who also focused on a comparison of the number of terror attacks and fatalities before and after the implementation of a certain policy. (Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "The Effectiveness of Anti-Terrorism Policies: A Vector-Auto regression-Intervention Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 87(4), pp. 829–44. Asaf and Noam Zussman, "Assassinations: Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Israeli Counterterrorism Policy Using Stock Market Data," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20(2), pp. 193–206.)
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## Straight From the Horse's Mouth:

### Exploring De-radicalization Claims of Former Egyptian Militant Leaders

by Dina Al Raffie

#### Abstract

*Towards the end of the 1990s, leading figures from two of Egypt's most prominent Islamist militant movements began releasing a series of documents that expressed seeming ideological revisions, culminating in a re-evaluation of perspectives and a cessation of violence. Conventional wisdom since the publication of these revisions maintains that the groups have "deradicalized".[1] In the aftermath of the January 25th, 2011 Egyptian revolution, many of these re-visionary authors were released from jail, and appeared on national television for the first time. Analyzing select interviews of these authors, as well as content from their re-visionist writings, this article re-examines the conventional wisdom of deradicalization. Contrary to previous findings that deradicalization has indeed occurred, it is argued that there is little evidence of real ideological deradicalization. Indeed, two of the four examples cited provide evidence of significant ideological recidivism as measured by both implicit and explicit calls to violence.*

**Keywords :** Egyptian Islamic Jihad; Islamic Group; Islamism; narratives; deradicalization.

#### Introduction

In Omar Ashour's (2009) seminal study [2] on former militant groups in Egypt and Algeria, [3] Ashour concludes that Egyptian groups have substantially deradicalized, albeit to varying degrees. Ashour's assessment is based on a definition of deradicalization that emphasizes a group's position on violence while slighting a group's shift (or lack thereof) in worldview pertaining to its Islamist ideology.

Deradicalization, as defined by Ashour, is '...primarily concerned with changing the attitudes of armed Islamist movements toward violence, rather than toward democracy.'[4] It does not matter if the content of these groups' ideologies remain '...misogynist, homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-democratic...' so long as they agree to erase violence from their rhetoric and political agendas. [5] Ashour considers groups ideologically moderate if they accept the electoral element of the democratic process. Moderates '...accept the Schumpeterian definition of democracy, tend to emphasize majoritarianism, and are reluctant to accept minority rights in general and those they consider to be "illegitimate" minorities in particular.'[6]

Importantly, Ashour acknowledges the limits of his own terminology in accounting for real ideological deradicalization. In cases where Islamists alter their agendas to accommodate liberal democratic values, as well as accept 'constitutional liberalism and provisions for protecting minority rights,'[7] they should be considered "liberal Islamists." [8] However, as Ashour contended back in 2009 (a view that arguably still holds true today), 'Within the largest Islamist movement, liberal Islamists are a very rare breed, and indeed could even be perceived as a theoretical extreme with little or no concrete instantiations.'[9]

Since Ashour's study, there have been few follow up studies carried out on the Egyptian Islamist militants of old. The sincerity of the leaders' proclamations have not been analyzed and, save for a number of terrorist attacks on tourist resorts in the Sinai, Egypt witnessed relative calm up until the January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 revolution. However, following the revolution, a significant number of Islamists – including former militants – were broken out of prison and granted official pardons by the Brotherhood-led government. A number of these

individuals were then hosted on popular Egyptian TV shows for the first time. Leaders from both the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (henceforth "Islamic Group"/ "IG"), and Tanzim al-Jihad (henceforth "Egyptian Islamic Group"/ "EIJ") featured in interviews, where they openly discussed their Jihadist experiences, their ideologies, and their current dispositions.

Offering valuable insight on the current views of former Jihadists within shifting circumstances, these interviews allow us to track the deradicalization process of some of the leading figures of these movements. They offer us a chance to comparatively analyze the evolution of their ideological viewpoints (if any) over time.

Picking up from where Ashour left off, this article expands on the definition of "deradicalization" to include core ideological constructs in which tracking change is key to identifying sincere ideological moderation. Although it is fair to say that behavioral transformation (e.g. the delegitimization of violence) alone can imply ideological moderation and lead to further ideological deradicalization, [10] it is insufficient as a single indicator in describing individuals and/or groups as deradicalized. It is acknowledged in conventional literature on deradicalization that the advocacy of violence or the lack thereof is often the result of a number of factors that may have little to do with a change in worldviews. [11] Therefore, any study of deradicalization should also seek to gauge changes in individuals' actual worldviews. This includes accounting for motivations underlying the behavioral shifts, and assessing the extent to which these are merely strategic or indeed permanent rejections of previous ideological positions.

In this regard, I will provide my own assessment of the former militants' positions on violence to determine whether they are absolute or conditional. If violence is prohibited purely due to its practical unsuitability, does that really amount to moderation, i.e. a degree of ideological deradicalization? I contend that only the unconditional condemnation of violence should be considered an indicator of real ideological moderation.

Following an overview of terminology, this article presents three primary case studies of former leaders from both the IG and EIJ. All three were senior figures in their respective groups and movements, and each played significant roles in dictating their groups' theological outlooks. For each, the initial revisions made by both the group and the leader (where relevant) will be summarized. I will then contrast them with the leaders' most recent views as expressed in selected interview materials. In both, I specifically search for evidence in their speech acts that implies change in commitment to extremist attitudes and political views. I am more interested in shifts in the ideas that underpin the worldview, as opposed to mere alternations between differing means and methods by which these individuals continue pursuing the *same ideology*. A short overview of recent commentary by a fourth leader from the IG is included at the end due to the relevance of his views to this article's topic. On the basis of these four examples, deradicalization claims are studied and conclusions on the nature of deradicalization are provided.

### ***Caveats***

I analyze interviews conducted between the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and the end of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood regime for three of the four ideologues included. My basic assumption for using material from within this specific timeframe is that the victory of an Islamist-friendly government provided a safe environment in which former militants could openly discuss their past and present views. The interviews on which I focus were given when each leader presumably dropped his rhetorical guard because he felt he could speak honestly without fear of recrimination or punishment from the regime. The fourth ideologue included at the end of the paper is IG leader Rifa'i Taha. The select interview with Taha is the only one that

falls out of the specified timeframe, yet is included due to its relevance for the article's conclusions. It is also important to note that many of the militants covered in this article were being interviewed for the first time.

For many of the interviews, only a number of those included in this article contained questions that specifically addressed members' ideological views, past and present. Interviews found for other former militants were not as in-depth as the ones used in the present article, which is why I cover two members from the EIJ, yet only one (in-depth) from the IG. Rifa'i Taha (IG) is included as a concluding note due to his sudden emergence, and the scarcity of interview material on which to base a more coherent narrative. All the subjects analyzed were spiritual mentors in leadership positions for their respective groups. They were responsible for providing both initial ideological direction as well as leading the revisions process. Given the significant role that leadership can play in the evolution of terrorist organizations, changes in ideology as dictated by the leaders are presumed to have a strong influence on the direction that remaining group members will take.

The narratives constructed from the interview material represent my own interpretation of the interviews. This is a task which involved translation of the videos from Arabic to English, then a compiling of the findings into single, coherent narratives. Despite being a native Arabic speaker, I may have missed certain nuances in translation. The same goes for my reading and interpretation of a number of the original revisions. Having said this, my primary concern addressing the material available was to gauge views and intentions on *specific* topics. These topics revolve around the two main questions I pose regarding the assessment of ideological moderation. Namely, the positions of former militants on violence and whether they are conditional or unconditional (absolute). [12] Their commitment to the ideology itself, based on the rejection of one or more of the key constructs of Islamist ideology, will be covered in the overview on terminology.

The discussion of the initial revisions provided is also more in-depth for the first militant leader, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, due to the fact that I am aware of only a few analyses of the leader's work. [13] This is perhaps a result of the more scattered manner in which leaders of the EIJ produced their revisions.

Finally, I recognize that both the number of interviews used in the article, and the general number of interviews available for the selected former militants, is small. The scarcity of sources from which to draw a larger-scale comparison of narratives also makes it difficult to make deterministic conclusions. Further, given the scope of the article, neither all details nor all interviews for the given timeframe could be provided. However, the interviews selected are sufficient in providing answers to the basic questions posed in this article for the assessment of ideological moderation.

### ***Islamist Deradicalization***

The terminology of 'extremism' as it pertains to political ideologies and worldviews finds many parallels in the characteristics of Islamism and is useful for describing the nature of "radicalism" in the Islamist context. Borrowing from a study by Schmid (2014) on terminology, extremist ideologies can be summarized as follows: Extremists '...strive to create a homogenous society based on rigid, ideological tenets; they seek to make society conformist by suppressing all opposition and subjugating minorities.' [14] Furthermore, extremists are very often 'anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian...non-compromising...single-minded black-or-white thinkers...[and prefer] 'uniformity over diversity, collective goals over individual freedoms.' [15] These characteristics can be easily transposed onto Sunni Islamist ideology in all its manifestations. [16]



Islamist radicalism is a religiously inspired form of radicalism that seeks to reform societies according to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. The ultimate goal of the new radicals is not the expansion of individual freedoms, but rather the transformation of society whereby individual freedoms are made subservient to an enforced system of beliefs. Islamism, at its core, rejects political ideologies and systems of governance that *they* perceive are running contrary to the Islamic Shari'a. [17] The society they envision is one in which individual "freedoms" are dictated according to select understandings not only of Islam, but of single sects or even sub-sects within Islam. This is driven by the notion that Islam provides more than simply moral and spiritual direction to its adherents; it provides details on how to run both personal and public (state) affairs (*din-wa-dawla*). Islamist ideology thus pushes for the intertwining of the public and private realms of society under a single, imposed Islamic identity. [18] This fundamentalist approach to religion (and governance) is *black and white* and leaves little to no room for dissent and/or discussion.

Religious governance in Islamism is based on the conviction that other systems of governance are religiously prohibited as they replace Allah's laws with manmade ones: a practice that is illegitimate and amounts to *shirk* (- alienation from God and thus amounting to *kufr* – becoming an unbeliever). [19] Islamists are therefore intolerant of other systems of governance and thus politically *anti-pluralistic*. [20] Islamists that will participate in the political processes of other systems of governance have generally been found to adopt only their administrative processes in an attempt to gain influence and/or to push select items on the Islamist agenda in a piecemeal fashion. [21]

Islamists are also inherently *anti-democratic* insofar as the values and ethics of democracies, as practiced in Western societies, are concerned. This is because Western secular democracies are perceived by Islamists to be morally corrupted in their tolerance and protection of certain individual freedoms, and in their perceived unabashed materialism. Citizens of secular democracies are also free to independently negotiate amongst varying identities—some which may have little to do with their religious affiliations—and as such are influenced less by collectivist endeavors than by individual ambitions and concerns. For the Islamist project, such a system of values is anathema to its political ideology as theirs is a collectivist system of governance that relies on the submission of members of society to a uniform fundamentalist Islamic vision, which spells out codes of conduct by which all must abide. [22]

By extension, because Islamists claim to be doing God's work in implementing the Shari'a, their authority should be unquestioningly accepted. And so, contrary to the diversity and tolerance of democratic principles of human rights and individual freedoms, the practice of the latter as envisioned for an Islamist "state" is very different. In this respect, freedoms and rights are defined by the religious understandings of those in power.

The ideological constructs presented above constitute the core constructs of Islamism that are generally agreed upon across the entire spectrum of Islamist movements; constructs that define a political ideology that is inherently extremist in its nature. The "heterogeneity" among Islamists is manifest primarily in the means and methods they employ to realize their political vision. [23] The first issue is that of political participation, which has already been addressed above. The second, and perhaps more important, is the legitimacy and permissibility of the use of violence to pursue the ideology's political goals. The concept of armed Jihad (henceforth "Jihad") has been discussed in detail elsewhere, [24] yet an important distinction amongst Islamist groups is their position on Jihad as a tactic for the enforcement of Shari'a through their pursuit of an "Islamic" state.

On the one hand are groups that argue a top-down approach, whereby apostate leaders are forcibly removed, any resistance from the population is swiftly and (if need be) violently quelled, and Shari'a instituted. Violence is justified on the grounds that Muslim rulers are apostates (*kufr*) for ruling with other than

what Allah has ordained, and are thus committing *shirk*. The same argument may also apply to Muslim populations if they are seen as actively preventing the instatement of Shari'a, and willingly supporting alternate forms of governance. Islamist groups that follow this method are more commonly known as Salafi Jihadists or *takfiris*. On the other hand are those that believe in the steady indoctrination of populations into accepting their worldview and political agendas through a grassroots approach. This involves preaching (*da'wa*), non-violent activism, lobbying and/or political participation. [25] I am not aware of statistics on the actual percentage of Islamist groups that make up each category, yet a cursory study of the Islamist scene suggests that grassroots Islamists constitute the majority.

Because Islamism's core ideological core tenets closely correspond to elements of extremist political ideologies, any claim to deradicalization by militants should not only entail a rejection and/or condemnation of violence, but also a moderation in core Islamist ideological views. [26] This is supported by studies on Islamism that show clear linkages between its violent and non-violent manifestations, suggesting that we should be paying as much attention to the non-violent ideological components of Islamist ideology when assessing deradicalization. [27] In this context, the previously outlined core constructs of extremist political ideologies can be used to develop rough parameters for guiding the assessment of ideological deradicalization as follows:

- *From anti- to pro-pluralistic*: In the political context, this would involve the willingness to work with other political parties and accept compromise on Shari'a rules that would discriminate against segments of society who do not adhere to the faith and/or the interpretations adopted by Islamists. Essentially, it would mean rejecting the idea of the Islamic Shari'a as a comprehensive body of laws that form the backbone of a state constitution, and accept civil law as the primary legal code by which to rule. As Tibi (2012) states, 'Shari'a is interpretative, not legislative, and thus cannot be institutionalized.' [28]
- *From anti- to pro-democratic*: The term "democratic" here involves, first, the recognition of basic human and political rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and subsequent legal instruments based on it. Human rights are not tailored according to select understandings of specific belief systems, but are safeguarded as *non-negotiable* rights of individuals. Most importantly, this would involve the rejection of the view that a religious order should be imposed on society, and accepting that individuals have a right to choose the role religion plays in their own lives. This would essentially entail the separation of religion and state. Secondly, accepting the administrative elements of the democratic process – such as election procedures – does not suffice. Islamists accept this procedure due to its familiarity with the Islamic concepts of *shura* (consultation) and *ijma'* (consensus). Yet purely adopting instruments of the democratic process without subsequent changes in the attitudes of Islamists does not amount to moderation. [29]
- *Religious pluralism*: This would involve the acceptance that there is no one interpretation of the Islamic Shari'a, and that *ijtihad* – or interpretation – is an endeavor that should continue in order to make the religion more practicable for every day and age. Unlike the prevailing Islamist fundamentalist view that religious practices should seek to emulate the earliest practitioners of Islam and their followers, moderation in this context would suggest a need to reinterpret and/or reform religious concepts so as to better suit the realities of the modern day and age.
- *From conditional to unconditional violence*: As previously mentioned, the delegitimization of violence should not be conditional nor based on theological arguments that merely postpone Jihad so as to make it more effective for a future conflict in the continued pursuit of the ideology.

*Former Militants' Ideological Views**Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's "Document for Guiding the Jihad in Egypt and the World"*

Among the most prominent of the EIJ ideologues is Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, aka "Dr. Fadl". His manual *al-'Umda fi I'dad al-'Udda* ("The Essentials of Making Ready [for Jihad]") was extensively used in training camps in Afghanistan both during and after the anti-Soviet Jihad years. [30] Al-Sharif was allegedly given the leadership position of the EIJ by Ayman al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan for a number of years, before the latter revoked the title over a leadership dispute. [31] With the exception of one initiative led by another EIJ leader that will be covered in the next section, most attempts at producing a cohesive set of revisions (like those of the IG) by EIJ members failed. [32]

Then, in 2007, al-Sharif supposedly penned and released the "Document for Guiding the Jihad in Egypt and the World" to the Egyptian "Al-Masri Al-Yawm" paper and the Kuwaiti "Al-Jarida". [33] Al-Sharif's revisions were primarily hailed for their strong repudiation of the al-Qaeda Jihadist warfare doctrine, and thus drew strong criticism from then-deputy of Al-Qaeda Core (AQ-C) leader al-Zawahiri. [34] The revisions were not fully accepted by all members of the EIJ, yet were generally understood as meant to deliver a blow to the global Jihadist movement in general.

Given the evolution of both AQ and other Jihadist groups since 2007, it is safe to say that the revisions did not have the impact hoped for by many in the field of counter-terrorism. A closer inspection of the revisions further shows that the aim of eventually leading an armed struggle for the purpose of realizing Shari'a-based states and (eventually) a Caliphate are nevertheless *explicitly* reiterated in the revisions. Al-Sharif's delegitimization of violence excuses Muslims from their Jihad duties due to the prevailing weakness of Jihadists relative to their opponents. The foundation for the hypothetical army required to re-establish the Caliphate is not strong enough and so, the Islamic effort is better served by preaching with the aim of ideologically preparing segments of the population to constitute such a future army. This argument is theologically developed in two ways.

The first relates to capability and timing. In each section where Jihad is addressed, certain limiting conditions are stated on both the individual and collective levels of Jihad based on calculations of the capability to carry it out. This limitation not only refers to physical and financial capability, but also the duties that the Jihadist has to his family, the larger Muslim population, and the rules of Jihad regarding permissible situations/ contexts and targets. All restrictions placed on the use of violence primarily prohibit the bloodshed of Muslims and warn against it, with *dhimmis* (non-Muslims living in a Muslim state) [35] given second priority in only very specific situations.

The theological arguments provided for the "delegitimization" of Jihad in this regard are based on the scripture relating to the (primarily) Meccan phase of the Prophet's life. During the initial Meccan stages of the Islamic revelation and the expansion of Islam, the Prophet encouraged coexistence and tolerance so as not to disrupt his missionary work. After Muhammed's *hijra* (emigration) to Medina, and his successive religious and military domination of the city, Islam could more forcefully be imposed, given the strength of the Prophet and his followers. [36] Likening the current, prevailing conditions to the early days of Islam, al-Sharif calls for tolerance and restraint so as to safeguard the interests of Muslims; further violence would only give cause to inviting aggression against Muslim populations.

This being said, al-Sharif is careful to note other limiting conditions for the practice of Jihad should conditions for a successful armed struggle arise. The first is financial capability, [37] and here al-Sharif heavily

criticizes those that partake in criminal activities in order to finance the Jihad. [38] The obligation of Jihad is dropped if the Jihadist is unable to find honest sources of funding and/or unable to provide for his family for the duration that he is away from home. Other limiting conditions include the impermissibility of fighting without the permission of the parents, and the necessity of paying off all debts before leaving for Jihad. [39]

With regards to *takfir* (excommunication based on wrong belief), the general argument made is that it is impossible to know the measure of belief of fellow Muslims because it is impossible to look into their hearts. And thus, if individuals are openly practicing the main rites of Islam, they are Muslims. [40] The same goes for the ruler, except in those situations where solid evidence can be given to prove his disbelief. [41] In this case, removing the leader is a duty insofar as the negative consequences of his removal do not outweigh the benefits. If the latter is the case, al-Sharif gives a number of alternative Shari'a judgments of which patience, *hijra* (emigration), and disobedience are a few. Further, the fact that populations tolerate the rule of a disbeliever does not imply that they too are disbelievers. This is because it is impossible to know what is in their hearts, and they are similarly granted the excuse of weakness to remove the ruler.

The second broader argument relates to differences in how communities were organized in the time of the *Salaf* (direct successors of the Prophet), and how they are organized today. Because many Islamic rules are based on the ability to clearly separate between the 'abode of Islam/peace' and the 'abode of war', it is impossible to apply the same rules today given the nonexistence of the respective abodes. [42]

Al-Sharif uses various examples from the *Hadith* and the *Sunnah* to stress the importance of treaties, and the impermissibility of treachery in peacetime with the non-Muslims. This argument is made in reference to protecting tourists in Muslim-majority lands, and discrediting "homegrown" attacks by Muslims in Western societies. [43] Further, because there are no signs distinguishing Muslims from non-Muslims in the world today, there is no reliable means of ascertaining whether the target of the attacks will be primarily infidel or not. Again, the discussion on the permissibility of killing infidels is unclear. On the one hand, there are conditions which make them impermissible as targets in peacetime. On the other, the permissibility of killing infidels in wartime is hardly dwelled upon in the revisions, save to mention select categories of infidels that are generally impermissible targets even in wartime. [44]

Finally, although al-Sharif refrains from using names in his series, he is deeply critical of the so-called "Internet Jihadists" and those whose actions led to the demise of the Islamic Emirate (presumably Afghanistan). [45] It is within this context that al-Sharif is arguably reprimanding bin Laden for carrying out the "Manhattan raid" of 9/11, a move which led to the invasion of Afghanistan and the destruction of the Emirate.

While the Dr. Fadl's revisions clearly urge restraint and a more "rational" approach towards the practicability and permissibility of concepts that sanction violence, they do not entirely delegitimize the use of force. Violence is delegitimized on the grounds that the conditions for it to take place are not optimal. The ideal world, as implied by al-Sharif, *should* be one where there are distinct abodes which discriminate, based on religious affiliation. His worldview, with its justifications, continues to be strictly modeled on the example of the Prophet and his Companions, and the world as it existed at the advent of Islam. The primary difference between his views and those of violent Islamists is the means by which their shared worldview should be put in place. In this sense, it is obvious that al-Sharif is attempting to emphasize the need for a more intensive grassroots approach for the sake of realizing the conditions required for a "just" and successful future Jihad. And so, al-Sharif not only fails to deliver on providing an unconditional delegitimation of violence, but also fails to show moderation /compromise on key ideological constructs of Islamism. Indeed, the end goal of a

Caliphate is one al-Sharif continues to subscribe to, as he states in the closing chapters of the revisions series. [46]

*The Zumur Cousins' "Third Alternative Between Despotism and Surrender"*

Another important leader from the EIJ that took part in the revisions initiative was Egyptian military intelligence colonel Abbud al-Zumur. In 2009, Abbud and his cousin Tariq al-Zumur, the latter an IG member, teamed up to draft "The Third Alternative Between Despotism and Surrender." These revisions were drafted with the intention of highlighting the cousins' vision for the future of the Islamic current in general. [47]

The theological content parallels many of the arguments forwarded in the "Correcting Conceptions" revision series of the IG that will be reviewed in the next section and so, not much detail will be provided here. However, these revisions differed mainly from the latter's in that they included specific conditions deemed necessary for maintaining Islamist disengagement from violence. The first is that the state must guarantee the Islamists their political and social rights, as well as allow them to continue *da'wa*. (spreading the teachings of Islam) The second involves the release of political, i.e. Islamist, prisoners from jail. The final condition is the development of legal mechanisms through which corrupt and unjust leaders can be tried. [48] The Zumurs' publication is otherwise equally clear in its continued pursuit of progressing the Islamist cause.

*The Islamic Group (IG) and the "Correcting Conception Series"*

The IG's ceasefire initiative and revisions developed over a number of years. [49] The process involved in-depth discussions among the leadership both in Egyptian prisons and abroad, and ended with the group's publication of the "Correcting Conceptions Series" and a complete termination of armed activities in 1999.

Ewan Stein succinctly summarizes the major shifts in the IG's ideology in his study on the group. [50] For Stein, the most significant change is the group's backtracking on the issue of *takfirism*. [51] Prior to the revisions, the group endorsed the view that rulers who did not implement the Shari'a in its entirety were *kuffar*, and could thus be forcefully removed. The post-revision view suggests that not ruling according to Shari'a is not *kufr*, but sinning ('*asyan*'). [52] Similarly, whereas rulers should avoid implementing laws or governing in ways that directly contradict the sources of Shari'a, the revisions acknowledge that not 'every rule of earthly order must be found in these sources.' [53] The primacy of God's sovereignty, *hakimiyya*, is also no longer the sole task of the ruler through the implementation of Shari'a, but the task of every Muslim through independently abiding by the Shari'a. [54] Taken together, these points show a tendency to de-emphasize the importance of focusing efforts on the removal of the ruler. Instead, recognition is given to the importance of "every Muslim" in bringing about the change in society that the group wishes to see.

The second major ideological revision is the group's views on *hisba*. [55] Prior to the revisions, *hisba* was encouraged as an individual duty due to the perceived lack of "real" Islamic authority to do the job. It was encouraged so long as its outcome did not cause large-scale strife and discord i.e. *fitna*. And so, the individual *muhtasib* was given the authority by the group's Charter to pursue the duties of *hisba*; even if it meant that un-Islamic behaviors be beaten out of those practicing them. [56] The renewed interpretation of *hisba* in the revisions is less flexible, and understands it as a state's responsibility first and foremost. [57] As Stein explains, 'the ruler, no longer being considered an infidel, can appoint official *muhtasibun*.' [58] Individual *hisba* is limited to situations where the officially appointed *muhtasibun* are unavailable, and the crime significant enough to prompt immediate "voluntary" intervention. [59] In both points, excuses are made for the ruler



so as to keep him within the Muslim fold and prevent him from being targeted. Physical coercion of any sort is similarly discouraged on the grounds that the authority of such coercion does not belong with individuals, but with the state.

As with al-Sharif however, the duty of waging Jihad is conditional. Here, and referring primarily to revisions penned by Nagih Ibrahim (the final case study in this article), the killing of a Muslim transgressor is even more pressing than that of the infidels. Similar to al-Sharif's views, this duty depends on the direness of its consequences for the Islamic *ummah*; if its costs outweigh its benefits, then it is no longer an obligation to carry out. [60] The same categories of "protected" individuals, as mentioned in al-Sharif's revisions, are also deemed impermissible targets of Jihad. [61]

For both groups, the use of violence is clearly discouraged. Whereas such a rejection could amount to a measure of moderation, with violent measures being the most extreme tactics in the militant's toolbox, the reasons for abandoning Jihad remain clearly conditional. The duty of Jihad, as a means of spreading Islam, is not questioned. What is questioned is the utility in adopting such means given the overwhelming weakness of those possessing the desire to carry it out. Thus, the theological delegitimization provided in the revisions temporarily relieves the Muslim from his duty using clauses from Islamic scriptures. Should the condition of weakness be reversed however, the revisions are arguably guidelines for appropriate Islamic conduct in waging a "just" Jihad.

### ***Current Militants' Ideological Views***

In the following section, the current views of three of the individuals either partially or fully responsible for drafting the aforementioned revisions are studied.

#### *Sayyid Imam al-Sharif Now: The Myth of Deradicalization*

The following narrative is constructed from elements gathered from three interviews [62] with al-Sharif, [63] and focus on the main differences between the revisions and his later views.

The most significant revelation emerging from the interviews is the suggestion that al-Sharif may not have authored the final revisions. Al-Sharif claims that he did not want to write anything in the first place, but was urged to do so by the Egyptian State Security. The security apparatus needed a written statement from al-Sharif to counter the strong influence of his earlier works on Jihad. According to al-Sharif, he was pressured to emphasize opinions about the futility of Jihad. [64] Important for the security apparatus back then was that a senior figure from within Jihadist circles be shown to condemn violence against the state in a bid to discourage further acts of violence. However, having to hand write the revisions in prison before handing them to members of the state security, al-Sharif claims to have never seen the final document; suggesting that parts of the final publications may have been doctored by the state. This could be an explanation for the seeming recidivism observed in the following narrative. Namely, al-Sharif never changed his views because the original revisions were never fully representative of his views in the first place.

Al-Sharif reiterates his view that Jihad continues to be a duty incumbent on Muslims, and has been since 1810. The year 1810 allegedly marks the beginning of the infiltration of Western/European laws aided by the *wali* of Egypt and Sudan, Muhammed Ali Pasha. Since then, successive Egyptian regimes have been ruling in a style other than what Allah has ordained, and this amounts to *kufir*. [65][66] In contrast to his views on *takfir* in the revisions, al-Sharif asserts that current Muslim regimes and societies are guilty of *kufir* because they do not rule solely by the Shari'a. With the exception of administrative laws that do not contradict the



Shari'a, every other area of governance is accommodated for in the scripture. This stands in sharp contrast to the cautionary tone he adopted in the revisions regarding *takfir*.

Islamic governance for al-Sharif means the immediate implementation of Islamic punishments, or *hudood*, as prescribed in the scripture. According to al-Sharif, '...There is no such thing as *hudood* only being implemented after the erection of an Islamic state. *Hudood* are *necessary* to bring about the Islamic state. And Allah said: 'And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous.' (Surat Al-Baqarah 2:179). [67] After all, 'When Amr ibn al-'As came to Egypt, were there Muslims? No. They were mostly Copts. But he nevertheless implemented the *hudood* and the Shari'a.' [68]

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Egypt's ruling party at the time of these interviews, similarly fails to escape the apostasy charge. Its failure to apply the *hudood*, as well as immediately implement Shari'a, when it came to power, is one of the biggest indicators that it is a "hypocrite" government. It paid lip service to the Islamic cause, yet demonstrated no real intention of establishing an Islamic state. There are "nullifying" actions in Islam, which if carried out by Muslims, invalidate the faith of a person. [69] The failure to implement the full body of Shari'a laws, including the prescribed *hudood*, is one of the nullifiers that render the ruler an apostate.

In contrast to his views in the revisions, Muslims' failure to remove what he sees as apostate regimes makes them complicit in the government's apostasy. 'The Jihad is a duty upon the belly dancer...because they are all Muslims [despite sinning]. So as long as they are still within the Islamic faith, they are obliged to carry out the duties as prescribed by Allah under the umbrella of [the verses] 'oh you who have entered into the faith...' [70] However, as with his views on capability in the revisions, if society is not able to remove the apostate ruler, a number of alternative solutions exist for the Muslims who live in this state. [71]

For al-Sharif, the study of Islam is unlike that of other sciences. In the natural sciences for example, the best of the findings are the most recent. In religion, the best is the earliest. [72] This is because, the Hadith makes clear that 'The best of my community are my generation and then those who follow them and then those who follow them', and this is relevant not just to *tawhid* ["the oneness" of Allah], but to all of Islam. The closer you get to the time of the *rasul*, the closer you are to the truth, and justice.' [73] And so, *ijtihad* (exegesis) is not a process that is supposed to progress Islamic theology so that it better applies to current situations, but one that ended at a certain point in history and culminated in distinctive Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

For al-Sharif, although there are several types of Jihad—like Jihad al-nafs (battling the internal devil) – '...the meaning of the word in Shari'a means the killing of apostates. All the other forms of Jihad do exist, but they are extras and when referred to are referred to specifically as alternative forms of jihad...if there is no other word attached to the core word "jihad", then it means combatting the apostates.' [74]

As with his views in the revisions, Jihad should be based on a cost-benefit analysis. According to al-Sharif, capability also rests on the willingness of the state (Egypt) to lend support to the Jihadists. Because al-Sharif views both state and society as apostate, his conclusion is that Jihad is unlikely to take off any time soon. [75] In none of the interviews does al-Sharif make an effort to dwell on the conditions and limitations of Jihad that are mentioned in the revisions.

Finally, al-Sharif's main critique of al-Qaeda-Core (AQ-C) is that the organization was not founded on a solid program or *manhaj*, [76] as much as it was on a cult of personality built around Osama bin Laden. [77] Besides his criticism of AQ-C's lack of *manhaj* however, al-Sharif reserves his most scathing comments for Ayman al-Zawahiri. Five specific points are made to discredit the current AQ-C leader, of which most are attacks on his integrity and personality, and not on his ideological views. [78]

Al-Sharif's current views are significantly at odds with those in his alleged revisions. Although he maintains that the current conditions for Jihad remain too weak for a successful armed struggle, al-Sharif backtracks on his revisionary views on *takfirism*; castigating fellow Muslims for not uniting to overthrow what is obviously apostate rule. Despite not explicitly calling for renewed Jihad, al-Sharif is nevertheless ideologically legitimizing it through his denunciation of entire Muslim populations as being apostate. The conclusion reached from the interviews is that, should the capability arise, Jihadists would have the right to shed the blood of the apostate regimes and those in society who support them. Al-Sharif thus fails to show change on any of the parameters for ideological moderation identified in this article. Given his allegations of having been coerced into cooperation with state security services, it is likely that what is observed in these interviews is not recidivism but a continuation of his ideological persuasions prior to his imprisonment.

#### *Abbud al-Zumur Now: The Extremist Middle Ground?*

I consulted several interviews for constructing Abbud al-Zumur's narratives, but used only one that best summarizes Zumur's views in all the interviews he featured in. [79] Tariq al-Zumur, Abbud al-Zumur's "Third Alternative" co-author and cousin, is not covered here due to the lack of available interviews that featured him, discussing the topics addressed in this article.

Zumur states that the reason the Egyptian Jihadist movement decided to give up violence was because Mubarak was fighting the entire Islamist movement 'as though he were fighting Israel.' [80] Refraining from provoking the wrath of the state was seen as necessary for expanding Islam via alternative means—a higher priority than fighting a ruler whose blood was *nevertheless viewed as legitimate to spill*. In this sense, Mubarak was still viewed by the various Jihadist groups – including the IG – as an apostate, but killing him was perceived to be counterproductive to the achievement of the desired Islamist end state.

When asked about the charge of apostasy and the permission to spill the blood of Muslims, Zumur states that a decision on the latter may be reached according to the *ijtihad* of the Islamic student. Insofar as the student carries out certain actions according to what the learned scholars say, no blame can come to the student if it is later discovered that s/he erred. Further, because the scholar is limited by his/her own worldly bounded rationality when carrying out *ijtihad*, he is also exempt from the responsibility of error. [81]

For example, in the case of Sadat, '...several [religious] scholars [82] issued *fatawa* that both permitted his assassination/murder [as well as] removing or replacing the Sadat regime... The religious problems on which the *fatawa* were based pertained to Sadat's religious transgression against the Shari'a in slowing down its implementation, his attack against the religion and the cussing of the clergy, as well as the Camp David treaty which...led to a collapse [in the Arab world] whose repercussions we are still suffering from today.' [83] Because the Egyptian courts failed to arrest and prosecute Sadat for failing to implement the Shari'a and for participating in foreign policies that they found offensive to Islam, they decided to take the matter into their own hands.

For Zumur, the use of violence is contextual. Besides the cost-benefit analysis that underlies the decision-making behind the utility of violence, different contexts apparently allow or disallow violence. Not every ruler that does not implement the Shari'a should be killed: '...there could be a ruler who wants to implement Shari'a but cannot because there are national and local pressures preventing him from doing so, and the religious scholars do take all of this into account...and so he is let off.' [84] To this end, Zumur is arguably more moderate in his calculations on what constitutes an apostate ruler than al-Sharif is. However, the repeated definition of apostasy as a measured relation to the degree and speed of the implementation of Shari'a indicates that Zumur's ultimate Islamist end goals remain unchanged. Further, it is not a matter

of not being required to rule according to the Shari'a, but of recognizing pressures that may be impeding the implementation of the process. Given the subjectivity of the process of identifying which pressures are significant enough to stall the application of Shari'a, even this ideological leeway is ineffective in delegitimizing violence.

Asked specifically about the nature of the "Islamic" state that Zumur and his ideological cohorts have in mind, Zumur responds by claiming that it is possible to have such a state in a democracy. 'If it [democracy] is how I understand the popular definition of democracy, which is the nation being governed by those within it [self-governance], then such self-governance cannot occur in an absolute manner, because there are excesses in the current form of democracy. In the revisions...we [the Islamists] say that there are traditions that should not be omitted. In other words, the majority rule is available in Islam—the majority rule of the people of knowledge, the majority rule of those that have learned and carry out Islamic punishments i.e. *qisas*....The popular understanding of democracy that allows the existence of opposing ideas, as well as the elections is allowed and is available as a tool of "democracy". Islam does not prevent elections.' [85]

For Zumur, whereas the minority rights are apparently "ignored" in secular democracies, Islam outlines the rights of minorities regardless of the composition of the majority. [86] And so, if Islam were to be the source of governance of a state, then minorities would automatically be protected. These minority rights would involve the payment of the *jizya* tax by the Christians so that they may be protected from having to fight in wars against countries whose armies are primarily composed of Christians, for example. 'Psychologically and emotionally this is not fair, so they pay for this protection and this exemption of having to fight.' [87] Similarly, the *hudoos* are a must, and are viewed favorably by Zumur, 'If one or two people publicly have their hands cut off, then other people will be deterred from stealing.' [88]

Finally, when asked if a political party whose ideology opposes that of the Islamists' were to win a majority in the elections, Zumur replies that the Islamists would then have to be content with the peoples' choice and being a "minority". He compares such a scenario to that of Muslims living in Western democracies where, despite the majority rule not being Islamic, the Muslims continue to live there as a minority. [89] The subtle implication of this is that, should Egyptians choose an alternative political ideology to rule them (not Islamist, i.e. not Islamic), then (the Islamists, i.e. real Muslims) will have to be content with living as a (Islamist = Islamic) minority in an (un-Islamic) Egypt. The condition in this case however should still be the ability to prosecute an unjust ruler, presumably in the case whereby the ruler attempts to crackdown on the Islamists' activities. Again, one is faced with the problem of defining what is meant by "unjust."

What becomes clear from the interviews is that Zumur shows little change on any of the core ideological constructs of Islamist ideology. Furthermore, given the conditions listed for the continuation of a ceasefire as found in the "Third Alternative", which Zumur also refers to in the interviews, I find little evidence to suggest that this delegitimization of violence is anything but conditional and thus temporary. Out of all the conditions mentioned in the "Third Alternative", Zumur places stress on the one that demands the development of a mechanism for holding unjust rulers accountable for their actions. My reading of this particular emphasis is that, given the still vibrant revolutionary zeal that existed at the time of these interviews and that thrived on similar sentiments, Zumur's emphasis on unjust leaders as a drive to radicalism attempted to both excuse past actions and position the Islamist narrative within that of the mainstream. In other words, he is trying to downplay the differences between the Islamists and the remainder of the nation by showing them that their narratives are more similar than is commonly perceived. It is clear, however, that Zumur maintains his view that any non-Islamist form of governance is also non-Islamic. As with the revisions, he also maintains that so long as the Islamists are allowed to continue their *da'wa* activities, i.e. the grassroots approach, violence is not necessary.

*Nagih Ibrahim: Potential Ideological Deradicalization?*

There are clear differences between the thoughts and ideological revisions of IG preacher Nagih Ibrahim and those of al-Sharif and Zumur. Like those studied before him, Nagih Ibrahim was responsible for partially drafting revisions for his group. The content of both the revisions and the more recent interviews in the case of Ibrahim are different from the latter in that these suggest a degree of ideological moderation, as per the parameters identified earlier in this article, that the others do not.

According to Ibrahim, [90] the reason for the spread of modern day *takfirism* is due to the weakness and failure of moderate preachers to effectively counter it. There are select individuals (i.e. *muftis*) that have the right to engage in the passing of binding legal edicts or *fatawa*, and they are afforded that right because they have spent a majority of their lives being educated in the scripture and the various schools of *fiqh* and are thus qualified to do so. Unlike Zumur and al-Sharif, Ibrahim rejects the opinion that Muslims who simply have some knowledge of their religion can adopt the task of passing *fatawa* that prescribe actions. Even those engaged in *da'wa* are not allowed to issue edicts, nor are they allowed to prescribe actions.

Unlike al-Sharif, Ibrahim recognizes the concept of *ijtihad* and encourages pluralism in the interpretation of the scripture and the various schools of *fiqh*. Ibrahim cites Imam Malik ibn Anas, a highly respected Sunni scholar, whose most famous response to questions on matters related to jurisprudence was 'I don't know.' The idea behind this example is that even learned scholars of jurisprudence take caution when passing *fatawa*, for fear that they may be wrong in their opinions. When they pass such edicts, *muftis* are effectively "signing off" on behalf of Allah and his Prophet. And so, many *muftis* will spend considerable time on framing and drafting an edict before they pass it. Even then, as Ibrahim contends, the best of the *muftis* will never claim to provide infallible opinions. Ibrahim cites Imam al Shafi'i's famous contention, 'My opinion is right, with the possibility that it may be wrong.' [91]

These views on accountability for *fatawa* in Islam, the role of *ijtihad*, as well as the ease—or difficulty—of passing edicts stands in stark contrast to even the less extreme Zumur. These views also arguably present a less fundamentalist interpretation of religion that clearly indicates a movement away from religious anti-pluralism to religious pluralism in Ibrahim's acceptance of continuous *ijtihad*.

For Ibrahim, the concept of Jihad is one that has been abused by not only those claiming to wage it, but also by those preaching it. A preponderance of preachers, as well as individuals who have no right to be prescribing actions, preach about the importance of Jihad yet fail to teach their followers about the pre-conditions for a valid Jihad, its conditions, and its limitations. Ibrahim does not entirely subscribe to the view that Jihad is an individual duty, and speaks of it in a purely defensive form whereby Jihad should be waged only in response to armed aggression, and only when it is prepared for and fought by a regular Muslim army (i.e. under the aegis of a state). In this regard, it is important to stress the differentiation as clarified by Tibi (2012) between classic/traditional and Islamist Jihad. In the former, Jihad is understood as conventional warfare carried out by Muslim armies in the past for the expansion of the religion. Although similarly imperialistic in nature to the Jihad represented by the violent Islamists today, it differs in that it is conventional, and not irregular/terrorist as is the contemporary Jihad. [92]

The consent of the Imam, i.e. the ruler in modern day terminology, is paramount for the decision to wage Jihad. Although this indicates that the state should be involved in the decision, Ibrahim does not make clear whether this and the condition of a regular Islamic army are key to Jihad, or whether the Imam's consent may suffice for a group of individuals to fight on the *ummah's* behalf. In all cases, Ibrahim clearly seeks to delegitimize the highly simplistic, individualized, and irregular nature of Jihad that the world is seeing itself

manifest in non-state global Jihadist movements today, while he stresses a more centralized and controlled version.

What might be most indicative of further ideological deradicalization in Ibrahim's case is the differentiation Ibrahim makes between the politics of a religious *jama'a* and that of the state. For Ibrahim, whereas the *jam'a* has the right to set its own rules, based on its own ideology, and act accordingly, a state cannot do the same. Ibrahim explains that a *jama'a*, like a club, may be built on religious grounds whereby relationships with communities and individuals are built on specific religious doctrines defining the membership of the *jam'a*. [93] This should not be translated into a state's system of governance, however, as the state encompasses several political ideologies, religions, and ethnicities that (theoretically speaking) should prohibit the imposition of a single system of thought or belief as a foundation for governance.

And so, whereas the *jama'a* might refuse to do business with a number of other states and/or entities due to doctrinal reasons, the state should not enjoy the same luxury. This is because all states act first and foremost with their interests in mind, and these interests can only be realized in relation to other countries' interests. It is a very realistic view of politics, and one that does not impose theological constraints on the system of governance; which is in and of itself a step away from the religiously motivated conceptualization of state governance underlying Islamism. [94]

It is precisely this separation between religion and preaching and state governance that poses the strongest argument for ideological deradicalization in Ibrahim's case. Whereas the latter may still be interested in Muslims maintaining strong Islamic identities, his insistence that no one doctrine is sufficient to run a country inhabited by individuals that follow different sets of beliefs, doctrines, and political ideologies, shatters one of the most important foundations of political Islam; the need for Shari'a to be the main source of governance for a real Islamic state. It thus shows ideological shifts on the parameters of political anti-pluralism and fundamentalist interpretations of religion. Furthermore, although Ibrahim does not elaborate on his views regarding democracy, his acceptance of diverse beliefs in society as well as the unsuitability of one doctrine to rule over all suggests, to some extent, pro-democratic behavior. The interview material consulted for this article, however, provides little to work with along these lines.

Ibrahim's views should nevertheless be taken with a grain of salt. Given the fact that most revisions focused on *da'wa* to Islamize society in preparation of a popular mentality needed to create a Jihad-ready majority, it is possible that Ibrahim could simply be paying lip service to democratic ideals to take pressure of the *da'wa* circles. This is suggested in his comments on the permissibility of *jama'as* to maintain their own doctrinal views in preaching. However, on the level of politics, the fact that Ibrahim publicizes his views regarding the separation of religion from state governance is nevertheless a welcome change.

### ***Concluding Note: Rifa'i Taha for a Return to Violence***

In the process of writing this article, another spiritual leader of the IG featured in an interview on the Muslim Brotherhood-run TV channel "Al-Sharq TV", broadcasting from Turkey. [95] Rifa'i Taha was a member of the IG's Shura Council, based outside Egypt at the time of the revisions. According to Ashour (2009), Taha was fired by the IG for allegedly signing on with al-Qaeda's International Front for Fighting Jews and Crusaders. [96] Taha then withdrew from the declaration and was supported by select members of the IG who asserted that spoilers of the ceasefire initiative from the EIJ had set him up. [97] Taha is not one of the leaders that took part in the revisions drafting process, and had been off the radar until resurfacing recently.



Despite his absence from the revisions process however, Taha's previous position in the IG suggests that he could still have influence with followers today. In the above-mentioned interview, Taha explicitly calls for a return to violence against the regime of Egyptian president Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi. According to Taha, the violent transgression of the current Egyptian regime against the sovereignty of the formerly elected Brotherhood government is not one that can successfully be fought using peaceful means. Because there does not appear to be another mechanism with which to bring al-Sisi to charge for these transgressions, the taking up of arms appears to be the only option. Such justifications for violence heavily echo the conditions set by the Zumur cousins in their own revisions. This should also come as no surprise as violence in response to Sisi's actions against the Brotherhood, representative of the "Islamic current", has already materialized; albeit not in response to any specific directives of former militants that remain inside Egypt today. Given his role as one of the former militant leaders of the IG, it will be interesting to see how the nature of terrorism will develop in the near future in Egypt.

### Conclusion

Using case studies of former Egyptian militant groups, this article provided an analysis of the alleged deradicalization claims of select former militant leaders.

First, the article expanded the definition of deradicalization, arguing that any appreciation of deradicalization must take into account two things:

- i. The justification and reasons given for the delegitimization of violence and,
- ii. Shifts in the worldview itself, and thus also non-violent elements of the Islamist ideology.

Building on the second point, key ideological constructs inherent to extremist political ideologies, of which Islamism is one, were used to develop rough parameters for the assessment of ideological moderation for each of the militants studied. These included a shift in views tending towards more pluralistic and democratic attitudes, and a less fundamentalist view of Islam in general. These parameters, along with the study of speech acts and/or written material of former Islamist militants, attempted to provide a method by which to assess moderation on ideological constructs that would better point to ideological deradicalization. By gauging militants' views on specific topics as they fall under each of these parameters, I aimed at drawing attention to non-violent ideological elements and their implications for studying deradicalization.

Finally, the former militants' positions on violence were also analyzed to determine whether they represented an absolute/unconditional or conditional rejection of violence. Only the former was deemed a real indicator of ideological moderation, in addition to changes on one or more of the previously mentioned parameters. Although each of these parameters alone could be expanded to include several others for a more nuanced "measurement" of deradicalization, the ones developed here were intended as a starting point from which further research could be dedicated to creating a more in-depth framework of metrics.

It is obvious from the overview of the initial revisions that the delegitimization of violence, i.e. Jihad, is by no means intended as discouragement of Jihad as a duty of Muslims. Rather, the revisions simply aim at clarifying conditions needed for a *successful* and "just" Jihad – a Jihad that fully complies with the rules of warfare as dictated in Islamic *fiqh*. While this clearly amounts to a form of disengagement from violence, the fact that there exist conditions under which violence should be recommenced in the pursuit of future Islamist goals challenges conclusions regarding the deradicalization of the militants discussed here.



Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, whose work has influenced both Egyptian as well as global Jihadist ideologies, has reneged on his earlier recantations while also suggesting that these may have been doctored. Al-Sharif's continuing delegitimization of Jihad is based on his belief that the armed struggle is useless and counterproductive due to a lack of capability. Yet he nevertheless encourages the pursuit of a Taliban-like state, should the capability arise. Given the current successes of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria at the time of writing, it is worrying that one of the most ideological Jihadist influencers continues to promote the struggle when the capability is suddenly presenting itself in neighboring theaters of Jihad.

Similarly, EIJ leader Abbud al-Zumur shows little change in his adherence to Islamist ideology. Although his discursive style is softer than al-Sharif's, his reasons for abandoning the armed struggle bear strong resemblances to al-Sharif's. Armed struggle is futile in the face of regimes that are capable and willing to defeat Islamist activists. Because violence is seen as counterproductive to the *da'wa* efforts of Islamists, it is heavily discouraged, as its result is the weakening of these efforts in Egypt. Zumur is an example of an Islamist that has disengaged, yet continues to pursue the vision of an Islamist-led state through the development of constituencies whose numbers could in the future be significant enough to vote for and sustain an Islamist government.

It is also worth noting that many of the conditions noted in the Zumurs' treatise for the prevention of violent resurgence are no longer satisfied under the current Egyptian regime. [98] Indeed, it appears that some within Islamist groups are acting according to such conditions and arguing for a renewed struggle, as demonstrated by Rifa'i Taha's latest interview.

Nagih Ibrahim arguably represents the only case where an ideological shift has occurred. Out of all three former militants studied, he is the only one that has provided an argument for the decoupling of religion and governance; implying a shift from the core Islamist requirement of Shari'a-based governance. His views on the permissibility of renewed *ijtihad* and its necessity for the modern day and age also indicate a relaxation of the fundamentalist interpretations that underpin Islamist ideology. To this end, Ibrahim shows a moderation on both the "pluralism" and "fundamentalism" parameters.

It is, however, difficult to accurately assess the extent to which his views are genuine. In many of the revisions, the ideologues go as far as to contend that concealing one's Islamic beliefs is permissible for the sake of continuing the proliferation of the religion via alternative means. Because Islamists generally see the establishment of Islamist states and the Caliphate as a duty enshrined in their Islamic beliefs, Ibrahim could simply be practicing his own interpretation of *taqiyya*. [99] Nevertheless, even if it is lip service, it is arguably still useful for countering the extremist ideology that many of his former peers still openly adhere to.

Finally, this paper aimed at demonstrating how claims to non-violence by no means indicate accompanying shifts in extremist worldviews. There can be moderation even within extremist ideologies, where ideological exceptions are made for the sake of political expediency and/or survival. This is most apparent in the former militants' cost-benefit analyses on the utility of waging Jihad, as well as the excuses made for rulers not governing according to the Shari'a, for the sake of survival and continued proselytizing in the pursuit of their Islamist goals. This hardly entails an ideological shift as much as it does a strategic one. It is a strategy that advocates tolerance of "others" in society, whilst building support through the indoctrination of the masses. For both militant groups studied, the basic implication was that Islamists should focus on creating both the populations and conditions deemed necessary to carry out a "just" Jihad. In none of the written materials provided did I find indications that Jihad is no longer a duty for the eventual restoration of Islamic governance to states.

The overall picture painted is not optimistic. ISIS, at the time of writing, arguably presents Jihadists with some of the conditions necessary for Jihad as cited by some of the lead ideologues covered in this article. Combined with a renewed call to violence in the face of oppressive measures adopted by the current Egyptian regime against Islamists, Jihadists could seek a rapprochement with extremist groups across the region in their fight and answer the call to arms; a grim future scenario for both Egypt and the region as a whole.

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## Notes

[1] Most importantly, the conclusions of Omar Ashour's seminal study regarding the deradicalization of armed Islamist movements. See Omar Ashour. *The De-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*. ((London: Routledge, 2009).

[2] Ibid.

[3] The term "former" is used to denote groups that, at the time of Ashour's study, were no longer active due to imprisonment and/or disbandment within Egypt.

[4] Ibid., 6.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ashour, *The De-radicalization of Jihadists*, 4.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*, 5.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Based on her research on the drivers of disengagement and deradicalization, Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) finds that, 'Even if the original reason for an exit did not implicate ideology, extremist attitudes might well moderate with time as a consequence of behavioral change—no longer acting out the extremist ideology,' in Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen. "Promoting Exit from Violent Extremism: Themes and Approaches," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 36, no. 2 (2013): 110.

[11] For a good overview on psychological and physical reasons for disengagement, see John Horgan, "Disengaging from Terrorism," in David V. Canter (Ed.) *The Faces of Terrorism: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 257-76.

[12] The remainder of the paper will demonstrate how the delegitimization of violence by the former militants, both in their revisions and their more recent interviews, is based on a cost-benefit analysis that simply argues for delaying armed Jihad as opposed to delegitimizing it as a duty of Muslims that should be carried out in the continued pursuit of Islamist goals. Specifically, Jihad is delayed until conditions are favorable for its successful execution.

[13] For an example of studies providing an overview of the revisions of Sayyid 'Imam al-Sharif see Rohan Gunaratna and Mohamed Bin Ali, "De-Radicalization Initiatives in Egypt: A Preliminary Insight," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 4 (2009): 277-91, and Paul Kamolnick, "Al Qaeda's Sharia Crisis: Sayyid Imam and the Jurisprudence of Lawful Military Jihad," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 5 (2013): 394-418.

[14] See Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," International Center

for Counter-Terrorism–The Hague: ICCT, March 2013. <http://www.icct.nl/publications/icct-papers/radicalisation-de-radicalisation-counter-radicalisation-a-conceptual-discussion-and-literature-review>.

[15] Ibid.

[16] It is important to take into consideration that Islamism is not only confined to Sunni Islam, but also manifests itself in other Islamic sects such as Shi'ism and even Sufism. This paper focuses solely on Sunni Islamism as the former militant groups studied are Sunni.

[17] The Shari'a "law" as understood by Islamists is one which collects various commandments and judgments pertaining to Islamic conduct in all areas of life as literally found in Islamic scripture and schools of thought, codifies these commandments, and applies them as a distinct form of Islamic common law. According to Islamists, the dictates for proper Islamic governance are found in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Sunnah; accounts of the Prophet's life transmitted and documented by his followers and those who knew them. More importantly, many within the Islamist current push a literalist reading of these texts, ignoring centuries of exegesis and interpretations that follow the passing of the first two/three generations succeeding the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. This is likely due to the fact that within the Islamist movement, there is a preponderance of Salafi influence which at its core places heavy emphasis on literal interpretations of the scripture, as well as the first three generations following the death of Muhammad (the Salaf). In reality though, there is no one body of Shari'a laws *per se*, but rather as scholar Khaled M. Abou El Fadl (2005) contends, Shari'a is '...the sum total of technical legal methodologies, precedents, and decisions...' that are combined in a subjective process of interpretation and analogy carried out by Muslim jurists.–See Khaled Abou El Fadl. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 2005), 39.

[18] The "ism" essentially explains the morphing of fundamental understandings of religion into a political ideology: agendas that affect the *politik*.

[19] The latter describes the term given to those who place others beside Allah in worship; the former amounts to something similar to excommunication where the Muslim is stripped of his/her faith.

[20] Despite the fact that some Islamist parties at times accept to work within a pluralist system as minority parties, the latter have traditionally exhibited close to zero tolerance as majority parties or else refrained from participation regarding issues they deem contrary to Shari'a. See for example Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics* 63, no. 02 (2011): 347-76.

[21] For more on the influence of Islamist political parties in "Islamizing" society through political participation, see Gehad Auda, "The "Normalization" of the Islamic Movement in Egypt from the 1970s to the Early 1990s"; in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott (Eds.) *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*. (Appleby. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1994), 374-412.

[22] For an in-depth read on the role of religion in the political ideology of Islamism, as well as the characteristics of secularism, see Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur, *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

[23] For an excellent framework on the differences and commonalities of Sunni Islamism, see Christoph Schuck, "A Conceptual Framework of Sunni Islamism," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 4 (2013): 485-506.

[24] For example, Patrick Sookhdeo, *Global Jihad: The Future in the Face of Militant Islam* (McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2007); for how it generally relates to Islamism as an ideology, see Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[25] For an in-depth study on the two, see Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

[26] An important caveat to note is that ideological deradicalization could be occurring despite an individual's continued participation in one role or the other in a terrorist organization. Various studies on deradicalization tell us that there are often significant physical constraints on individuals leaving the terrorist organization that force them to remain; despite there being significant disillusionment on the ideological level. However, because this article deals with disbanded militant organizations, this is not a concern relevant to the study of the groups in question. Further, because it is often the group leaders that may exert pressure on individuals in the group to stay together, this particular concern similarly holds little relevance in this case. It is group leaders themselves that initiated the revision processes in the cases of the Egyptian militant groups covered.

[27] See discussion on violent and non-violent extremism in Alex P. Schmid, *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism–The Hague. May 2014. <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Violent-Non-Violent-Extremism-May-2014.pdf>.

[28] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 118.

[29] 'Democracy is like a train: we take a ride in it and we get off when we reach the station of our destination,' said the current president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the Islamist AKP party back in 2010, in Von Popp, Maximilian. "Volkstribun Von Anatolien." *Der Spiegel*. November 29, 2010. Accessed December

15, 2014. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-75376560.html>. As research on Islamism generally finds that this is the case for many Islamists that partake in the political process, the adoption of the electoral process is thus deemed insufficient as a stand-alone indicator for ideological moderation.

[30] Al-Zayat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*, 28.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, 56.

[33] Al-Sayyed Imam Ben Abdulaziz al-Sharif, "The Document for Guiding the Jihad in Egypt and the World," *The University of Melbourne National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia*, November 2007, PDF. <[http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national\\_imams\\_consultative\\_forum/works\\_and\\_statements\\_by\\_former\\_extremists](http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national_imams_consultative_forum/works_and_statements_by_former_extremists)>.

[34] For an overview on the topic, see Omar Ashour, "De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 5 (2008). <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/36/html>

[35] The term traditionally stands for the "People of the Book", which refers to members of religions that similarly possess "revealed" scripture, i.e. primarily Judaism and Christianity. For more details, see Mahmoud Ayoub, "Dhimma in Qur'an and Hadith," in Robert Hoyland (Ed.) *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 25–36.

[36] For example, Al-Sharif, "Documenting the Jihad," 38–40.

[37] Mentioned in Ibid., 35–37.

[38] Al-Sharif gives examples of forbidden financing methods for Jihad, and these include hostage taking, theft, or the transgression against the life and possessions of Muslims. See Ibid., 33–37.

[39] Ibid., 48–52.

[40] As an example in the revisions, the following Sahih Bukhari hadith no.386, narrated by Anas Bin Malik in the "Prayers" (Salat) book is cited: 'Whoever prays like us and faces our Qibla and eats our slaughtered animals is a Muslim and is under Allah's and His Apostle's protection. So do not betray Allah by betraying those who are in His protection.'

[41] For an overview on treatment of the ruler, see Ibid., 64–69.

[42] Ibid., 76–78.

[43] Ibid., 79–86.

[44] For a good overview of the protected categories as per al-Sharif's revisions, see Kamolnick, *Al Qaeda's Sharia Crisis*, 396–402.

[45] Ibid., 24,104,174, and 176 respectively.

[46] Ibid., 203–214.

[47] For an overview of the contents of the revisions, see Nelly Lahoud, "The Forgotten Recantation," *Jihadica: Documenting the Global Jihad* (blog), January 8, 2010. <http://www.jihadica.com/the-forgotten-recantation/>. The link to the original Arabic-language series can also be found at the above link.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*, 81.

[50] Ewan Stein, "An Uncivil Partnership: Egypt's Jama'a Islamiyya and the State after the Jihad," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5, 863–881.

[51] Ibid., 874.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Islamic moral policing or the "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil."

[56] Ibid., 871–872.

[57] Ibid., 875–876.

[58] Ibid., 875.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Hamdi Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Azim, Najih Ibrahim Abdullah, and Ali Muhammad Ali al-Sharif, “Shedding Light on Errors Committed in Jihad (Taslit al-adwa’ ‘ala ma waqa’a fi al-jihad min akhta’) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2002), 5, “Murajaat.com” .doc [http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national\\_imams\\_consultative\\_forum/works\\_and\\_statements\\_by\\_former\\_extremists](http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national_imams_consultative_forum/works_and_statements_by_former_extremists)

[61] Ibid., 5–8.

[62] The three interviews used for constructing al-Sharif’s narrative are *Al Sada Al-Muhtaramoun* (“*The Respected Gentlemen*”): *Jihadists in Egypt and the World – Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, Ideologue of the Jihadist Groups*, YouTube Video, 1:37:00, posted by “ONTv”, May 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrkhaqwTLHk>, and *Behedou’* (“*Quietly*”) *Complete – 12-4-2013 – Complete Episode*, YouTube Video, 1:23:43, posted by “CBC Egypt”, April 14, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVnMz868uP8>, and *Dr. Fadl, Ideologue of the Jihadis in Egypt on ‘Egypt and the World,’* YouTube Video, 48:13, posted by “Ismail Elsherif”, March 6, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_dejcBW2QA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_dejcBW2QA).

[63] Timeframes for select quotations and paraphrased sections of al-Sharif’s actual dialogue are provided for further reference. The narrative itself is constructed according to the translation and paraphrasing of the author, and are subject to the author’s own interpretation and understanding.

[64] Ismail Elsherif, *Dr.Fadl*, 40:26–40:50. Also, on the alleged recantations, al-Sharif clearly states that what he wrote was not a recantation. That word is used by the security services for its own purposes, but what he wrote was simply a document for guiding the Jihad based on his views on Jihad which have not changed as is shown in the context of this and other interviews.. In Ibid., 14:20–14:35.

[65] Al-Sharif attributes the misfortunes and ills of Egyptian society to the introduction of European legislation by Muhammed Ali Pacha the *khedive* of Egypt and Sudan (1769 – 1849), in 1810.

[66] ONtv, *The Respected Gentlemen*, 05:19–06:05.

[67] CBC Egypt, *Behedou’*, 26:00–26:14.

[68] Ibid., 27:50 –28:10. Side note: The Shari’a courts in Somalia, and the former Taliban rule, are given as examples of how Islamic courts helped bring stability to the two countries. Al-Sharif dismisses the host’s comments on the Taliban’s poor track record on economic prosperity, progress, stability, and human rights, by writing them off as ‘mistakes.’

[69] For a discussion on ‘nullifiers’ listen to Ibid., 31:30–34:00.

[70] Ismail Elsherif, *Dr. Fadl*, 16:52–17:45.

[71] CBC Egypt, *Behedou’*, 52:50–53:00.

[72] Ibid., 57:25–57:40.

[73] Ibid., 55:56–57:25.

[74] Ibid., 53:35–54:35.

[75] Ismail Elsherif, *Dr.Fadl*, 35:08–36:10.

[76] CBC Egypt, *Behedou’*, 01:11:35–01:14:40

[77] Ibid., 01:09:16–01:09:43.

[78] The response to Ayman al-Zawahiri can be found in a short documentary at Ismail Elsherif, *Dr. Fadl*, 37:29 –40–21. The five main points addressed were: al-Zawahiri tried to take credit for carrying out attacks in Egypt in 1993. Al-Sharif refutes this, saying it is a lie, al-Sharif claims that, back in 1981 when al-Zawahiri was being held and questioned by the Egyptian authorities, the AQ leader took advantage of al-Sharif not being in the country to pin the blame on him for a number of things i.e. al-Zawahiri is too cowardly to take responsibility for his own actions and stand up for what he believes in. Al-Sharif claims that al-Zawahiri was not trusted enough by bin Laden to be told in advance about the 9/11 attacks i.e. even those he thought were closest to him did not think al-Zawahiri was trustworthy. When escaping from Pakistan from Afghanistan during the US barrage of AQ’s camps, al-Zawahiri and his cohorts were wearing women’s clothing to disguise themselves i.e. al-Zawahiri’s manhood is questionable.

- [79] The interview used by the author to construct Abbud al-Zumur's narrative is *Abbud al-Zumur in the '10pm Show with Mona El-Shazly*, YouTube Video, posted by Madgy Abd-Elhalim, March 14, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbOhjVkl4eg&app=desktop>. Other videos consulted also include *Al-Zumur and the Reasons for the Assassination of the Late Anwar el-Sadat*, YouTube video, posted by 'Free Egypt', March 22, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gx-aiFCEyZQ>
- [80] Ibid., 24:25–26:06.
- [81] Ibid., 29:10–29:50
- [82] The religious scholars Zumur refers to are “scholars” within the Islamist current as opposed to official jurists/scholars from Egypt's religious high authority, Al-Azhar. It is worth noting that in the aftermath of the Camp David treaty with Israel, Al-Azhar was tasked by the state with delivering *fatawa* in support of the treaty. Al-Azhar published these *fatawa* in 1979, and details of this can be found in Abdel Azim Ramadan, “Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfir Groups,” in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Eds.) *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 169.
- [83] Ibid., 14:05–15:20.
- [84] Ibid., 33:19–33:35.
- [85] Ibid., 42:56–43:53.
- [86] Ibid., 56:00–57:06.
- [87] Ibid., 58:45–01:02:19.
- [88] Ibid., 53:52–54:43.
- [89] Ibid., 43:53–44:32.
- [90] Primary video used to construct narrative: *Ideologue of al Jama'a al-Islamiyya Dr. Nagih Ibrahim, Guest of Youssef Hussein on 'The Respected Gentlemen'*, YouTube Video, posted by ONtv, April 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=switrXk0V5c>. Other videos consulted include 'Anbar al-Ra'ye (Opinion Chamber) – Nagih Ibrahim (Al Jama'a al-Islamiyya) WO Nagih Ibrahim 1|1 2|2, 3|3, 4|4, YouTube videos, posted by misr25channel, August 26, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXwj2UHqB6I>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGiQ18TFpMs>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIWXqQ9dWQ8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cWDiQiljkW>
- [91] This is a summarized version of what Imam al-Shafi'i is documented to have said on the topic of *ijtihad* and issuing *fatawa*, as cited by Ibrahim.
- [92] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 134–157.
- [93] In the interview Ibrahim uses the Salafi concept of *al wala' wa-al bara'* (loyalty to believers, disloyalty to unbelievers), as a possible doctrinal foundation for a *jama'a*. In his view, whereas the *jama'a* can use such a doctrinal foundation to dictate its relationships with individuals and communities, a state cannot do the same due to the diversity of doctrines that it will inevitably comprise.
- [94] Ibrahim quotes former Brotherhood General Guide Hassan al-Hudaybi's 'Preachers, not Judges' treatise when stating that preachers are those generally involved in *da'wa* circles and *jama'a*s should refrain from taking part in politics. They should specialize in preaching, and leave the running of states to statesmen and politicians. Al-Hudaybi's treaty was written at a time when the Brotherhood was fracturing, with elements inspired by Sayyid Qutb's more violent prescriptions as found (primarily) in “Milestones”, or *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*. Many of Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's recent views find many parallels in Qutb's works. Al-Hudaybi's treaty was an attempt to discourage Brotherhood members and other Islamist youth from the violent path, and Ibrahim's views heavily echo al-Hudaybi's work. For a detailed study on the former Supreme Guide's treatise, see” Barbara H. E Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood Hasan Al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2009).
- [95] “Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya Leader Refai Taha Calls for Armed Struggle against Egyptian President Al-Sisi ” YouTube video, 4:08, posted by “MEMRITVVideos,” December 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSS7uPmKUps>. For the Arabic interview summary, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdZefpE1AB8&app=desktop>
- [96] Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, 94.
- [97] Ibid.
- [98] See Lahoud, “The Forgotten Recantation”, 2010.



[99] Summarized in Schuck, "A Conceptual Framework", 502–503, the concept of *taqiyya* defines the permissibility of Muslims to feign accommodation of systems of governance or else environments that are hostile to them for the purpose of survival. Further, the strategy '...is only permissible in times of peace when Muslims are too weak to broaden their territory.'—Ibid., 503. Islamists could thus use the same strategy in order to survive within environments they deem hostile to their cause.

## Terrorism, Communication and New Media: Explaining Radicalization in the Digital Age

by Cristina Archetti

### *Abstract*

*This article aims to demonstrate that a greater understanding of communication in the 21st century is essential to more effective counterterrorism. In fact, while “strategic communication” and “narratives” are advocated by many analysts as essential weapons in countering extremism, few seem to truly understand the reality of the digital-age information environment where such tools need to be deployed. To contribute to bridging this gap, the article outlines some problematic misunderstandings of the contemporary information environment, provides an alternative communication-based framework to explain radicalization, and draws some counterintuitive lessons for tackling terrorism.*

**Keywords:** communication; media; radicalization; narratives; terrorism.

### *Introduction*

Since 9/11 much has been said about the role of technologies like the Internet and global communication networks in sustaining transnational terrorism, the spread of its ideology, and its recruiting activities. Many claims have also been made about the role of the media, particularly new communication technologies, in fostering the process of radicalization—the embracing of extremist views, which might manifest themselves in the form of terrorist violence [1]. There is a widespread realization that communication is crucial to terrorism, to the point that “strategic communication” has become a buzzword in official circles, think tanks and academia [2]. The notion of “narrative,” in particular, has increasingly been drawn into the analysis of the roots of terrorism and is now advocated as an essential part of counter-radicalization responses [3]. Even official documents suggest that “we” should rewrite the “narrative” of grievances, which is promoted by terrorists to enlist new followers into their ranks, in order to ideologically counter the terrorist threat [4]. Despite its centrality, however, there has been very little effort to establish an analytical framework that rigorously and comprehensively explains the role of communication in the development of violent extremism.

This article is part of a broader research agenda that aims to bring communication closer to the centre of our approach to contemporary extremism [5]. Within its self-contained scope, it shows that a greater understanding of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be the basis for a more realistic explanation of radicalization than current suggestions of contagion-like processes based on the spread of a radical ideology [6]. To do so, the article first outlines four crucial misunderstandings that characterize current communication approaches to countering terrorism. Second, it provides an alternative, communication-based explanation for the phenomenon of radicalization. This is the basis, in the third part of the article, to dispel some myths about the role of communication technologies and the media in the process of radicalization. Further practical lessons that can be applied to counterterrorism are drawn in the fourth section, before the conclusion.

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### *Limitations of Current Approaches*

The main shortcoming of strategic communication approaches to countering terrorism lies in assuming that the information space in the digital age is far simpler and more linear than it actually is. To start with, from reports on how to counter “online radicalization” [7] to governments’ calls for taking ‘extremist material off the Internet’ [8], there is a strong focus on “messaging.” Whether this means fighting the terrorists with the “right” counter-message or removing “their” extremist message, this approach reflects a woefully outdated model of public-media interactions. Such a model—often referred to as the “hypodermic needle” model of communication—was developed in the aftermath of World War I, i.e. nearly a century ago, at a time when the winners of the armed conflict believed they had triumphed at least in part thanks to the persuasive powers of propaganda [9]. The model was elaborated in the attempt to explain how propaganda messages had affected the morale of enemy soldiers. It assumes that the public is passive and that different members of an audience tend to change attitudes and behaviour in a similar way upon reception—or injection/inoculation, continuing with the hypodermic needle metaphor—of the same media message.

The reality of communication processes, however, could not be more different. The fact that the model is simplistic and naïve at best is not only proven by the fact that, as we can all realize in the immediacy of our everyday lives, we do not buy every commodity advertising messages tell us to buy. As a range of subsequent communication theories have pointed out [10], audiences are active both in the selection of the information they pay attention to—they do not consume all the information that is “out there”—and in the interpretation of media texts. This means that the *availability* of a message—for instance a jihadi video being online—does not necessarily equate *reach*, that is, such message actually being accessed and consumed (e.g. a jihadi video, among the estimated 6 billion hours of footage watched on *YouTube* alone every month, actually being paid attention to) [11]. This, in turn, does not at all mean *impact*—the message having the desired effect (i.e. getting any viewer radicalized, or terrorized, depending on the audience being targeted by a terrorist). As a further demonstration of these points, most readers of this article will have been exposed to some form of radical message from extremists, yet not turned into radicals. In fact, watching a jihadi video might even increase a counterterrorist’s resolve against extremism—an opposite effect then originally intended by the producer of that message.

In addition to this, strategic communication approaches to counterterrorism tend to demonize the Internet and social media needlessly. For some, the Internet is the very reason al Qaeda—while the average lifespan of 90 per cent of terrorist groups is shorter than one year—has managed to survive for more than two decades [12]. For others, the possibility new media offer to extremists to lurk in the dark alleys of cyberspace is even regarded as the main *cause* of radicalization [13]. Indeed, the Internet and social media are widely blamed for ISIS recruitment among Western audiences [14]. Such views are simplistic in their *technological determinism*—the belief that a technology, due to its mere existence, must produce certain effects. They overlook the fact that it is always humans (governments, citizens and extremists among them) who *use* technology as a tool to advance their own goals and that audiences, as already indicted, actively select and embrace—rather than merely absorb—messages they are interested in. In reality, although the phenomenon of Western fighters joining ISIS is described as ‘unprecedented’ [15], we need only to look back at history to find that this is not the case. The Spanish civil war (1936-39), for instance, attracted volunteer foreign fighters in much higher numbers: on the Franco nationalist side alone there were 8,000 Portuguese, 700 Irish, 250 French, 78,000 Moroccans, just to name some of the nationalities involved [16]. On the Republican side, the biggest national contingent of the International Brigades was French with 8,500 combatants, but involved many more volunteers from as far away as Brazil, and China [17]. Among them was also the British writer George Orwell. We can further think of the over 210,000 Irish volunteers who fought with the British in WWI [18].

While recruitment propaganda [19] was a contributing factor to the enlisting of volunteers in past conflicts—showing that the Internet is really no more effective than the old-fashioned poster—we do not tend to dismiss those war volunteers' motivations [20] for joining foreign conflicts as the mere effect of “brainwashing” [21].

Negative assessments of the role of the Internet and social media are also based on a lack of historical perspective. What we might see as an unprecedented “communication revolution” is barely the latest manifestation of those profound changes that the introduction of *any* communication technology, from the invention of parchment, to the printing press and the telegraph, has always contributed to across the centuries. The first instantaneous and global communication technology—the telegraph (not the Internet!)—for example, supported the establishment of colonial empires by enabling the effective and timely administration of distant lands. The telegraph, like the Internet of today, was associated in Victorian times with growing social ills, particularly with offering novel opportunities to criminals for fraud and deception [22]. The alarmed attitudes towards the “dangers” of Internet and social media—emerging platforms whose effects some appear not to fully comprehend—is thus not new when we look at the reactions by those who witnessed advances in communications in the past. In addition, the Internet might be “new” to security experts, but its effects on politics and society have been studied and debated for over twenty years in the fields of Political Communication, International Communication, and Communication Studies. It is perhaps a matter for counterterrorism practitioners to look a bit further into multidisciplinary territory for advice. The not unjustified, but certainly disproportionate, focus on the Internet prevents us from seeing the wider social—and never online-only—space in which extremism is rooted. In this respect, rather than focusing on the technology alone, it is more helpful to look at the convergence of different platforms, both “new” and “old” media, and at how they are used by political actors (terrorists, citizens, NGOs, governments and others) for advancing their own agendas.

A last limitation of current strategic communication efforts against extremism relates to the understanding of narratives as simple “messages” or “stories.” The idea here is that, if Western governments craft the “right” narrative and this is received by extremists, they will stop committing acts of terrorism. Narratives, however, are much more than rhetorical devices. Far from being “just stories,” they have deep roots: they are *socially constructed* [23]. In other words, narratives arise from a specific constellation of relationships—a social network [24]. It is possible, in fact, to say that where there is a narrative there must be a network. The reason is that a narrative does not exist in a void. It exists because the story it embodies is told and continuously re-told by the people who belong to that network. Understanding this is important: sending a “narrative” into the information environment (as some current approaches in fact aim to do) without there being a network to convey it and re-convey it could be compared to sending a message into outer space. What must be kept in mind is that narratives are not merely the product of words, but of *social practices*.

The next section, in line with the above, examines the social construction of narratives, particularly how the connection between social networks, communication and extremism can be explained.

### ***Explaining Extremism***

As this author has argued elsewhere in greater detail, the phenomenon of violent extremism takes place in a social world that is constituted by overlapping networks of relationships [25].

In examining narratives, a distinction should be made between *individual narratives* and *collective narratives*. An individual narrative consists of a person's understanding of the world and one's role in it. As illustrated more specifically in Figure 1, an individual's identity (“who we are”) is shaped by the network of relationships he or she is enmeshed in at any given moment. Communication technologies have a role

in extending such relationships beyond the realm of face-to-face interactions. Craig Calhoun [26], in this respect, argues that the proliferation of 'indirect relationships' is a feature that fundamentally characterizes modernity. Beyond direct interpersonal relations, Calhoun envisages indirect personal connections that can exist, for instance, with political representatives, TV personalities, but also through upheld traditions [27]. Communication technologies, in this respect, can further extend our social reach in forming both direct relationships (through emails, for example, or by having a chat over the phone) and in building indirect relationships. For instance, an activist can develop an indirect relationship with an admired political figure (e.g. a terrorist leader) one comes to know through speeches available online. In this sense relationships can be *imagined*.

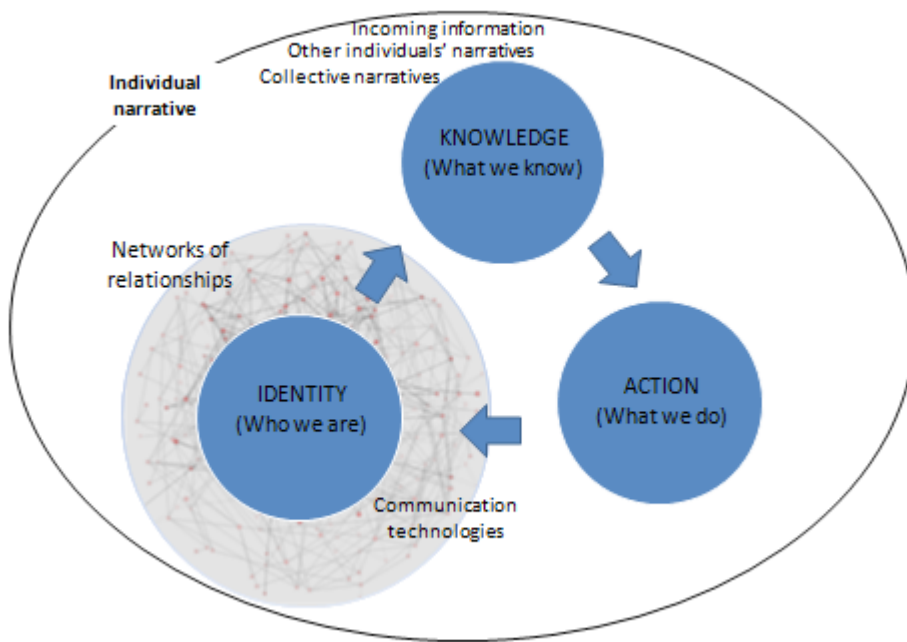


Figure 1: The social construction of the individual narrative

'Imagined communities,' to borrow the concept introduced by Benedict Anderson in his discussion of nationalism [28], are based on the 'politics of identification' [29]. As Calhoun explains: 'People without direct interpersonal relations with each other are led by the mediation of the world of political symbols to imagine themselves as members of communities defined by common ascriptive characteristics, personal tastes, habits, concerns' [30]. They are 'imagined' because they are based on 'categorical identities.' In this respect, there can be imagined communities of interest like those constituted by environmental activists, gay marriage campaigners, or radical Muslims who aspire to live in a society regulated by Sharia law.

Face-to-face communication and communication technologies, together with media coverage, however, occupy another place on the social map ('incoming information,' in the upper part of Figure 1). They allow the acquisition of new information (through conversation, surfing on the Internet, reading the newspaper, watching TV, etc.), which will be interpreted through the relational perspective occupied by the individual at any specific time. It is at this point that an individual can come into contact with other narratives. These might be other actors' individual narratives (belonging to our friends and acquaintances, for instance), but also collective narratives (related to the sense of belonging to a democratic society, for example, or sustained by the traditions of an ethnic minority or the rituals of a religious group). The collective narratives might be promoted, as in the case of political movements (or terrorist organisations), for specific mobilization

purposes. I will come back to this in a moment in discussing collective narratives.

Any incoming information, including other actors' narratives, will never be absorbed as it is but will be filtered and *appropriated* through the prism of the individual own narrative. This might, over time, lead to a transformation in the vision of the world of the individual, reflected in his/her changing patterns of social relationships, development of a revised identity, individual narrative, behaviour, and so forth—in a continuing cycle. Partly as a result of our action, partly as the outcome of the simultaneous action by all the actors within our networks, the relationships' maps are constantly changing. This leads to our identity being continuously evolving, together with the way we interpret the world around us and the way we act. Such evolution of our interpretation also includes a continuous reworking of the past, as well as of our projections of future action trajectories [31].

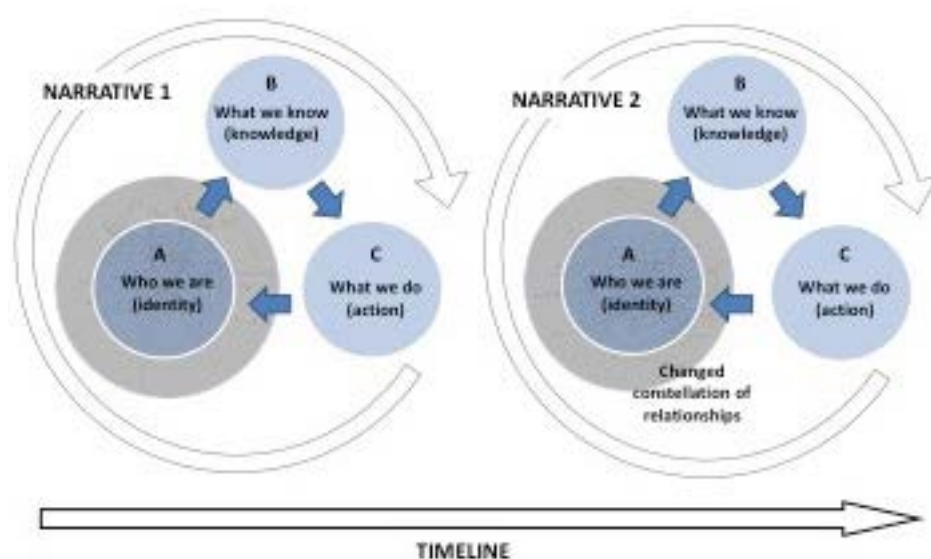


Figure 2: Evolution of the individual narrative over time

This is reflected in a continuously and progressively changing individual narrative. Figure 2 shows the way in which different networks lead to different identities, interpretations of the world, and consequent behaviour.

As identities exist at both individual and collective levels, so do narratives. In this perspective, according to Alberto Melucci, social movements (and also terrorist groups) 'offer individuals the collective possibility of affirming themselves as actors and of finding an equilibrium between self-recognition and hetero-recognition' [32]. Whether an individual will join an extremist group depends on the compatibility between the individual's own narrative and the one of the group. In Figure 3, for example, individuals 1 and 3, as a result of their specific and unique constellation of relationships at that given time, can see themselves as belonging to, and having a role in, an extremist group. They might be individuals living in completely different parts of the world. One might live in the Middle East and have a network of like-minded individuals he or she meets regularly. The other might be a British citizen who, mainly through the Internet, has developed contacts and imagined relationships with individuals he or she might have never met. In this sense, it is interesting to note that this individual actor, often referred to as "lone wolf," is not alone at all in his/her mind. Individual 2 (perhaps one of the readers of this article), due to his/her different network of relationships, cannot envisage a role within an extremist group. These configurations, however, given that networks of relationships continuously evolve, might change over time. Perhaps, as a result of a shift in his/her network of relationships, Individual 1 will leave the extremist group at a later stage.



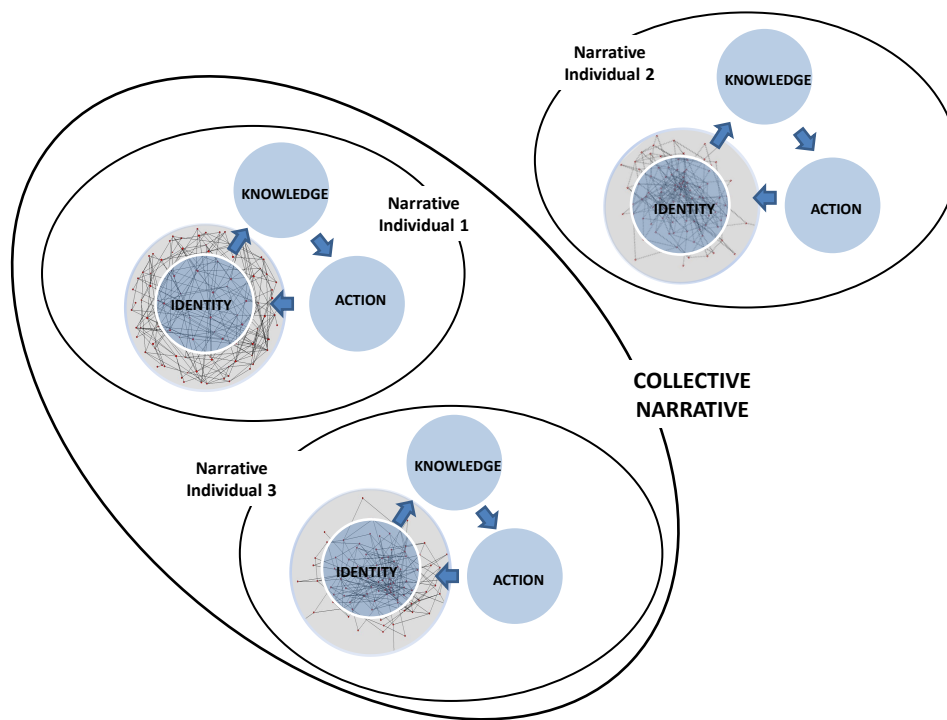


Figure 3: Changing membership of a group over time: compatibility/dissonance of individual narratives with a collective narrative

### Dispelling the Myths

Once violent extremism is understood through such a relational framework, it is easy to counter some widely-held beliefs in counterterrorism circles. Among these are: the notion that acts of terrorism can be “predicted,” that there are technologies (such as the Internet) that can be held responsible for radicalization, and that there is a need to counter specific extremist messages. These notions are flawed because radicalization is a temporal- and context-specific outcome: it depends on an individual’s unique position within a configuration of relationships at any given time.

In other words—which helps explaining the failure of terrorism research in finding a definite set of “causes” for terrorism—there are no individual characteristics that by themselves define the profile of a terrorist [33] and there are no fixed structural conditions under which terrorism will arise. As has been noted, individuals who turn to terrorism might be unemployed, excluded, alienated, vulnerable young people, but they could also be members from the educated, middle class, and even come from the well-off class [34]. Extremism can develop in closed societies [35] as well as in open, democratic ones [36, 37]. What matters is that terrorist action is the outcome of an identity and a corresponding narrative that legitimize violent action. Where and when the constellation of relationships—both real and imagined—that will support the formation of that violence-prone identity will materialize simply cannot be anticipated with mathematical certainty without reference to the specific milieu in which these develop.

The role of the Internet should not be dismissed: of course it has changed our society, the way politics work, and it has also influenced the dynamics of social mobilization [38]. This technology offers the opportunity to reach out to potential supporters internationally and to fundraise more effectively, as social movements (Greenpeace, Amnesty International or Occupy, for instance), activists (like Anonymous), and charities (such as Oxfam) know very well. However, the role of the Internet in the extremism phenomenon—as in any

political mobilization—is relative: in the mountains of Afghanistan—where there is no electricity and most of the population is illiterate—the terrorists’ narrative is not conveyed through the Internet but rather by *shabnamah* (night letters) and leaflets affixed to walls, communications which are often handwritten [39].

It is frequently argued that multimedia material available online is more “radicalizing” than text. For instance, Anthony Lemieux and Robert Nill have underlined the role of music in jihadi propaganda, particularly in leading individuals exposed to the lyrics to ‘engage in deeper processing and consideration’ [40]. But no message is either ‘convincing’ or able to connect at a deeper emotional level with an individual in and by itself. Whichever information and messages one receives, these will be filtered through the lenses of an individual’s identity and point of view from a specific “corner” of the social world. The very fact of being “convincing” or “moving” is relative and depending on the relationship between the incoming message and the pre-existing individual narrative. Individuals who have become extremists do not necessarily need to be exposed to extremist material to reinforce their conviction and perhaps take violent action. They can just watch the news and find confirmation of their interpretation of what happens in the world around them. For example Nizar Trabelsi, accused of plotting to bomb a military base in Belgium in the name of Al Qaeda, stated during his trial that he had decided to carry out the attack after seeing pictures of a Palestinian baby girl who was killed in the Gaza Strip in 2001 [41]. It is not clear where Trabelsi exactly saw those pictures. Yet, it is very likely that many more people (perhaps even tens or hundreds of thousands in case they had been broadcast over the daily mainstream media news) must have been exposed to the same images and did not become “radicalized” by them.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, it is not necessary to be exposed to radical ideas to become a radical. The Norwegian Anders Breivik, for example, developed much of his extremist manifesto *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* [42], on the basis of quotes from harmless sociology books that can be found in any library. Ed Husain, a former British Islamist, as he recalls in his memoir *The Islamist*, became interested in political Islam by reading a textbook on religion in school [43]. These are good examples of the creativity of members of audiences in actively interpreting messages: both Breivik and Husain independently drew their own extremist conclusions from non-radical materials to which countless other individuals, who did not turn into violent extremists, had also been exposed to.

### **Counter-Terrorism Lessons**

The implications for counter-terrorism are that “we” cannot re-write “their” narrative. Instead, “we” might want to learn from social movements’ and charities’ public communications campaigns—an example is the viral fundraising video by British teenager Stephen Sutton, who in the summer of 2014 raised over 5 million pounds for the Teenage Cancer Trust [44]. Charities, to continue with this example, are learning to operate in an increasingly unpredictable environment. While they cannot know what is going to be “liked” by the public and what will “go viral” in an increasingly message-saturated society, they understand that most audiences generally do not “buy” artificially-packaged top-down messages. Many organizations have therefore adapted and transformed from being uni-directional broadcasters of messages to loose networks that facilitate the distribution of creative content by grassroots activists.

Ultimately, although communication is crucial, it is important to understand that the message is not all. “We” can communicate as effectively as we like, but the consistency between words and deeds is of paramount importance. Just to illustrate this with a couple of examples: could the very existence of the Guantanamo Bay prison and the killing of civilians resulting from the increasing use of drones in Muslim countries be undermining “our” own narrative? How credible, in the light of what is happening in Cuba and Afghanistan,

is the claim that Western countries are democracies that value individual freedoms and human rights? Reality can in the end not be permanently concealed behind rhetorical makeovers.

Again, because any individual interprets incoming information according to a personal narrative that is rooted in one's network of relationships at any given time, targeting extremists with the "right" message is, to put it bluntly, a waste of time. I am not arguing that communicating with extremist is not useful or has no impact: receiving information (*if* one is listening to, that is) always leads to some form of effect. However, do not expect to de-radicalize extremists by merely "messaging" them. As political campaigners know, there is no point in trying to convince people who are very interested in politics about whom to vote for: these individuals have already made up their minds. The same applies to extremists: they too have already decided. That is why messages, if at all used, should target not the extremists, but those who are *around* them—the extremists' non-radical network of relationships. In other words: if you can change an extremist's network (and the narrative that is embedded in it), then you also gradually change the extremist's identity—to a point perhaps in which the person is no longer an extremist.

### Conclusion

To sum up: it is not possible to predict acts of terrorism; there is no simple formula that can tell when and where terrorism will arise. There are also no messages, however perfectly crafted, that can, by themselves alone, neutralise violent extremism. However, in each single local context, through community-based approaches and long-term engagement, it is possible to gain an insight into the local narratives and the networks such narratives arise from. Therefore we have to ask: What is the identity of the local community? How do its members see themselves? Who are the "relevant others" of that community? The establishment over time of radical and extremist identities through ideas and discourses can be detected. By being part of a community, it is also possible to engage with the non-radical networks that are around an extremist core. Such a community-based approach and close attention to the consistency between our narrative (words) and our policies (deeds) are in the end the most effective tools against extremism.

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### Notes

[1] 'Some authors refer to "violent radicalisation" in order to emphasize the violent outcome and distinguish the process from non-violent forms of "radical" thinking' (Stevens, T. and P. R. Neumann (2009) "Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action" (London: ICSR/Community Security Trust), p. 10).

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[5] Archetti, C. (2012) *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media: A Communication Approach* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

[6] Just to provide a couple of examples, David Cameron has recently stated that the fight against ISIL is 'a battle against a poisonous ideology' (Cameron, D. (2014) "David Cameron: Isil poses a direct and deadly threat to Britain," *The Sunday Telegraph*, 16 August, available from:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/11038121/David-Cameron-Isil-poses-a-direct-and-deadly-threat-to-Britain.html>); British members of Parliament Hazel Blears and Julian Lewis have criticized the way in which intelligence services have failed to neutralise the ideology that 'infects' extremists (Blears, H. and J. Lewis (2014) "Jihadists Need to Be Treated Like Nazis," *The Times*, 27 August).

[7] Stevens, T. and P. R. Neumann (2009) "Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action" (London: ICSR/Community Security Trust); Neumann, Peter R. (2013) "Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36(6): 431-459; Helmus, T. C., E. York, and P. Chalk (2013) *Promoting Online Voices for Countering Violent Extremism* (Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Homeland Security and Defense Center), available from: [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR100/RR130/RAND\\_RR130.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR100/RR130/RAND_RR130.pdf).

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[12] Rapoport, David C. (1992) "Terrorism," in Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan (Eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Government and Politics, Volume II* (London: Routledge), p. 1067.

[13] For example, a US Presidential Task Force report states that "The United States should devote far more resources to countering radical extremist messages on the Internet, where the self-radicalization process is spreading and accelerating" (Presidential Task Force (2009) *Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, p. 17). The opening sentence of a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report reads: "The Internet is used by international insurgents, jihadists, and terrorist organizations as a tool for radicalization and recruitment, a method of propaganda distribution, a means of communication, and ground for training" (Theohary, C. A. and J. Rollins (2011) *Terrorist Use of the Internet: Information Operations in Cyberspace*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, R41674, available from: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/R41674.pdf>, p. 2).

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## Constructing Cyberterrorism as a Security Threat: a Study of International News Media Coverage

by Lee Jarvis, Stuart Macdonald and Andrew Whiting

### Abstract

*This article examines the way in which the English language international news media has constructed the threat of cyberterrorism. Analysing 535 news items published by 31 different media outlets across 7 countries between 2008 and 2013, we show that this coverage is uneven in terms of its geographical and temporal distribution and that its tone is predominantly apprehensive. This article argues that, regardless of the 'reality' of the cyberterrorism threat, this coverage is important because it helps to constitute cyberterrorism as a security risk. Paying attention to this constitutive role of the news media, we suggest, opens up a fresh set of research questions in this context and a different theoretical approach to the study of cyberterrorism.*

**Keywords:** Cyberterrorism; Media; News; Terrorism; Internet; Threat; Security; Insecurity; Stuxnet

### Introduction

This article reports findings of a research project on media constructions of cyberterrorism. Examining a total of 535 English language items published in 31 different news outlets across 7 countries between 1 January 2008 and 8 June 2013, the project sought to examine a range of issues, including: the volume and tone of media coverage of cyberterrorism; the geographical and temporal spread of this coverage; the imagery used; the level at which the coverage was pitched (e.g., was background knowledge needed?); whether sources were quoted, and if so which; the portrayal of cyberterrorists (e.g., as professionals, hackers, etc.); whether the coverage made reference to past (cyber or non-cyber) events, and if so which; and, who or what is said to be threatened by cyberterrorism [1]. The aims of the research project were: first, to add empirical depth to conceptual accounts of the importance of media reportage within cyberterrorism discourse [2]; and, second, to explore the processes by which the term cyberterrorism is constructed and given meaning within the mainstream news media.

In this article – the first of three reporting our findings – our focus is the volume and tone of the media coverage, and its geographical and temporal distribution. The article will show unevenness in terms of both the temporal spread of the news items (with a marked increase in coverage from October 2010 onwards) and their geographical distribution (with a greater number of items published in UK outlets than those located within other countries). By contrast, our research identified far greater consistency in the *tone* of this coverage, with many more items manifesting concern over the cyberterrorism threat than scepticism toward it. The article concludes by arguing that, by demonstrating the role the news media plays in constructing a discourse that presents cyberterrorism as a security threat, our findings open up a range of fresh research questions in this area.

### Cyberterrorism and the International News Media

Recent scholarship on cyberterrorism has focused largely on questions of definition, threat assessment and response [3]. Whilst each of these issues has generated diverse opinions, these debates share a common underlying assumption: that claims about cyberterrorism should be assessed or critiqued for the accuracy with which they reflect or represent reality. In this article we point to a different theoretical approach—one

which recognises that news media has a constitutive rather than correspondential relationship to the 'reality' of cyberterrorism. Instead of asking whether media coverage of cyberterrorism accurately reflects reality, our concern is instead to explore the role of the news media in constructing cyberterrorism as a real security threat.

### *Methodology*

This project is the first systematic study of this size that focuses specifically on cyberterrorism [4]. The 31 news outlets examined in our research were of three sorts: broadsheet newspapers, tabloid newspapers and the websites of media corporations [5]. A key word search was conducted around the terms <cyber terrorism>, <cyberterrorism> and <cyber terror> for each news outlet, generating a total of 535 relevant items. These items included a wide and varied spread of content, ranging from news stories relating to current affairs in the country of origin or abroad, technology news and discussion thereof, opinion pieces and editorial reflections, items related to culture and the arts—including reviews of movies with fictional representations of cyberterrorism [6]—and special reports or other features using this terminology. While all of the news stories generated from this key word search referred explicitly to cyberterrorism, it was not uncommon for other elements of the cybersecurity lexicon – cyberwar, cyberespionage, cybercrime, etc. – also to be present. Where such examples are cited in this article, this is not meant to imply they are synonyms for cyberterrorism. Instead, this reflects the lack of clear distinction between said concepts and the flexible manner in which many of these media outlets employed such terms.

The study focused on items published between 1 January 2008 and 8 June 2013. These dates were selected for two reasons. First, because this provided sufficient data through which to explore developments in reportage on cyberterrorism: a total of 1986 days of media content. An second, because this period incorporated key events of potential relevance to cyberterrorism and media coverage thereof. These included the 2008 cyberattacks on Georgia, the 2010 revelations of the Stuxnet attack, the 2010 publication of the UK's *National Security Strategy*, and the November 2011 release of the UK's *Cyber Security Strategy: Protecting and Promoting the UK in a Digital World*. The 31 news outlets were selected for this research for reasons of accessibility and pluralism. These included: the provision of a searchable online archive; diversity of political perspective and type of media company; diversity of geographical origin to facilitate comparison across and beyond the Anglosphere; and, reasons of language, such that the news content was provided in the medium of English.

*Geographical Distribution of Coverage and Focus*

News outlet	Total number of items that mentioned cyberterrorism
The Guardian	50
The Telegraph	43
Fox News	39
Reuters	28
BBC	26
The Washington Post	25
The Independent	24
Financial Times	23
Russia Today	22
The Australian	21
CNN	20
The Sun	20
The Times of India	20
Australian Telegraph	19
Australian Financial Review	18
The New York Times	16
China Daily	15
The Wall Street Journal	14
The Sydney Morning Herald	14
Daily Mail	12
The Straits Times	11
Channel 4 News	10
Aljazeera	10
Sky News	9
ABC News	8
LA Times	6
South China Morning Post	4
USA Today	3
Boston Globe	2
The West Australian	2
The Herald Sun	1
Total	535

*Table 1: Number of News Items by News Outlet*

Table 1 shows the total number of news items that appeared in each of the news outlets over the course of our research timeframe. As this indicates, there was significant variation in the coverage given to this topic by each of these outlets. The top eight on the list accounted for 258 of the 535 items (equivalent to 48% of the total). The bottom eight, in contrast, account for just 35 items (7%). Also significant is the geographical distribution across this period of time: of the top eight outlets, four were UK broadsheet newspapers and another was the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC's) online news site. The same trend is apparent in Table 2, which shows the

number of news items published in each of the US, UK and Australian newspapers in our sample. A total of 313 items appeared in these 18 newspapers (61% of the total). Of these, more than half were published in a UK newspaper (55%).

UK		Australia		US	
Newspaper	Total number of items	Newspaper	Total number of items	Newspaper	Total number of items
The Guardian	50	The Australian	21	The Washington Post	25
The Telegraph	43	Australian Telegraph	19	The New York Times	16
The Independent	24	Australian Financial Review	18	The Wall Street Journal	14
Financial Times	23	The Sydney Morning Herald	14	LA Times	6
The Sun	20	The West Australian	2	USA Today	3
Daily Mail	12	The Sun Herald	1	Boston Globe	2
Total	172	Total	75	Total	66

*Table 2: Anglophone Newspaper Items by Country of Publication*

The geographical focus of media coverage of cyberterrorism was as uneven in its distribution as in its origin. As Table 3 shows, more items focused on the US than any other country. Indeed, the number of items that focused on the US, UK and Australia was more than double the number concentrating on all other countries combined (353 compared to 174). Table 4 probes this unevenness further by asking what proportion of the news items focused on their country of publication. So, for example, all seven of the news items that focused on Singapore were published in the Singaporean *The Straits Times*. Similarly, only one of the 39 news items that focused on Australia was not published in Australia. Yet whilst 87% of the items that focused on the UK were published there, only 52% of the items that focused on the US were published in the US. And the majority of items relating to cyberterrorism that focused on China (69%) and Russia (83%) were not published in these countries.

US	170
UK	144
Australia	39
China	29
South Korea	28
India	21
Israel	18
North Korea	18
Iran	10
Singapore	7
Russia	6
Pakistan	5
Mexico	4
Europe	3
Japan	3
Estonia	2
Ireland	2
Middle East	2
Algeria	1
Georgia	1
Hong Kong	1
Indonesia	1
Morocco	1
Palestine	1
Saudi Arabia	1
Somalia	1
Spain	1
Zimbabwe	1
General international focus	56
No geographical focus	12

*Table 3: News Items by Primary Geographical Focus*

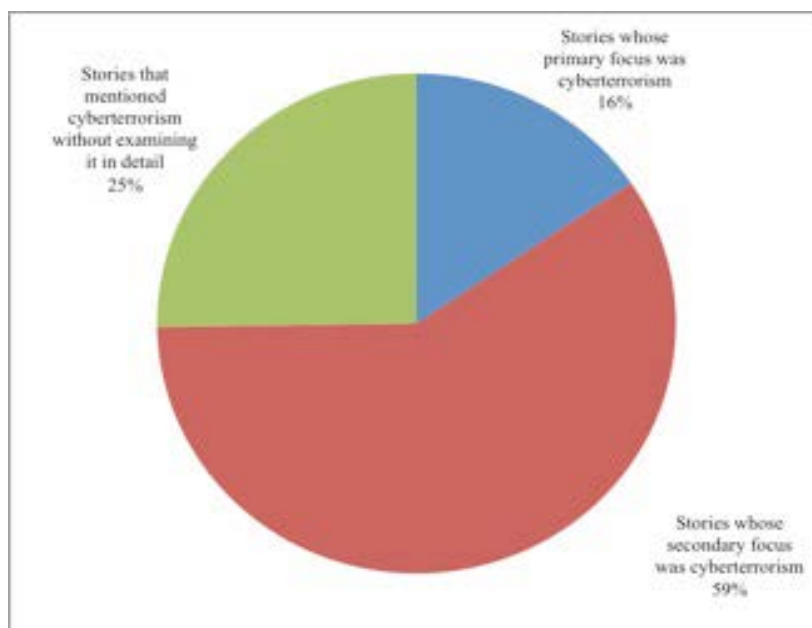
(Several news items within our sample had a strong focus on more than one country. Where this was the case both countries have been included)

	Total number of items primarily focused on this country	Percentage of these items that were published in this country
US	170	52%
UK	144	87%
Australia	39	97%
China	29	31%
India	21	86%
Singapore	7	100%
Russia	6	17%

*Table 4: Geographical Focus of News Items by Country of Publication*

#### *Content Analysis: Focus and Apprehensiveness of News Coverage*

Our analysis of the tone of the coverage across this diverse media content began by examining the extent to which each story focused specifically on cyberterrorism. A threefold classification was employed, with items categorised according to whether cyberterrorism was their primary focus, their secondary focus, or a topic mentioned in passing without any detailed discussion or analysis. As Chart 1 shows, a total of 83 items (16% of the dataset) had cyberterrorism as their primary focus, with a further 317 (59%) having it as their secondary focus. There were 135 items (25%) that mentioned cyberterrorism without examining the concept in detail.



*Chart 1: Proportion of News Stories with Cyberterrorism as their Primary or Secondary Focus*

The next stage of the analysis concentrated on the 400 news items that had cyberterrorism as either their primary or secondary focus. Each story was coded and placed into one of the following six categories: concerned; concerned with elements of scepticism; balanced; sceptical; sceptical with elements of concern; or, neither (there were various reasons for placing a story in the last of these categories, such as the type of piece, with purely descriptive pieces not corresponding to any of the prior five categories). The results of this analysis are displayed in chart 2.



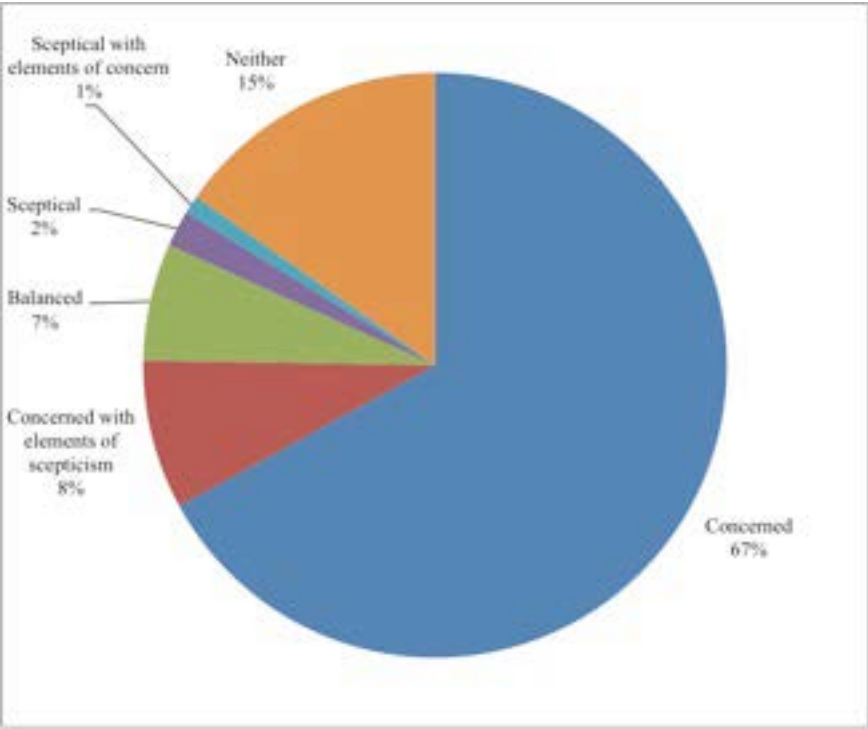


Chart 2: Proportion of News Stories that were Concerned, Sceptical, Balanced or Neither

A total of 268 news items – two-thirds of those with a primary or secondary focus on cyberterrorism – evidenced a marked concern with the threat posed by cyberterrorism. A further 33 items (8%) demonstrated concern with elements of scepticism: the second most fearful category within our schema. Equally striking are the small numbers of items that were sceptical about cyberterrorism posing any threat at all – only eight (or 2%) of the 400 analysed – sceptical with elements of concern (four in total; 1%) or balanced (26 in total; 7%). As this suggests, news coverage—at least within our sample—was predominantly apprehensive in tone throughout the five-year period on which we focused.

Table 5 investigates the tone of the news media coverage further by showing a breakdown of the items we explored by news outlet, by type of news outlet and by their origin in the Anglosphere or otherwise.

	Total number of news items which had cyberterrorism as a primary or secondary focus	Concerned	Concerned with elements of scepticism	Balanced	Sceptical	Sceptical with elements of concern	Neither
The Guardian	43	24 (56%)	9 (21%)	4 (9%)	3 (7%)	0	3 (7%)
Fox News	39	28 (72%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)	0	0	7 (18%)
The Telegraph	30	21 (70%)	7 (23%)	1 (3%)	0	1 (3%)	0
The Washington Post	25	14 (56%)	0	0	1 (4%)	0	10 (40%)
BBC	23	15 (65%)	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	0	0	5 (22%)
The Independent	23	18 (78%)	0	0	0	0	5 (22%)
Financial Times	22	16 (73%)	0	1 (5%)	0	0	5 (23%)
CNN	20	9 (45%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	0	0	7 (35%)
The New York Times	16	7 (44%)	0	0	0	0	9 (56%)
The Australian	14	13 (93%)	1 (7%)	0	0	0	0
Russia Today	13	4 (31%)	2 (15%)	4 (31%)	0	2 (15%)	1 (8%)
The Wall Street Journal	13	10 (77%)	0	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	0	1 (8%)
Daily Mail	12	9 (75%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	0	0	1 (8%)

Reuters	11	8 (73%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	0	0	1 (9%)
The Sydney Morning Herald	11	5 (45%)	4 (36%)	2 (18%)	0	0	0
Australian Financial Review	10	9 (90%)	0	0	1 (10%)	0	0
The Sun	10	7 (70%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	0	0	1 (10%)
Channel 4 News	9	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	0	0	0	0
China Daily	9	6 (67%)	0	0	0	0	3 (33%)
The Straits Times	9	8 (89%)	0	1 (11%)	0	0	0
Australian Telegraph	8	8 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0
ABC News	6	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	0	0	0
LA Times	6	4 (67%)	0	0	1 (17%)	0	1 (17%)
Sky News	5	4 (80%)	0	0	0	0	1 (20%)
The Times of India	4	4 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0
Aljazeera	3	1 (33%)	0	0	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	0
USA Today	3	2 (67%)	0	1 (33%)	0	0	0
Boston Globe	2	2 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0
The West Australian	1	1 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0
South China Morning Post	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The Herald Sun	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Tabloids	31	25 (81%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	0	0	2 (6%)
Broadsheets	240	163 (68%)	21 (9%)	11 (5%)	7 (3%)	1 (0%)	37 (15%)
News channels	129	80 (62%)	10 (8%)	13 (10%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	22 (17%)
Anglophone	362	245 (68%)	31 (9%)	21 (6%)	7 (2%)	1 (0%)	57 (16%)
Non-Anglophone	38	23 (61%)	2 (5%)	5 (13%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)	4 (11%)
Overall total	400	268 (67%)	33 (8%)	26 (7%)	8 (2%)	4 (1%)	61 (15%)

Table 5: *Concerned, Sceptical, Balanced or Neither, by News Outlet*

A number of interesting points arise from this data. First, the five tabloid newspapers included in the sample were responsible for just 31 of the items identified in our research: a very modest average of 6.2 items per outlet over this period. This compares to averages of 14.1 items per broadsheet newspaper and 14.3 items per broadcaster. This indicates that if there is a dominant news media discourse on cyberterrorism it is not solely the product of tabloid hyperbole. At the same time, however, whilst the predominant tone of the entire sample was apprehensive, this tone was particularly acute in the tabloid newspapers. Of their 31 items, 25 (81%) were concerned and a further two (6%) were concerned with elements of scepticism. Moreover, none of the 31 tabloid items was sceptical or sceptical with elements of concern. Third, the proportion of items that were classified as concerned or concerned with elements of scepticism was lower for the broadcasters than for the broadsheet newspapers. In total, 70% of the items from broadcasters fell into one of these two categories, compared to 77% of those from the broadsheets. Moreover, the broadcasters had a higher proportion of balanced items (10%, compared to 6% for the tabloids and 5% for the broadsheets). Fourth, the non-Anglophone sources had a lower proportion of items that were concerned or concerned with elements of scepticism (66% in total), a higher proportion of items that were balanced (13%) and a higher proportion that were sceptical or sceptical with elements of concern about the threat posed by cyberterrorism (11%). The cumulative import of these findings is that Anglophone newspapers – particularly tabloids but broadsheets too – tended to strike a more apprehensive tone than broadcasters and non-Anglophone sources.

### *Chronological Analysis*

Moving on to the temporal spread of the dataset, Chart 3 shows the number of news items that were published each month, from January 2008 to June 2013. As the chart shows, a far greater number of items were published in October 2010 (35 in total) than in any of the other months covered by our study. There were two factors that contributed to this large number of items. The first was the release of the UK's National Security Strategy on 18 October 2010, which identified international terrorism and cyberattack as two of the top tier threats facing the UK [7]. This was accompanied by the associated decision to invest an additional

£650m in cybersecurity at a time when cuts were being made to other aspects of the defence budget in the name of austerity. These developments generated a total of 22 news items mentioning cyberterrorism from 17-20 October 2010. As Table 6 shows, although most of these were published in the UK (17, 77%), there was also some media coverage from the US and Australia.

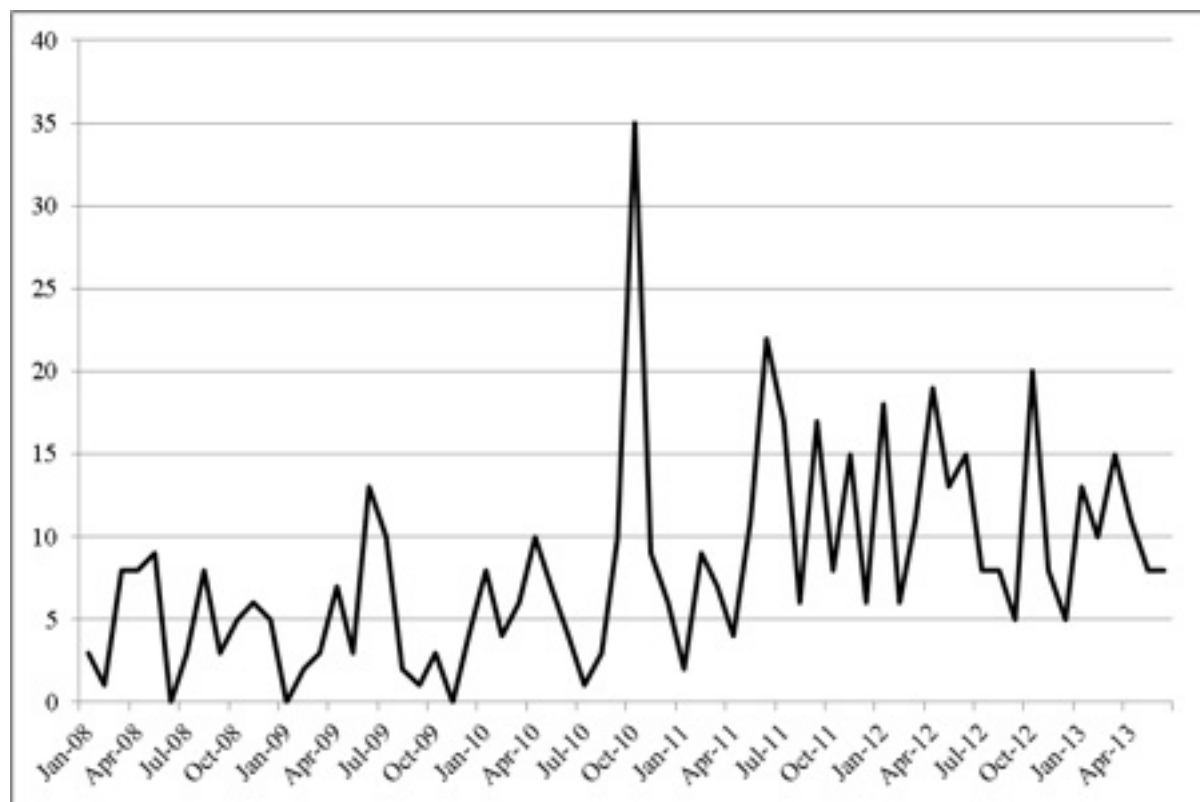


Chart 3: Number of News Items, by Month of Publication

Channel 4 News	4
The Telegraph	4
The Guardian	3
Aljazeera	2
Daily Mail	2
The Sun	2
ABC News	1
BBC	1
Fox News	1
The Independent	1
The Wall Street Journal	1
Total	22

Table 6: News Items 17-20 October 2010, by News Outlet

The general tone of these items is also significant. As Table 7 shows, of the 16 that discussed cyberterrorism in sufficient detail to enable classification within October 2010, none demonstrated a sceptical or balanced view of the threat posed by this phenomenon. On the contrary, a total of 13 items (81%) were classified as concerned and a further 2 (13%) as concerned with elements of scepticism. In fact, the tone of some of this coverage was dramatic. One headline published in the UK's most widely read newspaper warned of the need to, 'Fight

cyber war before planes fall out of sky' [8]. Another–headlined, 'Why Britain is desperately vulnerable to cyber terror'–presented a detailed description of a digital 'Pearl Harbour' in which:

*Power cuts scythed through Britain, plunging cities into darkness ... The nationwide panic meant supermarket shelves emptied and petrol stations ran out of fuel ... There was no TV, no radio and no mobile networks. After a fortnight, there were riots, and the military, which was itself crippled by mysterious communications glitches, was called in [9]*

This was followed by the foreboding statement that 'This terrifying scenario may seem like a science fiction movie. But it is exactly the sort of possibility currently being considered at the highest levels in government as part of the National Security Strategy' [10].

	Number of news items
Concerned	13
Concerned with elements of scepticism	2
Balanced	0
Sceptical	0
Sceptical with elements of concern	0
Neither	1
Did not discuss cyberterrorism in detail	6
Total	22

Table 7: News Items 17-20 October 2010, by Concerned, Sceptical, Balanced or Neither

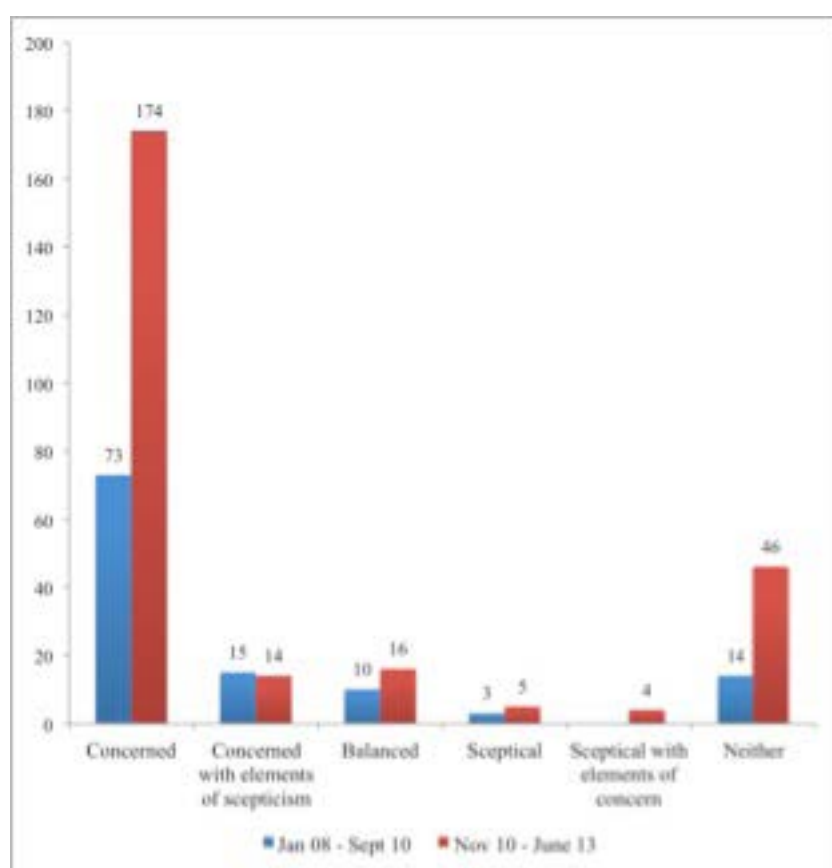
The second factor that contributed to the large number of items mentioning cyberterrorism in October 2010 was the revelations concerning Stuxnet. Stuxnet is of particular importance as one of the first known malwares to cause physical damage to critical infrastructure [11]. Allegedly developed by the CIA in cooperation with the Israeli Government, Idaho National Laboratory and other US agencies [12], it was introduced to the Natanz Uranium Enrichment Plant in Iran by USB flash drive causing 1000 centrifuges to fail. The first mention of Stuxnet in the 31 news outlets in our study came on 23 September 2010 in a piece published in the UK's *Financial Times*, headlined 'Warning over malicious computer worm'. In October 2010 there were a total of 11 news items that specifically mentioned this attack. As with coverage of the UK's National Security Strategy, discussion of Stuxnet was also characterised by considerable apprehensiveness of tone. A story on 1 October–headlined 'Security: A code explodes'–warned that Stuxnet had taken worries about cyber warfare to a different plane. The image accompanying this story was a picture of a grenade [13]. Three days later the same newspaper warned that comparing the cyber threat to the nuclear arms race was, if anything, 'a little too comforting' [14]. The story continued, this was because 'Anyone can play at cyber warfare. The tools can be bought on a local high street and the command-and-control bunker can be a spare bedroom' [15]. This time the accompanying image was a picture of three military tanks resembling computer mice.

During the same period, another newspaper published in Australia stated that half of all companies running critical infrastructure systems have reported politically motivated cyberattacks, adding, 'A global survey of such attacks – rarely acknowledged in public because of their potential to cause alarm – found companies estimated they had suffered an average of 10 instances of cyber war or cyber terrorism in the past five years at a cost of US \$850,000...a company' [16]. Two days later this newspaper also quoted Eugene Kaspersky, who described Stuxnet as a 'turning point', arguing 'I am afraid this is the beginning of a new world' [17]. The *South China Morning Post*, meanwhile, even lamented the fact that 'Unlike Britain and the United States, neither the mainland nor Hong Kong has an established multi-agency government structure that could co-ordinate various agencies to react quickly to cyber terrorism' [18]. In fact, the first news item in our sample



that specifically mentioned Stuxnet and was classified as balanced was not published until June 2011: a story by the UK's BBC on the possible 'hacking' of the International Monetary Fund [19]. Up to that point, a total of 21 items had mentioned the attack in Iran, all of which were concerned (18 items) or concerned with elements of scepticism (3 items) about the threat posed by cyberterrorism.

While there were far more news items that mentioned cyberterrorism in October 2010 than any other month in the period of our study, the events reported during this month had a lasting impact on news media coverage of cyberterrorism. The change is twofold. First, as Chart 3 shows, following October 2010 there was a marked increase in the general level of items mentioning cyberterrorism. In the 33 months prior to October 2010 there was an average of 4.8 items per month. This more than doubled in the 32 months that followed, during which there was an average of 10.6 items per month. Second, in the period following October 2010 there was a marked increase in the number of news items published that demonstrated a concern with the threat of cyberterrorism. This is shown in Chart 4.



*Chart 4: Number of Concerned, Sceptical, Balanced and Neither News Items before and after October 2010*

As Chart 4 demonstrates, in the 33 months prior to October 2010 there were a total of 73 items that were concerned, an average of 2.2 per month. By contrast, in the 32 months that followed there were a total of 174 items that were concerned, an average of 5.4 per month.

### **Conclusion**

The above discussion sketches some of the key developments within the coverage—or construction—of cyberterrorism and its threat in the English language international news media between 2008 and 2013. Two broad findings of importance to contemporary discussions of cyberterrorism emerge from this research. The first finding is that—in purely quantitative terms—there is a considerable amount of international media content

that focuses on cyberterrorism: a phenomenon that some (although not all) academic researchers argue has yet to occur [20]. In the deliberately narrow parameters of our research—whereby some variant of <cyber> and <terrorism> or <terror> had to be present in the story for its inclusion in our sample—an average of one story making reference to cyberterrorism was published every 3.7 days. As we have seen, the distribution of this coverage was far from uniform and many of the items we explored only mentioned cyberterrorism in passing. That said, this clearly evidences a significant amount of media interest in this new form of terrorism.

The second core finding is that much of the media coverage considered in our research expresses real concern over the current or future threat posed by this phenomenon. This concern contrasts with some of the more sceptical academic perspectives which frequently question whether would-be cyberterrorists have the means, motive or opportunity to engage in this type of activity [21]. It does, however, correspond rather more closely to a recent survey of researchers working on this topic in which 70% of those surveyed stated that cyberterrorism either does constitute, or potentially constitutes, ‘a significant threat’ [22]. This is important, we argue, because news coverage has a constitutive rather than corresponding relationship to the ‘reality’ of cyberterrorism: it is actively involved in the production of this potential security threat. Danger, as David Campbell wrote, ‘is not an objective condition’ [23]. It is a product of framing and interpretation, in which meaning is given to the world via language, images and other discursive practices: be they pictures of hand grenades, discussion of hypothetical ‘doomsday’ scenarios, or headlines about ‘malicious computer worms’. Thus, whether or not there exists a ‘real’ threat of cyberterrorism (if such a question could ever, even, be answered), media (and other) depictions thereof are important in their own right. This is, not least, because when they become widely circulated and reproduced, dominant narratives of threat—around cyberterrorism, and, indeed, anything else—can, very quickly, take on the appearance of, ‘an external “reality” which seems to confirm it as truth and commonsense’ [24].

In our future research we will seek to build on the analysis presented here by exploring more specific aspects of findings from this project. This will include: first, looking at the voices of authority cited in news coverage of cyberterrorism in order to ask who is seen to speak the ‘truth’ about this threat and how such voices work to augment or mitigate it. Second, investigating how the figure of the ‘cyberterrorist’ is represented, and what types of target cyberterrorists are seen to threaten. And, third, looking at the use of historical and other metaphors in media attempts to make sense of this security challenge and how these connect to visual images in this coverage. Our hope in this article, however, is that by charting some of the ways in which English language news media has constructed cyberterrorism as a security threat we have demonstrated the importance of such a research agenda.

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## II. Research Notes

### Although the (Dis-)Believers Dislike it:

#### a Backgrounder on IS Hostage Videos – August - December 2014

by Judith Tinnes

##### *Abstract*

*With the beheading video of U.S. photojournalist James Foley, the Islamic State (IS) initiated a hostage video campaign that received tremendous coverage in the international news media. This backgrounder highlights the most important aspects of IS hostage videos with a particular focus on their media strategic functions, which, in part, stand in sharp contrast with strategic guiding principles voiced by traditional Jihadist ideologue such as Ayman al-Zawahiri – exposing the growing rift between the IS and Al-Qaeda. Providing examples from primary sources and identifying commonalities and differences to earlier hostage footage, the Research Note illustrates that the IS hostage video campaign is rationally calculated, multifaceted, and constantly changing.*

**Keywords:** Islamic State; IS; hostage videos; execution videos; media strategy; beheading

##### *Introduction*

On August 19, 2014, with the beheading video of U.S. photojournalist James Foley, the Islamic State (IS) initiated a hostage video campaign drawing tremendous attention by the mainstream media. Much of the news reporting focused – in stark black-and-white-rhetoric – on the barbaric, savage, and evil nature of the displayed violence and its perpetrators, thereby neglecting that execution videos contain many more facets that deserve attention when a realistic assessment is to be made. This backgrounder highlights the most important aspects of IS hostage videos [1] with a particular focus on their media strategic functions, which in part stand in sharp contrast with strategic guiding principles voiced by traditional Jihadist ideologues such as Ayman al-Zawahiri – exposing the growing rift between the IS and Al-Qaeda.

##### *Theatre of Terror: Characteristics of IS Execution Videos and their Predecessors*

Hostage execution videos are not mere documentations of conflict atrocities but high-impact propaganda instruments in the terrorists' "War of Ideas" for which the killings were purposely committed. As early as 1974, Jenkins pointed out that

*terrorist attacks are often deliberately choreographed by the terrorists to achieve maximum publicity, particularly to attract the attention of the electronic media or the international press. [...] Terrorism is psychological warfare. It is theatre [2].*

Consequently, hostage executions and their media orchestration are the total opposite of senseless emotionally-driven behaviour. They are the product of a rationally deliberated calculus that aims at creating a maximum impact on different target groups at the same time, thereby unfolding a degree of political leverage their producers would not gain otherwise due to their minority status.

Terrorism, being rather a strategy of communication than of mere violence [3], has to rely on the distribution power of mass communication outlets to unfold maximum publicity. In the battlefield of the media, where

more than half of terrorists' battle is taking place [4], the Internet (and the social media in particular) have taken centre-stage. Nevertheless, the traditional mainstream media remain of high importance for terrorists, who try to exploit them as a powerful echo-chamber for enhancing the radius of their message. On the other hand, terrorist attacks combine many news factors [5] (i.e. features that render an event news-worthy), making them ideal assets for coverage. Due to this mutual benefit, the relationship between terrorism and the media is often referred to as symbiotic. Hostage takings are particularly well-suited to play the theatre of terror, as they last for a prolonged period, often unfolding a climatic event structure with a dramatic potential. These kind of dual-phase terrorist acts are emotionally laden, and focus on a few individuals that can easily be categorized into a "good versus evil" scheme. The combination of "human interest", life-and-death situations, and dramatic choreography proves irresistible for the media, especially commercial ones, wishing to attract and hold audiences.

On May 11, 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's organization *Jama'at al-Tawhid Wa'al-Jihad* (one of the IS' predecessor groups), released a video showing the decapitation of American communications contractor Nicholas Berg. It marked the beginning of a video series that bears much resemblance to the current IS hostage video campaign – but is also characterized by some discrepancies that shed light on shifts in media strategy. Typically, execution videos are highly staged and focus on the execution ritual that consists of several recurrent steps (e.g. a self-identification of the hostage, a legitimizing speech by the executioner, or the actual execution). According to Perlmutter, "beheading videos are inherently symbolic, in fact they are the personification of symbolic warfare" [6]. Many of them have a symmetrical image structure, with the captors (mostly an odd number) posing behind their kneeling and shackled hostages in a centred group-photo-like constellation, signalling a hierarchy which demonstrates the terrorists' power over their helpless victims. The forensic signature of beheadings is consistent. They are "essentially ritual murders that are used as psychological warfare and propaganda" [7]. The hostage is beheaded with a knife – a pejorative allusion to the slaughter of animals aimed at dehumanising the victim. The executioner places the severed head on the centre back or chest of the torso. According to Neer and O'Toole,

*ISIS's violence is premeditated, purposeful, cold-blooded, and predatory, and has a sadistic quality to it. [...] [It] is best described as instrumental violence, and is the type typically preferred and engaged in by psychopaths [8].*

Execution videos are laden with colour symbolism. Often, the captive is forced to wear an orange jumpsuit – a reference to the prison uniforms at Guantanamo Bay. The IS adopted the orange jumpsuit symbolism, introduced by Zarqawi a decade ago, for many of its 2014 videos and also occasionally uses it in photo reports of executions released by its provincial media wings. The executioner is usually clad in black clothes – symbolically representing the concepts of jihad and the caliphate by creating a historical link to both the prophet's black battle flag and the medieval Abbasid Caliphate [9]. While many of the 2004 killings were filmed indoors in rooms with empty walls (except of a group banner in the background), most of the 2014 executions were recorded outdoors in desert areas – demonstrating that the perpetrators are in full control of the geographic region and do not have to hide at a clandestine location. The IS footage contains only a few dominant colours: the black of the executioner's clothes, the orange of the hostage's jumpsuit, the beige of the sand, and the blue of the sky. The setting is heavily staged, creating the impression of a minimalistic theatre, focusing in an unprecedented manner – without any elements of distraction – the viewer's attention on the executioner and his victim. The sharp contrasts between the few colours (at some points the executioner appears to be a threatening dark silhouette against the blue sky) gives the image an enormous visual impact that remains effective if it is transferred from a screen to static stills in print media. Other than in most of the 2004 videos, the IS victims are mostly not blindfolded, which amplifies the psychological impact.



The first four 2014 videos showing the execution of Western captives (i.e. James Foley, Steven Sotloff, David Haines, and Alan Henning) were choreographed and produced in a strikingly similar fashion. Staged down to the last detail for media suitability in accordance with typical Western news settings, the videos use a political (instead of a religious) narrative. While most tapes from the 2004 series contain characteristic religious elements, such as *anasheed* songs or Quranic verses, such features have been dropped in the four IS videos. Even the praising “Allah-u-akbar”, militants usually frenetically shout during the killing process, was left out. While most traditional hostage videos are in Arabic, the IS executioner, widely dubbed as “Jihadi John” (henceforth JJ), delivers his statement in fluent English with a London accent. The political leaders and the public of the hostages’ home countries are explicitly addressed, and the videos make abundant mentioning of recent political decisions and military actions by these nations. In an introductory part, each of the four IS videos contains an edited segment of TV news reports on addresses by Western political leaders or parliamentary decisions, framing the subsequent hostage footage in a clear political context.

While the 2004 videos were shot with low-quality video cameras – implementing the golden rule of terrorism to achieve maximum impact with minimal effort – this does not apply to the IS videos, which are filmed from different angles with multiple HD cameras. An extensive frame-to-frame analysis of the elaborately produced IS hostage video *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* by Quilliam/TRAC [10] has revealed that the central hostage segment was filmed in multiple takes over no less than 4-6 hours and has been edited using AVID post-production technology. The fact that “this is not something that an amateur photographer can learn through trial and error” [11] proves that the IS has professional media experts in its ranks. The production costs of the video amount to “at least \$200,000” [12]. For Quilliam/TRAC it is “clear that the content of the video was carefully considered and the individual (or individuals) who directed it were obvious perfectionists” [13]. Nevertheless, their analysis has exposed that the producers made several editing mistakes, revealing information they had wanted to conceal (such as three hidden executioners).

A common characteristic of the 2014 IS’ execution videos is tactical self-censorship, whereby the producers exclude the most graphic content. Only the very beginning of the execution procedure is shown, then the screen turns to black, and afterwards the bloody aftermath is displayed for a few seconds. This is not an entirely new practice. Roughly 20% of the beheading videos released in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia 2004-2008 were self-censored [14] to prevent a “bad PR” effect (i.e. being heavily criticized even by supporters for being excessively violent and breaking Islamic law). What is new though, is the frequent use of self-censorship: Without one exception all officially released IS hostage execution videos were self-censored. Moreover, according to Bunker, “beheading victims are normally put through dry runs of the beheading [...] to get them conditioned for the terminal event” [15] – a cynical effort to make the later visual production suitable for target audiences. With this media strategy, the IS holds a balance between psychological warfare (by showing the victim’s body) and audience-suitability (by sparing viewers the most distressing moments).

The IS execution videos use a consistent narrative. As a communication (instead of a violence) strategy, terrorism aims to send a message to different target audiences. The violence perpetrated against the victim is only a medium to draw the target audiences’ attention and make them receptive for the message. Consequently, what is said in a hostage video, is of particular importance. The intention to convey a message becomes evident in video titles, which often explicitly include the term, e.g. the Foley video is titled “A Message to America”. The central message of the IS Western hostage video campaign is to deter the U.S. and its allies (mainly via generating pressure from the general public) from direct military intervention against IS targets in Iraq and Syria. For example, IS executioner JJ threatens:

*We take this opportunity to warn those governments that enter this evil alliance of America against the Islamic State to back off and leave our people alone. (Steven Sotloff video, released: 2/9/2014)*

*If you, Cameron, persist in fighting the Islamic State, then you, like your master Obama, will have the blood of your people on your hands. (David Haines video, released: 13/9/2014)*

With an average run-time of 2 minutes 46 seconds, the duration of the four videos is unusually short – roughly half the average length of the hostage footage released in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia 2004-2008 [16]. This is probably done to fit into the news items format structure of Western news media. The legitimization for the violence is mainly retributive and formulated straight-up without complex theological arguments. For example, in the Sotloff video, JJ states:

*I'm back, Obama, and I'm back because of your arrogant foreign policy towards the Islamic State, because of your insistence on continuing your bombings and [unintelligible] on Mosul Dam, despite our serious warnings. You, Obama, have but to gain from your actions...[unintelligible] another American citizen. So just as your missiles continue to strike our people, our knife will continue to strike the necks of your people.*

The clear-cut, simple legitimization narrative marks a significant difference from the 2004 videos, where militants delivered sophisticated legitimizing arguments for their deeds [17]. This is in line with a general trend towards simplification of ideological messaging in order to make it more accessible for Western audiences (particularly young people with limited attention span) [18].

While in the past terrorists frequently legitimized executions by pointing to alleged individual “crimes” a victim had committed, such as spying, the first four executed Westerners are presented as victims of their home nations’ foreign policy. [19] Their governments are accused of showing no interest in the fate of their citizens – a common propaganda communication strategy that aims to drive a wedge between leaders and ordinary citizens. Before his execution, Foley is forced to say:

*I call on my friends, family, and loved ones to rise up against my real killers, the U.S. government, for what will happen to me, is only a result of their complacency and criminality. My message to my beloved parents: Save me some dignity and don't accept any meagre compensation for my death from the same people who effectively hit the last nail in my coffin with their recent aerial campaign in Iraq. (released: 19/8/2014)*

The language of the 2014 IS videos is less elaborated than that of the carefully formulated and theologically-founded Jihadist statements in earlier hostage footage; e.g. in the David Haines video JJ proclaims:

*Your evil alliance with America, which continues to strike the Muslims of Iraq and most recently bombed the Haditha Dam, will only accelerate your destruction, and playing the role of the obedient lapdog, Cameron, will only drag you and your people into another bloody and unwinnable war.*

Symbol expert Dawn Perlmutter has identified elements of gang codes in the videos. She points out that the language, gesture, and violence signify disrespect in the same manner as a gangbanger is calling out a rival gang leader. Perlmutter gives the examples of JJ dishonouring Obama by omitting his President title, and calling Cameron an “obedient lapdog” (a double insult negating his political autonomy and equating him to a dog – a species deemed impure in Islam). With the hostage murder, the IS sends the message: If you enter our territory we will kill a member of your gang [20]. JJ emphasizes the IS’ frontal disrespect by making plenty use of personal and possessive pronouns like “you” and “your”, while aggressively pointing his knife to the camera. Demonstrating his power over life and death, he dominantly points the knife to his captives when mentioning them.

A chilling innovation of the IS’ hostage video campaign is the group’s tactic to present the next victim at the end of an execution tape. This practice breaks with traditional release patterns of hostage media. Terrorist

groups often release so-called proof-of-life videos that precede later execution footage. Such tapes serve to create credibility by providing evidence that a captive is still alive and indeed held by the group which is claiming the kidnapping. In case an organization makes demands, it uses a proof-of-life tape to publicize its conditions for the release of a hostage, usually linked to an ultimatum of several hours to days and a threat to kill the captive when the deadline has expired. In 2014, the IS did not use this traditional video type and instead introduced hybrid videos combining execution and hostage footage. The presentation of a new victim immediately after the display of his predecessor's body is a maximum psychological warfare operation. Moreover, the unpredictability of the IS' time schedule (no ultimatum is announced, only demands are made) raises the psychological pressure, making the captors – as the sole controllers of events – appear powerful while underlining the helplessness of their adversaries. Foley is not even shown in a hybrid video before his execution – implying that the group, at this stage of the kidnapping case [21], deemed the psychological pressure of its actions more important than the fulfilment of any demands.

### ***Media Bias: High vs. Low Profile Hostages***

The videotaped decapitations of the American and British hostages raised a media storm [22]. According to a NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, 94% of Americans said that they saw, read, or heard the news coverage about the beheadings of the U.S. journalists [23]. This awareness is higher than for any other major news event in the last five years [24] and proves that the IS has been successful in grabbing the attention of a maximum audience and spreading its message to millions of viewers in the Western hemisphere. The tremendous coverage amplifies its well-organized and highly resilient social media campaign [25], making the mainstream media an active participant in the group's "War of Ideas". Much discussion has unfolded on whether it is ethically justifiable to publish screenshots or segments from the videos or even the full-length tapes. Proponents emphasize the importance to show visuals in order to provide a realistic account of the enemy's brutality and to secure freedom of speech, an intrinsic element of a functioning democracy. Critics point out that showing the footage plays directly into the hands of the Jihadists and is insensitive towards the victims and their families. Several news outlets completely refrained from publishing stills from the videos – a notable example is the British newspaper "The Independent on Sunday": After the beheading of aid worker Alan Henning, it used a plain black front cover with white letters reading:

*On Friday a decent, caring human being was murdered in cold blood. Our thoughts are with his family. He was killed, on camera, for the sole purpose of propaganda. Here is the news, not the propaganda [26].*

Remarkably, only few discussions have focused on the center-piece of the videos – the terrorist message – with many news outlets simply transcribing verbal quotes from JJ's statements and the hostages' scripted speeches without carefully framing them as terrorist propaganda.

The success of the IS media campaign can be considered as one important reason for the spread of videotaped beheadings to other nations. A high media attention is particularly useful for emerging groups which have not yet managed to establish instant name/brand recognition. In an apparent move to copycat the IS media strategy, several other militant groups published similar footage, amongst them Algeria-based AQIM splinter-group *Jund al-Khilafa* (JK) and the Sinai-based *Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis* [ABM]. Some characteristics of their tapes bear striking resemblance to the IS hostage videos, indicating that the militants used the IS productions as templates for their own media operations (e.g. the JK beheading video of French mountaineering guide Hervé Gourdel contains an introductory segment with edited news footage and employs a similar self-censorship tactic).

Perlmutter has identified another important reason for the geographical spread of beheading videos: in line with her gang code interpretation of IS media, Perlmutter considers the decapitations as initiation rituals comparable to the “blood-in” code that requires a new member of a group to commit murder; consequently, the filmed decapitations are a form to pledge allegiance to the IS [27]. This is consistent with both the developments on the ground (JK and parts of ABM have merged with the IS) and the IS’ narrative. In an article about secured pledges of allegiance published in its English-language propaganda magazine *Dabiq*, the group writes about JK:

*when Shaykh Abū Muhammad al-ʿAdnānī [the IS spokesman, J.T.] made a call to target crusaders everywhere, the mujāhidīn of Algeria were the quickest to answer his call, and immediately presented a French prisoner for execution if the French did not withdraw from the American coalition against the Islamic State, and then executed him when the French arrogantly insisted upon continuing their transgressions. [28]*

Other than one might expect, the media storm effect does not apply to all execution videos in a similar manner. Instead, a strong bias can be observed, manifesting itself in an over-reporting of Western hostage killings and an under-reporting of domestic executions. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Jihadist groups have regularly published execution videos. Many of these tapes were unofficially released productions uploaded by individual fighters (or their enemies) to social media sharing sites, such as YouTube. Much of this low-quality, Arabic-language footage is uncensored and displays excessively cruel violence [29]. It can be assumed that these unofficial productions were not choreographed for Western media-suitability, and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to find reliable information on the victims and their killers. These factors might explain why such videos do not receive the same amount of coverage than Western captive footage. However, the media bias also applies to official releases displaying domestic hostages. For example, on August 28, 2014, the IS released a carefully choreographed English-subtitled video featuring 24 captive Peshmerga fighters, one of whom is beheaded in front of the Great Mosque in Mosul – “a provocation, trying to show that IS control of the city is assured” [30]. It addresses Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani and U.S. President Obama and contains a threat to decapitate further hostages. Though released only a few days after the Foley video (with the high-impact news coverage still going on), the Peshmerga video did only receive very little attention – in spite of the fact, that the lives of the 23 remaining captives were endangered.

The so-far most blatant disregard for domestic hostages could be observed in the coverage of the IS compilation video *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it*. The tape contained two segments of hostage footage, the first showing the simultaneous beheading of 22 Syrian officers and pilots, the second displaying the remains of executed American aid worker Abdul-Rahman (Peter) Kassig. In the first 24 hours after the video release, the mainstream media almost entirely focused in their reporting on the Kassig segment (as if it were a separate video) and completely ignored the Syrian officers and pilots’ segment [31]. Later on, as the number of news articles covering the Syrians’ executions raised, most of this reporting nevertheless dealt primarily with the identities of the international IS executioners and did not pay much attention to the hostages [32]. Remarkably, Kassig’s parents mentioned the killed Syrians in a statement released on the same day they learned of their son’s death [33]. IS supporters exploit the under-reporting of domestic casualties in their social media posts. The ignorance of non-Western victims perfectly fits into their “Western arrogance” narrative. For example, IS supporter “Milk Sheikh” tweeted on November 26: “One Kafir beheaded by the Islamic State = Cocunuts cry like Rafidah on Ashurah. Assad kills 200+ civilians in Raqqa = Cocunuts are quite [quiet is meant, J.T.]”.



***Terrorism Cinema: Choreographing Execution Videos for the Young Generation***

While the first IS execution videos were similar in terms of content, choreography, and production style, the IS set a new media strategic precedent with the release of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* on November 16. The 15 minutes, 53 seconds English-language compilation video consists of three segments: The first, split into further sub-segments spanning across the video as a conjunctive narrative, summarizes the IS' history, expansion successes, and ambitions – communicating the message, that the group is unstoppable. By displaying graphic footage of air strike casualties caused by Assad's forces, it also serves as a legitimization for the violence shown in the second segment – the simultaneous beheading of 22 Syrian officers and pilots. The last segment displays the bodily remains of executed U.S. aid worker Abdul-Rahman (Peter) Kassig. The video re-engages traditional elements of Jihadist propaganda such as *anasheed* songs and Quranic verses – indicating that it is not primarily addressed to a Western audience (including potential recruits) but mainly to Jihadist supporters and enemies in the region (such as Assad's army).

While in the past the IS has released video footage showing gunshot executions of a large number of captives, the carefully choreographed ritualized mass beheading documented in graphic detail is a first – not only for the group but for global Jihadist propaganda in general. The 22 military personnel, captured by the IS during the overrun of Division 17 and other military bases in summer, are paraded through an olive grove to a desert place in a humiliating way, bent, barefooted, and shackled, with each militant grabbing one of them by the scruff of his neck. The ritual procession, led by JJ, walks past a wooden box with black military knives, each militant taking one when passing by. The captives, who are wearing dark blue (rather than Guantanamo-style orange) jumpsuits are forced to kneel in a line left and right to JJ, creating a symmetrical constellation. Notably, all militants are unmasked, have different nationalities or ethnicities, and wear military fatigues, except JJ. Clad in his black executioner uniform, his face covered, he gives a short threatening address to Obama. Before the beheading starts, the camera lingers over the faces of the captives. Some of the militants are shown running their thumbs over the blades of their knives – a psychological warfare tactic obviously targeted at the audience (the militants are standing behind their victims and are out of their view). With the word “Bismillah”, JJ signals the begin of the decapitations.

The slickly edited HD video makes heavy use of cinematic special effects. The psychological impact of the footage is reinforced by visual effects and chilling sounds (e.g. when the militants pick their knives from the box, the sound of metal sliding against metal is exaggerated). The video has a climax-oriented structure, culminating in a movie-like “showdown”, focusing on JJ beheading “his” captive: In the most disturbing scene, the executioner begins to decapitate his victim (shown in slow-motion), then halts the execution, exposes the neck wound of the victim, and then suddenly looks up (emphasized by an uncanny sound effect), staring threatening into the camera, which holds the scene for a moment, then (underlined by a fast-motion effect and chilling sound), pounces back on his victim to complete the beheading. With its shock effects, the choreography of the whole scene strongly resembles American horror slasher movies. In motion pictures, slow motion explicitly disrupts the illusion of natural vision, the process of dying is drawn out for inspection, enabling the sequence to shock, the mortification of the body becomes lyrical, yet the graphic nature signifies realism to viewers [34]. Employed in a terrorist video, the slow-/fast-motion and sound effects are a means to aestheticize, dramatize, and spectacularize the (real) violence, thereby creating, on the one hand, a distance that keeps the video appealing for viewers, while, on the other hand, retaining the shock value of the footage, which is required for psychological warfare. After the beheading, the camera lingers solemnly in slow-motion over the faces of the perpetrators, the footage now resembling a heroic epic glorifying the warrior ethos of its protagonists. With effects of Western cinema culture, a cowardly act – the cold-blooded decapitation of shackled, kneeling, helpless victims – is framed as a heroic deed.

Wrapping the violence in cinematic elements is a media strategic meant to create a familiar bonding to foreign viewers and secure a range and impact of message outreach which the IS propagandists would not gain otherwise. It particularly appeals to young Muslim Jihad sympathizers familiar with Western pop culture, where the domestication of ultraviolence is “a signifier of ‘action’ and pleasure” [35]. According to former French IS hostage Nicolas Hénin, particularly the European IS recruits have seen more horror and disaster movies than time spent reading pages from the Quran [36]. This points to an often overlooked function of execution videos: recruitment. Considering the support of the greater Jihadist community as vital, the IS invests more effort in recruitment than any other Jihadist group, with a special emphasis on foreign fighters [37]. As “terror marketing” [38], beheadings resonate with young Muslim Jihad sympathizers (including converts) around the world, who interpret the violence as a just retribution for the West’s oppressive and humiliating behaviour towards Islam. Execution videos prove that the IS is making good on its threats to kill – thereby raising its street credibility [39] and demonstrating power and prowess in the competitive environment of terrorist groups. Though on a smaller scale as in *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it*, Western pop cultural elements can also be found in other IS execution videos. For example, De Graaf and Boyle point to striking similarities between the edited news segment in the Sotloff video and the opening credits of the U.S. TV series “Homeland” [40]. The exploitation of Western pop culture becomes further evident in the IS’ use of style elements from Hip Hop music videos: the “dissing” of adversaries, JJ’s gesturing, and the use of sound effects to emphasize certain words (such as echo effects) are common codes of Hip Hop culture, which is very popular among young Muslim males.

The appeal of IS execution videos manifests itself in the overwhelmingly celebratory reactions of the group’s supporters (many of them IT-savvy individuals), kicking off social media hypes. The reactions do not only prove that the supporters see the videotaped murders as a huge victory against their enemies and a restoration of the “Ummah’s” honour, but also that they regard the graphic violence as entertainment. For example, on November 16, 2014, “abdul haafidh” tweeted: “Watching ‘even though the disbelievers dislike it’ In Full HD May Allah bless #IS’s media team”. The message was accompanied by a picture of his TV with the video running on it. The grim, left-handed executioner JJ has turned into a celebrity-like cult figure praised by his countless fans with slickly edited glorifying and threatening art-work, often used as avatars and headers for their Twitter and other social media accounts. A symbolic signature figure for the unstoppable brute force of the IS, JJ has become more than his individual personality: He is now a brand with an established recognition value (which might also explain why he is still appearing in his typical identity-concealing black uniform while other executioners show their faces). One artwork image displays JJ in front of a full moon (with written elements of the IS flag on it), pointing his knife to the camera. With moon and knife not only symbols of Jihadist culture but also typical elements of horror film symbolism, JJ is put close to American slasher movie heroes such as Michael Myers from “Halloween”. Research has shown that young horror film watchers prefer violent and murderous slasher monsters and find them attractive because of their killing prowess [41]. JJ’s fans abundantly quote their hero’s sayings, first and foremost the vengeful catchphrase “I’m back”, used in the Sotloff video (likely an allusion to the famous quote “I’ll be back” from the Terminator movies). His fan community welcomes his deeds with cheering comments. On November 16, “Pro-Muslim” posted a screenshot from the central scene of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it*, showing JJ staring into the camera during the beheading and commented: “That stare. .. Priceless”. Considering him a weapon to strike fear into the hearts of their enemies, they use pictures of him for making threats against adversaries, and express their excitement to see him “in action”. On December 24, when the IS broke news about the capture of Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh, “Abu Jandal” posted two stills of JJ and sarcastically wrote: “That Jordanian Pilot has Won a VIP exclusive audience with our brother Jihadi John! Enjoy your Prize!”



The detailed graphic nature and the dropping of its self-censorship mechanism in *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* can probably be attributed to a shift in the IS' media strategic targeting pattern, moving the focus from the "far" back to the "near" enemy (foremost: the Assad regime). With its detailed documentation of excessive violence, the group tries to deter Assad's military personnel in a "Shock and Awe" manner and seeks to raise its profile among local anti-Assad forces, increasing its recruitment appeal. The shifted focus is further substantiated by the initiation of a new IS hostage video series titled "Nusayri Soldiers in the Hands of the Islamic State", showing the beheading of captured Assad military personnel. Other than in the Western hostage videos, the captives are mistreated and humiliated on-camera (e.g. one soldier is forced to kiss the boot of a militant and mocked when he bursts into tears). In contrast to the solemn execution rite of the compilation video, the Nusayri series portrays violence as casual (e.g. one soldier is decapitated while sitting on a bench). However, notably, the IS has re-engaged its self-censorship mechanism in the series, a move that might have been caused by "bad PR" effects in reaction to its excessively cruel compilation video. A separate tape, released on December 24, 2014, and titled *The Execution of a Murtaf Group Linked to the Nusayri Regime* displays 13 alleged Assad spies who are questioned and later simultaneously killed by gunshots. In contrast to most of the previous IS hostage videos, the footage (which also employs slick post-production editing such as special effects overlays) was not recorded in a remote desert area; instead the captives were publicly executed in front of a large crowd, obviously to create a high deterrent effect among the local population.

The focus on the "near" enemy, the excessive violence, and the high production value of the mass execution segment are not the only discrepancies that distinguish *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* from previous IS hostage videos. Its last segment, showing the bodily remains of U.S. aid worker Abdul-Rahman (Peter) Kassig, is characterized by several striking irregularities, of which the most important are:

1. The video does not contain a statement by Kassig. Given that the central element of terrorist propaganda is the message, this is a remarkable inconsistency. JJ plays down the omission by cynically mocking Kassig's bodily remains by stating: "Peter, who fought against the Muslims in Iraq while serving as a soldier under the American army, doesn't have much to say. His previous cell mates have already spoken on his behalf". Notably, the hostage is not presented as a victim of his home government's foreign policy; instead his military past is emphasised – maybe in an attempt to counter the heavy criticism the IS had received for the death threat against Kassig, a Muslim convert who had been on a humanitarian mission to help the local population (including injured militants).
2. The production value of the segment is far below the rest of the video. The footage is poorly lit and does not contain many special effects.
3. Kassig's body is not shown; only his severed head is displayed in what Quilliam/TRAC believe to be – with a high degree of certainty – a still photo, that has been edited into the video [42].
4. The IS does not present its next victim at the end of the video.

Most experts have concluded that the discrepancies do not emanate from deliberate media strategic decisions but are rather a result of the IS' plans to videotape Kassig's execution having been foiled, most probably because the hostage resisted his captors. Based on medical expert analyses, Quilliam/TRAC conclude that Kassig might not have been beheaded, as the IS suggested, but shot instead [43].

*Zealous Young Men: Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi Revisited*

One of the most important conclusions that can be drawn from the IS hostage video campaign (and from *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* in particular) is the fact that the group's media strategy turns the strategic guiding principles voiced nearly a decade ago by Ayman al-Zawahiri upside down. In an intercepted letter from July 2005, Zawahiri, at that time the second-in-command of Al-Qaeda Central (AQC), criticized Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, then-leader of the IS' predecessor organization Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), for the way he conducted jihad in Iraq. Though formulated rather as a piece of advice rather than as a direct order, the letter reveals a first "tension that has arisen between the 'old guard' of al-Qaeda and the operational echelon in 'the field'" [44]. While Zawahiri does not question the theological justification of Zarqawi's actions, he pragmatically criticizes his method to achieve his goals. Zawahiri's main dictum is that the success of Jihad is dependent on the support from the Muslim masses, "therefore, the mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve" [45].

In his letter, Zawahiri criticized three elements of Zarqawi's strategy. The first point of criticism was the indiscriminate attacks against ordinary Shia people – he opines that the majority of Muslims does not comprehend the sectarian violence and finds it alienating. Notably, while Zarqawi's organization regularly conducted brutal attacks against Shiite civilians, it often either refrained from officially claiming these attacks or offered non-sectarian justifications for its deeds (e.g. it legitimized hostage killings by pointing to alleged "crimes" that the individuals had committed, such as spying, instead of highlighting their Shia identity). In contrast, the IS openly propagates an anti-Shia ideology, condoning sectarian cleansing. In Episode 2 of the propaganda video series "Lend me your Ears" (released: 29/9/2014), British hostage John Cantlie is forced to say that the IS does not "regard the Shia as Muslims at all. In fact [...] [they] are considered worse than Americans as they are apostates claiming to be Muslims while worshipping the dead". In the first segment of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it* which summarizes the IS' history in brief, the narrator states:

*It was not befitting for the grandsons of Abu Bakr and 'Umar [...] to take the stance of a subservient and humiliated person. So they sharpened every blade to make the rafidah [pejorative term for the Shia, J.T.] taste all sorts of killing and torment. They uprooted the fortresses, pounded the strongholds of shirk, and cleansed the land of the filth of the rafidah.*

The second element Zawahiri criticized in 2005 was AQI's foreign leadership (Zarqawi himself was Jordanian-born), which he thought might stir up sensitivities among Iraqi people. Indeed, in the years following the U.S. 2003 invasion of Iraq, foreign fighters – not only leaders but also ordinary foot soldiers – were often treated with suspicion by domestic militants. In the IS, the tide has turned. About half of the estimated 30.000 fighters-strong group consists of foreigners [46]. That the IS considers and propagates itself as a multi-national force becomes strikingly evident in the mass execution scene from *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it*: The video's producers carefully selected the prominently featured executioners from different nationalities and ethnicities. Also in November 2014, the IS tried to capitalize on the protests in the U.S. city of Ferguson, appealing to African-Americans by emphasising its own non-racism stance. On November 27, IS supporter "State of Islam" posted a picture of several fighters from different nationalities/ethnicities with the comment: "Many races. No racism. This is the Khilafah. #Ferguson #IslamicState".

The third strategic element – the one Zawahiri criticised the most rigorously – were the videotaped beheadings. He wrote:

*Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable – also – are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughter-*

*ers, etc. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular. [47]*

Zawahiri was especially concerned about the “bad PR” effect of beheadings that could be amplified by the mainstream media coverage:

*The general opinion of our supporter does not comprehend that, and [...] this general opinion falls under a campaign by the malicious, perfidious, and fallacious campaign by the deceptive and fabricated media [48].*

To avoid counterproductive reactions, Zawahiri recommends to stop decapitation as a method of execution:

*We can kill the captives by bullet. That would achieve that which is sought after without exposing ourselves to the questions and answering to doubts. We don't need this [49].*

Criticism by leadership figures such as Zawahiri and the controversy about the decapitation scenes within the broader Jihadist community eventually led to a sharp decline in beheading videos [50]. In the first years after its foundation, Al-Furqan media, the IS' oldest media production centre (founded on October 31, 2006 by the group's predecessor organisation Islamic State of Iraq), strictly complied with Zawahiri's advice. When executions of hostages were videotaped, the captives were killed by gunshots. However, since its establishment in April 2013, the IS has not only re-introduced videotaped beheadings but made the cruel execution method the hallmark of its media strategy. Moreover, it ignored opposition, even from hard-line supporters [51], to the decapitation of captives who were engaged in humanitarian work (such as Alan Henning) and/or were Muslim converts (e.g. Abdul-Rahman [Peter] Kassig).

The media strategic shift of going “back-to-the-roots” has to be seen in the broader context of the IS' and Al-Qaeda's differences in strategy which in February 2014 led to AQC's public expulsion of its Iraqi branch, which since its admission into Al-Qaeda in December 2004, had become a “liability to the image of jihad generally and of al-Qa`ida in particular” [52]. One important root cause of the internal strife is a generation gap. Approximately half of the IS membership is made up of young men, who

*criticize Zawahiri as being an old man who [is] both lacking in wisdom and too far-removed from the Syrian conflict to justifiably weigh in on the strategy for it [...]. They regard the old hands of jihad as has-beens who need to step aside and make room for the next generation of jihad [53].*

Many of the media strategic elements employed by the IS (such as the simplification of the messaging or the exploitation of pop cultural elements) can be interpreted in the context of the group's agenda to win the hearts of young foreign Jihad sympathizers. For this young generation, which has grown up with the brutality of Western action and horror movies, the graphic violence depicted in beheading videos has become a pull (rather than a push) factor. That the young make up the targeted demographic group most receptive to IS' recruitment efforts, may release the organization from worries about “bad PR” effects and encourage it to continue its strategy. However, it can be expected that the generation gap will almost certainly have negative effects as well. With so many young fighters, the IS lacks experienced and skilled members for its long-term goal to consolidate and expand its Islamic Caliphate. The group is aware of this weak point and tries to counteract it – one example worth mentioning is a special call by IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi for scientists, scholars, preachers, judges, doctors, engineers and people with military and administrative expertise in many domains, stressing that the IS is in dire need of such personnel [54]. That well-educated people are equally attracted to cruel beheading scenes than the inexperienced “zealous young men” is, however, questionable.

AQC and its branches consequently adhere to their media strategic standard of avoiding decapitation footage

and keep up their vocal criticism of non-conformers. On December 8, Nasser bin Ali al-Ansi, a senior commander of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), openly chastised the IS for its beheading videos, stating:

*These are scenes which we do not accept and we strongly reject [...] Prophet Mohammad [...] has ordered us to be kind in everything, even in killing, and it is not part of kindness to film beheadings and slayings and publish them in public, where sons and daughters of those killed can see [55].*

In line with this, AQAP's own hostage media footage differs considerably from the IS videos. For example, in a December 4 tape featuring kidnapped U.S. journalist Luke Somers (who was later killed in a failed rescue attempt), al-Ansi, who is unmasked and wears traditional Muslim clothes, reads from a prepared script in a calm tone without heavy gesturing. Somers is dressed in Western civilian clothes, appears to be unshackled, and is not visibly threatened with a weapon. The IS and its supporters counter Al-Qaeda's criticism and PR-conscious approach by accusing it to betray jihadist principles. On December 29, "anbaari12" tweeted a picture of Zawahiri with a mocking speech bubble reading: "We don't implement Shari'ah because we want to be popular".

### ***Bifurcated Media Strategy: Terror News Programming***

In an effort to reach out to a more sophisticated audience, the IS embarked on a new media strategic path parallel to its execution video campaign. On September 18, 2014, it released the introduction of a propaganda video series featuring British hostage John Cantlie. By the end of 2014, six episodes have been released in addition to the intro trailer; the group has announced two further instalments on its advertising banner. With the multi-part footage titled *Lend me your Ears – Messages from the British Detainee John Cantlie*, the IS tries to portray itself as a civilised and legitimate organisation by carefully packaging its political messaging through the words and conventions of a Western news media insider [56]. Mimicking a news setting with Cantlie serving as the anchor, the experienced war reporter is shown sitting on a wooden desk against a black background, his hands unshackled. Though he candidly admits that he is speaking under duress, the videos do not show any physical violence perpetrated against him [57] and lack the threatening tone of the execution videos. Instead of intimidating the political leaders and public of the hostage's home country, the IS attempts to subtly influencing its audience, trying to persuade it of the group's views and causes [58].

The Cantlie video series pursues three main objectives. The first is creating a counterbalance to the Western news media reporting. As mentioned before, terrorists remain dependent on the mainstream media for maximum distribution of their messages. However, it is not only important *that* their acts are reported but also *how* the media report on it. As terrorism is widely condemned by local and international news outlets, the reporting takes the stance of the IS' adversaries, which is counterproductive for the group's image. In the intro, Cantlie says on the IS' behalf:

*I'm gonna show you the truth behind the systems and motivation of the Islamic State and how the Western media, the very organisation I used to work for, can twist and manipulate that truth to the public back home. There are two sides to every story – think you're getting the whole picture? [...]. Join me for the next few programs and I think you may be surprised at what you learn (released: 18/09/2014).*

Cantlie's straight and open tone combined with his facade of being a news anchor – a role, Western audiences associate with reliability – give his message an aura of trustworthiness.

The second objective of the propaganda series is congruent with that of the execution videos: The footage



aims to deter the U.S. and its allies (mainly via the general public) from continuing or starting a military intervention against the IS. Hereby, the group takes a double-tracked approach. It presents itself as an unstoppable invincible force and simultaneously portrays its adversaries as being incapable of conducting a successful military intervention. “Obama’s under-construction army”, a “motley collection of fighters on the ground” who have “a long history of underperforming” (Episode 2, released: 29/09/2014) will confront “the most powerful Jihadist movement seen in recent history” (Ep. 1, released: 22/09/2014) and is

*completely underestimating the strength and fighting zeal of the opponent. Not since Vietnam have we witnessed such a potential mess in the making. Current estimates of 15.000 troops needed to fight the Islamic State are laughably low. The State has more Mujahideen than this and this is not some undisciplined outfit with a few Kalashnikovs. (Ep. 1)*

Consequently, “anyone hoping for a nice neat surgical operation without getting their hands dirty is in for a horrible surprise once it gets under way” (Ep. 3, released: 12/10/2014).

The IS exploits Cantlie by having him perform news analyses – a common format of Western news culture. In the style of a press review, the hostage quotes selected expert opinions taken from different media reports that fit into the IS’ argument that an intervention by the U.S.-led alliance is doomed to fail. Katz has pointed out that the IS’ timing of hostage video releases and its choice of victims correlate with political and military actions by its adversaries. She concludes that the

*IS’s demonstrations of might, along with their claims of Western engagement in an ‘unwinnable war,’ are rooted not in confidence, but fear. The group’s simultaneous presentation of brute through beheadings, and tranquil debate through Cantlie, show a by-any-means approach to sway both Western officials and citizens as Western action against IS escalates [59].*

The third objective of *Lend me your Ears* is criticising the hostage negotiation policy of the U.S. and the U.K. Both governments adhere to a strict no-ransom stance – in contrast to many European nations who covertly negotiated with the IS and secured the release of their citizens through ransom payments totalling tens of millions USD. Between 2004 and 2008, the IS’ predecessor organizations and other ultra-radical Jihadist groups in Iraq – at least under their official brand name – refrained from publicly demanding money and also refused secret ransom deals, considering it “un-Islamic” to ask for material goods. Instead, when making demands, they tried to extort political concessions (such as a prisoner release or the withdrawal of troops), which the hostages’ home countries largely denied, explaining in part the high death rate of abductees in the hands of these groups (>90%) [60]. In contrast, the IS’ openness for ransom deals has resulted in a remarkably higher survival rate of its hostages: Of the 23 known foreign abductees held together in Syria, 15 were released, 6 were executed (1 Russian, 2 Britons, and 3 Americans), and 2 (Cantlie and an unidentified U.S. woman) are still being held [61] at the time of the writing of this Research Note.

By utilising Cantlie, the IS passes harsh criticism on the inflexibility of the U.S.’ and U.K.’s handling of the current hostage situation, stating:

*Only the British and American prisoners were left behind. [...] Our governments had chosen not to negotiate with the Islamic State through our families and friends. And while everyone else had fulfilled conditions for release, for us there was no deal (Ep. 5, released: 25/10/2014).*

The group indicates that it prefers prisoner exchanges over ransom payments by letting Cantlie ask:

*Since 2008, France has reportedly paid 58 million in ransom payments to different Islamic groups, nearly 10 million a year. These payments are one of many demands made by different Islamic groups. Wouldn’t it just be cheaper to release the Muslim prisoners as asked? (Ep. 6, released: 21/11/2014).*

Aiming to drive a wedge between the hostage nations' leaders and ordinary citizens, the IS makes Cantlie introducing himself at the beginning of each episode as "the British citizen abandoned by my own government". The captive accuses the U.S. government of being hypocritical, because it swapped Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl for five high-profile Taliban held at Guantanamo but ruled out a deal for the IS hostages:

*The double-standards on display here are breathtaking. [...] He was one man. We were six. And the Islamic State asked for Muslim prisoners in exchange for all of us (Ep. 6).*

Moreover, Cantlie suggests that the governments may have deliberately abandoned the hostages for selfish political reasons, stating that the

*killings are, rather unfortunately for us, exactly the sort of thing our governments need to bolster public support. [...] Prime Minister [David Cameron], you have known about our situation for nearly two years. You chose not to enter negotiations with the Islamic State that might have got us out, and now you want to use these deaths to fan the flames of this war? If that is the case then I deeply resent it (Ep. 3).*

Though Cantlie being a "high-profile" hostage, the *Lend me your Ears* series received markedly lower media coverage than the more spectacular beheading videos of Cantlie's former cell mates. The IS has tried to forestall a lack of viewer interest in its series. Guarding against a wear-out effect, it has employed several mechanisms to create suspense. For example, the advertising banner for the series announces eight episodes in total (making viewers ask themselves how the "story" will end, foremost, what will happen to Cantlie when the series is over). At the end of each episode, Cantlie invites the audience to join him again in the next program, sometimes giving a preview on what to expect in the upcoming instalment. Additionally, in Episode 6, the tone of the series gets grimmer, with Cantlie saying that his "fate will overwhelmingly likely be the same as my cell mates", raising psychological pressure.

In addition, on October 27, the IS used the media-trained journalist for a new propaganda twist in an effort to command headlines. In a video unrelated to the *Lend me your Ears* series, the organization made its captive "report" from the Syrian city of Kobane, which has become an important symbolic battlefield in the fight between the group and its adversaries. The video adheres even more to Western journalistic conventions than the series. Instead of his usual self-identification as a "prisoner of the Islamic State" and wearing an orange jumpsuit, Cantlie is dressed in black civilian clothes and can move freely. Switching back and forth between panorama views of the war-torn city and Cantlie, the camera work resembles a traditional news report delivered by a special correspondent. Cantlie's phrasing, prosody, and self-confident gesturing pretend him to be an official IS war journalist (instead of being a hostage under duress).

The video's main communication purpose is to refute Western mainstream media reports of the IS being on the retreat in Kobane. On the group's behalf, Cantlie states:

*The battle for Kobane is coming to an end. The mujahideen are just mopping up now, street to street, and building to building. [...] Contrary to what the Western media would have you believe, it is not an all-out battle here now, it is nearly over. As you can hear, it is very quiet, just occasional gunfire.*

A real revolution, the IS video with Cantlie as guest presenter [62] received much attention in the Western news media and in Jihadist circles. While some Western analysts blamed the Stockholm syndrome for Cantlie's cooperative behaviour [63], the video generated sympathies for the captive within the Jihadist community. For example, on December 30, IS supporter Abu Umar Al-Ansari tweeted: "I am starting to like John Cantlie, especially after his Ayn Al-Islam [IS name for Kobane, J.T.] video". One day later, he added: "I don't want to see him dead". Some IS supporters believe that Cantlie has turned into an IS member, e.g. on



December 19, Abu Hamza al Misri listed the names of the Western hostages, who he said, Obama did not rescue. Cantlie's name is included in parentheses, with the comment "began a career as #ISIS journalist". At the writing of this backgrounder, Cantlie's fate remains unsolved, however with the growing sympathies in the Jihadist community, it is getting increasingly difficult for the group to legitimize an execution of the converted captive without losing serious support.

### **Conclusion**

The spectrum of aspects outlined in this backgrounder makes clear that the IS' hostage video campaign cannot be assessed in simple dualistic categories. It is rationally calculated, multifaceted, and constantly changing. Consequently, it cannot be countered successfully with a one-dimensional, static approach. For example, capitalising on the "bad PR" effects of beheading videos by highlighting their cruelty and inhumanity in a counter-narrative campaign might have been successful a decade ago, when the opinions of "old guard" Jihadist ideologues such as Zawahiri were widely respected and the Jihadist community felt largely alienated by scenes of excessive violence. In the current scenario, however – while probably successful to deter more sophisticated Jihad sympathisers from joining the group – relying on the counterproductive effects of videotaped beheadings will be rather ineffective for discouraging the IS' main demographic target group, namely young foreign sympathisers who disrespect the advice of "old-school" ideologues and consider the IS' unique brand of extreme violence [64] and its cinematic choreography a pull instead of a push factor.

Mainstream media outlets and individual journalists have to be constantly aware that they can be active participants in the rationally deliberated IS' hostage video campaign. Because of the high news value of hostage executions, media outlets cannot ignore such stories. However, whether the coverage will be a success for the IS or for its adversaries, depends to a large extent on how those terror acts are framed. Using -black-and-white terminology such as "pure evil", "vicious", "monsters", "savages", or "barbarians" to describe the terrorists and their instrumental media-oriented violence strips the phenomenon of its complexity, thereby failing to inform the public (the media's core mandate), ignores real dangers (e.g. the recruitment appeal of beheading videos), and pokes needless fears by demonising the enemy (which in democracies may lead to overreactions that in turn may be part of the IS' calculus). A more differentiated approach is needed, if the media want to avoid becoming part of the problem, instead of its solution.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author is part of the Editorial Team of 'Perspectives on Terrorism', but she played no editorial role in relation to the decision to publish this Research Note.

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## Notes

- [1] For the purpose of this backgrounder, hostage videos are defined as officially released Jihadist videos primarily focusing on abductees. An official release is defined as a Jihadist publication that has been produced and distributed by established Jihadist media production and distribution outlets.
- [2] Jenkins, Brian Michael (1974, June): *Terrorism and Kidnapping*. (RAND Papers, P-5255), p. 3. URL: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P5255.html>
- [3] See for example Schmid, Alex P.; de Graaf, Janny (1982): *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media*. London: SAGE.
- [4] Cf. Ayman al-Zawahiri, in: Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) (Ed. & Trans.) (2013): *Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi (English Translation)*, p. 10. URL: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>
- [5] For the concept of news factors, see Galtung, Johan; Ruge, Mari Holmboe (1965, March): The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64-90. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002234336500200104>
- [6] Perlmutter, Dawn (2014, August 22): Beheading as Symbolic Warfare. *FrontPage Magazine*. URL: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2014/dawn-perlmutter/beheading-as-symbolic-warfare>
- [7] Perlmutter, Dawn; Kail, Tony (2014, Winter): What is Symbol Intelligence? *The Journal of Counter Terrorism & Homeland Security International*, 20(4), p. 21.
- [8] Neer, Thomas; O'Toole, Mary Ellen (2014, December): The Violence of the Islamic State of Syria (ISIS): A Behavioral Perspective. *Violence and Gender*, 1(4), p. 147. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/vio.2014.0037> URL: <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/vio.2014.0037>
- [9] Cf. Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) (2006, March): *The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda*. (CTC Study), p. 105. URL: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-islamic-imagery-project>
- [10] See Quilliam Foundation; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) (2014, December): *Detailed Analysis of Islamic State Propaganda Video: Although the Disbelievers Dislike it*. URL: <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/detailed-analysis-of-islamic-state-propaganda-video.pdf>
- [11] Ibid., p. 31.
- [12] TRAC as cited in Shubert, Atika (2014, December 8): ISIS's Brutal Beheading Video: Search for Clues. *CNN International*. URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2014/12/world/isis-syria-video-analysis>
- [13] Quilliam Foundation; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) (2014, December), op. cit., p. 31.
- [14] Cf. Tinnes, Judith (2010, May): *Internetnutzung islamistischer Terror- und Insurgentengruppen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von medialen Geiselnahmen im Irak, Afghanistan, Pakistan und Saudi-Arabien*. (Doctoral Dissertation, Universität des Saarlandes, Saarbrücken, Germany), p. 730. URL: <http://scidok.sulb.uni-saarland.de/volltexte/2010/3117/>
- [15] Bunker, Robert J. (2014, November 25): The 10 Things you Need to Know about Radical Islamist Beheadings: A Primer. *Foreign Policy*. URL: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/25/the-10-things-you-need-to-know-about-radical-islamist-beheadings-a-primer>
- [16] Cf. Tinnes, Judith (2010, May), op. cit., p. 699.
- [17] For a comprehensive analysis of Jihadists' legitimation of hostage executions see Prucha, Nico (2013): Kangaroo Trials: Justice in the Name of God. In: Rüdiger Lohlker (Ed.): *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations*. (Studying Jihadism, Vol. 2). Göttingen: V&R unipress, 141-206.
- [18] See, for example, Brachman, Jarret M.; Levine, Alix N. (2011, Winter): You Too Can Be Awlaki! *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 35(1), 25-46. URL: <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Fletcher-Forum/Archives/~media/Fletcher/Microsites/Fletcher%20Forum/PDFs/2011winter/Brachman-Levine.pdf>
- [19] It has to be mentioned that in the David Haines video, JJ refers to the victim's military past. However, in his forced statement, Haines names the British Prime Minister's politics as the sole reason for his demise: "I would like to declare that I hold you, David Cameron, entirely responsible for my execution".
- [20] Cf. Perlmutter, Dawn (2014, September 3): The Politics of Islamic Beheading. *FrontPage Magazine*. URL: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2014/dawn-perlmutter/the-politics-of-beheading> and Perlmutter, Dawn (2014, September 16): Beheading Raises Islamic State Street Cred. *FrontPage Magazine*. URL: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2014/dawn-perlmutter/beheading-raises-islamic-state-street-cred>
- [21] While the IS did not publicly make demands for Foley, the group tried to secretly strike a deal with the U.S. government, which was unsuccessful due to the U.S. strict no-ransom policy. See, for example, Callimachi, Rukmini (2014, October 25): The Horror before the Beheadings: ISIS Hostages Endured Torture and Dashed

Hopes, Freed Cellmates Say. *The New York Times*. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/26/world/middleeast/horror-before-the-beheadings-what-isis-hostages-endured-in-syria.html>

[22] For the concept of media storm see Boydston, Amber E.; Hardy, Anne; Walgrave, Stefaan (2014): Two Faces of Media Attention: Media Storm versus Non-Storm Coverage. *Political Communication*, 31(4), 509-531. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2013.875967> URL: [http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/boydstun/CV\\_and\\_Research\\_files/Boydston\\_Hardy\\_Walgrave\\_2014\\_Two\\_Faces\\_of\\_Media\\_Attention.pdf](http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/boydstun/CV_and_Research_files/Boydston_Hardy_Walgrave_2014_Two_Faces_of_Media_Attention.pdf)

[23] Cf. NBC News; The Wall Street Journal (2014, September): *NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey*. URL: [http://newscoms.nbcnews.com/sites/newscoms/files/14901\\_september\\_nbc-wsj\\_poll.pdf](http://newscoms.nbcnews.com/sites/newscoms/files/14901_september_nbc-wsj_poll.pdf)

[24] Cf. McCalmont, Lucy (2014, September 9): Poll: Beheading News Makes Impact. *POLITICO*. URL: <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/09/poll-james-foley-isis-110783.html>

[25] For the success and resilience of the IS social media campaign, see Fisher, Ali; Prucha, Nico (2014, October 1): ISIS is Winning the Online Jihad against the West. *The Daily Beast*. URL: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/01/isis-is-winning-the-online-jihad-against-the-west.html> and Fisher, Ali; Prucha, Nico (2014, July 8): Eye of the Swarm: The Rise of ISIS and the Media Mujahedeen. *CPD Blog*. URL: <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/eye-swarm-rise-isis-and-media-mujahedeen>

[26] As cited in Szoldra, Paul (2014, October 4): This UK Newspaper's Front Cover is a Moving Statement against ISIS Propaganda. *Business Insider*. URL: <http://www.businessinsider.com/uk-independent-alan-henning-2014-10>

[27] Cf. Perlmutter, Dawn (2014, November 17): Latest IS Beheading Video: New Levels of Ritual Madness. *FrontPage Magazine*. URL: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2014/dawn-perlmutter/latest-is-beheading-video-new-levels-of-ritual-madness> and Perlmutter, Dawn (2014, September 26): Blood In: Beheading as Islamic State Initiation. *FrontPage Magazine*. URL: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2014/dawn-perlmutter/blood-in-beheading-as-islamic-state-initiation>

[28] Dabiq, Issue 5, p. 32.

[29] E.g. a video released in summer 2014 shows several sequential beheadings allegedly conducted by IS militants. After having completed the first decapitations, the captors frighten the remaining victims by showing them the severed heads of their comrades and taunting them.

[30] BBC News (2014, August 28): Islamic State Militants "Behead Kurdish Man" in Iraq. *BBC News Middle East*. URL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28975638>

[31] One notable exception was the National Post, even mentioning the mass beheading scene in the headline of its article: National Post (2014, November 16): Grisly ISIS Video Showing at least a Dozen Beheadings Ends with Claim that U.S. Aid Worker Peter Kassig is Dead. *National Post*. URL: <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/11/16/grisly-isis-video-showing-at-least-a-dozen-beheadings-ends-with-claim-that-u-s-aid-worker-peter-kassig-is-dead>

[32] One remarkable exception was the BBC (which had also reported on the Peshmerga video), releasing a news article on the identities of the hostages: Usher, Sebastian (2014, November 20): Islamic State Video Draws Attention to Syrian Victims. *BBC News Middle East*. URL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30117417>

[33] See Kassig, Ed; Kassig, Paula (2014, November 16): *n.t.* [Facebook Post]. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/MercyforAbdulRahman/posts/802164513178627>

[34] Cf. Tait, Sue (2009, September): Visualising Technologies and the Ethics and Aesthetics of Screening Death. *Science as Culture*, 18(3), p. 338. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09505430903123016>

[35] Ibid., p. 334.

[36] As cited in El Difraoui, Asiem (2014, November 22): Die brutale Subkultur des "Heiligen Kriegs". *Die Welt*. URL: <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article134518761/Die-brutale-Subkultur-des-Heiligen-Kriegs.html>

Jihadist supporters also prove themselves as connoisseurs of Western pop culture in their social media posts, e.g. on December 19, "Colonel Shami" tweeted four pictures of swords with the comment: "Pick your blade only one" – an obvious allusion to the crucifixion scene in Monty Python's British comedy "Life of Brian".

[37] Cf. Katz, Rita (2014, August 22): The Overlooked Goal of the Islamic State's Beheading Video: Recruitment. *inSITE Blog on Terrorism and Extremism*. URL: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/component/content/article/21-jihad/4418-the-overlooked-goal-of-the-islamic-state-s-beheading-video-recruitment?Itemid=122>

- [38] Mosendz, Polly (2014, October 2): Beheadings as Terror Marketing. *The Atlantic*. URL: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/beheadings-as-terror-marketing/381049>
- [39] Cf. Perlmutter, Dawn (2014, September 16), op. cit.
- [40] See de Graaf, Mia; Boyle, Darren (2014, September 3): Was ISIS Hostage Video Inspired by Homeland's Opening Credits? Expert Reveals how Themes from Popular Culture are Used to Attract Western Recruits. *Daily Mail Online*. URL: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2742248/Is-ISIS-copying-Hollywood-drama-techniques-recruit-young-disaffected-westerners-jihad.html>
- [41] See Fischhoff, Stuart et al. (2005, Summer): The Psychological Appeal of Movie Monsters. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 10(3). URL: [http://web.calstatela.edu/faculty/sfischhoff/psychological\\_appeal\\_of\\_movie\\_monsters1.pdf](http://web.calstatela.edu/faculty/sfischhoff/psychological_appeal_of_movie_monsters1.pdf)
- [42] Cf. Quilliam Foundation; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) (2014, December), op. cit., p. 26.
- [43] See Quilliam Foundation; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) (2014, December), op. cit., 28-29.
- [44] Bar, Shmuel; Minzili, Yair (2006): The Zawahiri Letter and the Strategy of Al-Qaeda. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 3, p. 39. URL: [http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1343/bar\\_minzili\\_vol3.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1343/bar_minzili_vol3.pdf)
- [45] Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) (Ed. & Trans.) (2013), op. cit., p. 5.
- [46] Cf. Kane, David (2014, November 28): The Syrian Conflict: The Arab Spring Version 2.0? *inSITE Blog on Terrorism and Extremism*. URL: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/320-the-syrian-conflict-the-arab-spring-version-2-0>
- [47] Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) (Ed. & Trans.) (2013), op. cit., p. 10.
- [48] Ibid.
- [49] Ibid.
- [50] See Tinnes, Judith (2010, November): Counting Lives in a Theater of Terror – An Analysis of Media-Oriented Hostage Takings in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 4(5), pp. 16-17. URL: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/120>
- [51] See, for example, Malik, Shiv (2014, September 24): Radical Cleric Urges Islamic State to Release British Hostage Alan Henning. *The Guardian*. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/24/radical-cleric-islamic-state-release-british-hostage-alan-henning>; SITE Staff (2014, November 16): Jihadists Debate Permissibility of IS Beheading of Peter Kassig. *inSITE Blog on Terrorism and Extremism*. URL: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/314-jihadists-debate-permissibility-of-is-beheading-of-peter-kassig>, and Katz, Rita (2014, November 17): The Kassig Beheading: The Islamic State's Last-Ditch Effort to Keep US Boots out of the Caliphate. *inSITE Blog on Terrorism and Extremism*. URL: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/315-the-kassig-beheading-the-islamic-state-s-last-ditch-effort-to-keep-us-boots-out-of-the-caliphate>
- [52] Lahoud, Nelly et al. (2012, May): Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined? (CTC Report), p. 26. URL: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letters-from-abbottabad-bin-ladin-sidelined>
- [53] Kane, David (2014, November 28), op. cit.
- [54] As cited in Ali, Abdallah Suleiman (2014, July 3): Baghdadi Vows Revenge in Announcing "Islamic State". [Sahar Ghoussoub, Trans.]. *Al-Monitor*. URL: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/07/iraq-syria-baghdadi-call-muslims-caliphate.html>
- [55] As cited in Variyar, Mugdha (2014, December 9): ISIS Beheadings are "un-Islamic", Says Yemen Al-Qaeda, which Killed American, South African Hostages. *International Business Times*. URL: [56] Cf. SITE Staff (2014, October 16): Jihad through Shakespeare: The Islamic State's Outreach to the West. *inSITE Blog on Terrorism and Extremism*. URL: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/298-jihad-through-shakespeare-the-islamic-state%E2%80%99s-outreach-to-the-west>
- [57] Off-camera, Cantlie and other IS hostages were heavily mistreated, see for example: Callimachi, Rukmini (2014, October 25), op. cit.
- [58] It is worth mentioning that the IS has deepened this media strategic approach by publishing articles about or allegedly authored by some of its abductees (i.e. Foley, Sotloff, and Cantlie) in its English-language propaganda magazine "Dabiq".
- [59] Katz, Rita (2014, November 17), op. cit.
- [60] See Tinnes, Judith (2010, November), op. cit., pp. 13-15.

[61] All hostages who were executed or are still being held originate from non-negotiating countries.

[62] Cf. Peyrard, Michel (2014, November 24): The John Cantlie Mystery. [Judy Pain, Trans.]. *Paris Match*. URL: <http://www.parismatch.com/Actu/International/Le-mystere-John-Cantlie-647430>

[63] See Kinder, Tabatha (2014, September 19): John Cantlie Isis Video: Is Stockholm Syndrome to Blame for English Journalist's Anti-Western Speech? *International Business Times*. URL: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/john-cantlie-isis-video-stockholm-syndrome-blame-english-journalists-anti-western-speech-1466325>

[64] Cf. Neer, Thomas; O'Toole, Mary Ellen (2014, December), op. cit., p. 149.s

## When Terrorists and Target Governments Cooperate: the Case of Syria

by Michael Becker

### **Abstract**

*In the course of the Syrian Civil War, the Syrian government has had an unusual relationship with the numerous groups seeking to overthrow it; at times, the government of Bashar al-Assad has deliberately avoided engaging the more radical elements of the opposition, including the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State, and has also purchased oil from them, effectively bankrolling some of ISIS' operations. This case thus represents an unusual—but not totally unique—instance of indirect cooperation between a militant group and the government being targeted by it. Taking the Syrian case as a point of departure, the Research Note investigates the circumstances under which target governments and militant groups each benefit from having the other as a foil. The findings of the Syrian case indicate that such tacit cooperation is more likely in circumstances where opposition forces are ideologically fragmented, where intervention by external states is likely, and where governments are faced with existential threats.*

**Keywords:** Syria; al Nusra; ISIS

### **Introduction**

In the course of the past year, it was revealed that the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, embroiled in a brutal civil war in Syria, has made use of a rather unorthodox strategy in its efforts to crush the opposition. Not only have government forces at times spared the Islamic State (hereafter IS) and the Al-Nusra Front (hereafter ANF)—two of the most radical elements of the opposition—from attack,[1] but the Assad regime has also knowingly supported them by purchasing oil and gas from territory controlled by these rebels and by releasing prisoners associated with the militant groups.[2] The case of Syria thus represents a most unusual situation: a government, under attack from a variety of rebel militant groups, chooses not to strike back against the most radical of the militants, and indeed effectively bankrolls their operations at least in part, while focusing its military operations mainly on the more moderate rebels, such as the Free Syrian Army.[3]

Yet while this case has received a moderate degree of attention from various media outlets, scholars have not yet considered in a systematic manner the strategic logic of the Assad government's decision, nor whether or not it may have applications in other cases. This Research Note aims to suggest new directions for investigations into insurgent-government relations. It proceeds in the following manner. First, the specifics of the situation in Syria are discussed, including the nature of the unusual, tacit cooperation between the Assad government and the more radical of the Sunni insurgents, as well as the conditions that led to a resumption of hostilities between them. Second, the costs and benefits of, respectively, cooperation and confrontation are considered, leading to a two-level analysis of the likely motivations behind each actor's decision to cooperate, at least indirectly, with the other. Third, a framework is proposed, building from the Syrian case, that explains when cooperation between target governments and insurgents is possible. Finally, this Research Note offers suggestions for future research.

### ***The Nature of Regime-Insurgent Cooperation in Syria***



The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, has pitted regime forces and their backers against a diverse collection of insurgents. The conflict first erupted in the context of the “Arab Spring” uprisings, and has taken on the complexion of a proxy war, making for strange allies.[4] On the regime side, Assad’s government has received material and human support from Russia, Iran and the Lebanon-based militant group Hezbollah. The various insurgent groups have been backed, to different extents and at different times, by the members of the European Union, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and numerous militant groups, including affiliates of al-Qaida.[5]

This complex interweaving of religion, ethnicity, and geopolitics complicates the seeming Sunni versus Shia nature of the conflict. While it is true that, generally speaking, the regime and many of its allies are Shia-affiliated, and that most of the insurgents are in some way associated with Sunni Islam, the reality of the situation is much more complex. Especially on the side of the insurgents, deep cleavages have formed with respect to both acceptable military means and tactics and the eventual desired political system for Syria.[6] These cleavages have deteriorated relations among many of the rebels to the point that infighting among them is, in some areas, more common than fighting against government forces. This has complicated the strategic landscape for all parties to the conflict, leading to inventive alignments that cut across belligerents’ lines. While subsequent sections of this Research Note delve into the specific cost-benefit calculus underlying inter-belligerent cooperation and confrontation, this section first describes the nature and extent of that cooperation, focusing in particular on the tacit cooperative arrangement that sprung up in the early stages of the Syrian conflict between the Assad government and the Sunni militant groups IS and ANF.

To begin, a caveat is in order. The evidence does not support—and this Research Note does not seek to demonstrate—that Assad has actively sought to promote the interests of certain Sunni militants as a first-order matter when he makes decisions, or that IS and ANF would secretly prefer that Assad win the war. Rather, this article argues that a certain constellation of conditions has temporarily led each party at certain points to aid, actively or passively, the other in pursuit of *its own* best interests.

It is difficult to determine the full extent of cooperation between the Assad regime and IS and ANF: reliable information about the Syrian conflict is difficult to come by, and as the next section argues, both sides have an incentive to hide their cooperation. Yet the Syrian government’s support for extremist Sunni groups likely predates the start of the Syrian Civil War. Evidence from the Sinjar Records, a cache of al-Qaida files obtained by the American military in 2007, indicates that Syria helped to funnel jihadist fighters into Iraq during the mid-2000s.[7] Of course, this is not as surprising as Assad’s support for Sunni militants after the start of the war at home. Before 2011 Assad’s government was not under active assault by Sunni militants. Yet it is worth noting that contacts between Assad’s government and certain jihadist groups are longstanding.

The Assad regime’s support for jihadist groups was equally visible in the early stages of the Syrian conflict. Even as the regime decried “terrorist” elements among the opposition, Assad ordered the release of scores of known Sunni jihadists, many of whom later joined groups such as the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State.[8] As the next section discusses, it behooves Assad, both domestically and internationally, to portray the opposition as composed of “terrorists,” whether or not the majority of rebel fighters actually shared the extreme ideology espoused by jihadist groups.[9]

Besides these prisoner releases, cooperation between the Assad government and the insurgents who claim to be trying to bring him down has taken two forms. First, Syrian government forces have at times—though by no means without exception—avoided attacking rebels from IS or ANF when they had the opportunity to do so, preferring instead to focus their energies on the more moderate elements of the opposition.[10] One IS fighter stated, “We were confident that the regime would not bomb us.”[11] For their part, IS and

other insurgent groups have for the most part focused their military operations against each other, rather than against the Assad regime's forces.[12] Second, the Syrian government has engaged in energy deals with IS and ANF, purchasing oil and gas from territory the militant groups controlled.[13] It is true that such energy deals are in part a function of the exigencies of war: Syrian rebels need money, the Assad regime needs oil, and neither has many alternative ways of obtaining these resources. Therefore, such energy deals are not necessarily indicative of an active collaboration between the Assad regime and Sunni jihadist groups. Nevertheless, they do reflect the fact that both actors are not opposed to striking deals with each other when it suits their interests, a fact which is at odds with the way each claims to feel about the other.

It is worth noting that several observers have denied the existence of any sort of arrangement, tacit or not, between Assad and jihadist groups. Their main point is that hostilities between the two are ongoing, and brutal.[14] This argument, however, suffers from two flaws. First, the onetime existence of a mutually beneficial arrangement does not preclude either party from eventually turning on the other. In other words, clashes between government forces and IS militants—some of which have been devastating[15]—in no way nullify instances of cooperation. Second, both parties are capable of playing a complicated game that transcends the ideal types of “enemies” and “allies”. As Brian Fishman pointed out, “there is a difference between ‘an explicit partnership [and] an implicit alignment of interests.’”[16] Assad, IS and ANF have a history of cooperating, when possible, against mutual enemies like the more moderate rebels, and each benefits from having the other as a foil for recruitment and fundraising. In other words, the three are capable of cooperating in certain domains without actively conspiring together since, in the end, each seeks to limit the other's military capabilities and geographic sphere of influence.

The temporary and limited nature of the coincidence of interests between the Syrian regime and IS and ANF was illustrated by a reprisal of clashes between them in mid-2014, as IS in particular continued to gain in influence and seized more and more territory. Whereas before, IS focused mainly on battling other rebel groups, consolidating its territorial gains, and instituting its Islamist form of governance in areas it controlled, increasingly the militant group began striking regime targets and territory, including engaging in an especially brutal massacre of hundreds of regime troops in July of 2014.[17] Regime forces have also carried out strikes against IS targets.[18]

Yet notwithstanding recent clashes between jihadists and government forces, the two players have a history of implicit cooperation, if not outright collusion. Moreover, even as conflict between jihadist groups and the Syrian government became more common, the bloodiest, most contested battles remained those between, on the one hand, moderate rebels and more extreme militant groups, and on the other hand, between moderate rebels and the Syrian government. The battle for the town of Kobanê, between Kurdish forces and IS, is emblematic of this tendency. In general, then, while the evidence supporting government-insurgent cooperation is at times patchy and difficult to verify, the totality of the information presented in this section militates toward the existence of a sometime, tacit arrangement between Assad and IS and ANF. The remaining sections of this Research Note are dedicated to explaining the incentives that led to this arrangement, and to examining possible analogous situations wherein a target government cooperates with the militants targeting it.

### ***The Costs and Benefits of Regime-Insurgent Cooperation in Syria: a Two-Level Framework***

#### ***Benefits to the Syrian Regime***

The Assad government reaps several benefits by its support of IS and ANF, which can most easily be elucidated using a two-level framework. On the international level, the more influence and territory amassed

by the Sunni extremist groups, the more credence is lent to Assad's claim that the Syrian opposition, or at least a sizable contingent within it, is composed of "terrorists." If Assad can successfully portray the opposition as terrorists, or can empower the segments of the opposition who actually are terrorists, the less likely it is that the opposition will receive support from the West or even from Sunni regimes that oppose militant Islam, like Saudi Arabia. This assertion is supported by the circumstances under which non-lethal American military aid to the rebels was halted in late 2013—it was out of concern that the supplies, whatever proximate use to which they might be put, would eventually end up in the hands of al-Qaida or another hostile militant group.[19]

This assertion is also supported by the nature of Western and Arab governments' intervention in Syria in late 2014. After the kidnapping and beheading of several Western citizens, and amid growing worldwide concern about the growing capabilities of IS, a coalition of countries began a (largely air-based) military campaign against IS targets in Iraq and Syria. The reactions from the Assad regime were initially somewhat ambivalent. Eventually, however, despite some nominal protestations about violation of its sovereignty, government officials spoke approvingly of the intervening states' operations against "terrorists." [20] Thus the strengthening of IS, as well as its extreme methods, allowed the Assad regime credibly to label the Syrian opposition as terrorists, and therefore to minimize the chances that Western and Arab powers would contribute significantly to the overthrow of the Assad regime. This present situation stands in marked contrast to that of 2012, when President Obama threatened force against the Syrian regime, and at a time when Western leaders were in broad agreement that Assad should cease power. As a result of Assad's successful efforts to marginalize moderate rebels and depict Syrian politics as a zero-sum game with only two major players—his regime, and extreme groups like IS and ANF—his regime is now regarded by many in the West as the lesser evil.

On the domestic level as well, Assad and his government benefit from cooperation with IS and ANF, and more specifically from the latter's strengthened hand vis-à-vis the other insurgent groups. This is so for several reasons. First, the extreme political preferences of ANF and, to an even larger degree, IS are unpopular among many Syrians.[21] They include the institution of political Islam, certain mandatory garments for women, and bans on alcohol. If these planks come to dominate the platform of the insurgency in the minds of many Syrians, it will sap support for the general cause, and make Assad's regime appear moderate by comparison.

Second, to the extent that aid to the more radical Sunni insurgents stimulates infighting among the rebels instead of between them and the Syrian government's forces, Assad benefits. In the more recent years of the Syrian conflict, collaboration between different insurgent groups has been sporadic, but marred by bloody conflict, especially between jihadist groups like IS and the more politically moderate elements, like the Free Syrian Army. In part, this conflict is due to the variance in political preferences of the different insurgent wings; however, perhaps equally important has been the perception that some of the insurgents are in league with the Syrian government.

#### *Costs to the Syrian Regime*

Involvement with extremist groups like IS and ANF, though not entirely costless from a reputational standpoint, has not been as risky as it might appear at first glance, making Assad's calculation a shrewd one. The main risk involved in cooperating with hostile Sunni insurgents is that Assad's Syrian constituents and patron states—most notably Iran and Russia—would become aware of his strategy. In the first case, Assad can deny his involvement to his constituents, as he has done, by denouncing such reports as rumors designed

to discredit him.[22] Syrians who do have access to reliable information will likely be members of the government, and will thus benefit from cooperation in a similar way as Assad himself.

On the international level, it is probable that Iran and Russia are aware of Assad's tacit cooperation with jihadist rebels. Yet while leaders of those countries—especially Iran—are not likely to be pleased that Assad, however passively, supported radical Sunni insurgents, there is reason to believe that they may sympathize with the logic underlying the decision. Stated simply, if Iran and Russia sincerely support Assad, they would want him to take the actions that are most likely to lead to victory for his regime. If doing so involves duplicitous cooperation with certain segments of the insurgents, this may be a necessary price to pay. On the other hand, however, it is possible that Russia and Iran do not support Assad for his own sake, but rather because he claims to oppose the kind of Sunni extremism abhorrent to Russia and Iran, or in Iran's case, because he is affiliated with the Shia branch of Islam. Yet even if this were true, both Russia and Iran, as can be stated with confidence, would be vehemently opposed to any Western involvement on the insurgents' behalf. Therefore, the rise of IS and ANF, though repugnant to Iran and Russia in and of itself, may produce some happy consequences from their point of view, since it reduces the chances of any substantial Western backing of the rebels. In the eyes of Russia and Iran, this may justify, to some extent at least, Assad's decision to cooperate with some of the insurgents.

A final, serious risk to the Assad regime is that he empowers IS or ANF to the point where they can not only dominate other elements of the insurgency, but actually depose him from power as well. Assad's likely goal in cooperating with extremist groups is that they gain power *relative to other insurgent groups*, but not to the point where they are capable of overthrowing his government. It is likely, however, that Assad's chances of remaining in power are maximized when he is faced with a jihadist insurgency, rather than a more moderate one, as external support for IS and ANF is much lower than would be the case if, say, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) were in their position and had their resources and manpower.

### *Benefits to Insurgent Groups*

The benefits to insurgent groups from the Assad regime's decision to cooperate are numerous, and include both direct and indirect benefits. The most direct benefit has been the money that the Assad regime paid for oil and gas harvested from insurgent-controlled territory. This money, according to Western intelligence services, amounts to millions of dollars,[23] which, along with proceeds from other illicit activities, has made IS in particular one of the best-financed militant groups currently extant.[24] Second, IS' and ANF's ranks have been swelled by the prisoners Assad had released from prison. While accurate information on the personnel of ANF and IS is hard to come by, testimonials suggest that some share of both organizations is made up of former prisoners released by Assad.[25]

The aforementioned militant groups have also benefited indirectly from Assad's relative military restraint in dealing with them. This restraint means that IS and ANF are stronger than they would otherwise have been, both in absolute terms and relative to other insurgent groups with which they frequently clash. Not having to focus their energies on the Assad regime—except when they desire—has allowed IS and ANF to secure their territorial gains, eliminate hostile opposition, and even begin the process of building Islamist governmental and societal institutions.[26] Another indirect benefit has been an increase in the legitimacy attached to IS and ANF as pseudo-states. Both of these organizations can capitalize on their relative success to attempt to build support among the populations of the areas they control, and boost recruiting among these populations.

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### *Costs to Insurgent Groups*

It is not clear what costs, if any, the militant groups incur by allowing Assad to cooperate with them. There is little reason to suspect that supporters of IS and ANF would be upset if they knew that Assad was releasing fellow insurgents, refraining from all-out attacks against them, and even purchasing oil from them; and many of them are probably not even aware of this arrangement. More generally, since IS and ANF are not, in turn, supporting the Assad government, it is unclear on what grounds any of these groups' domestic or international supporters would object to the quasi-cooperative arrangement between them and Assad.

### *General Applications of the Syrian Case: when are Target Governments likely to Cooperate with Militant Groups that Target them?*

The situation wherein governments cooperate with militants who are actively opposing them is no doubt rare, but it is not unheard of. During the Algerian civil war, the government was accused of collaborating with the more extreme of the opposition groups, the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), even as the latter sought the overthrow of the government.[27] The State of Israel, as well, was involved in the inception and financing of the organization that eventually became Hamas, although admittedly before that organization's embrace of violence as a tactic.[28] Furthermore, governments' understandable reluctance to admit involvement in any sort of support for a hostile militant group means that the phenomenon may be more common than is realized. In any case, the strategic logic of a government's support for an adversarial militant group tends to remain constant across time and space. Embattled or threatened governments wish to 1) splinter opposition forces, while 2) discrediting their demands and 3) minimizing the chances of foreign involvement.

Yet the rarity of confirmed instances of this phenomenon raises a significant question: under what circumstances, if any, will it happen again? It is difficult to make deterministic statements about insurgent-regime cooperation precisely because of the apparent paucity of cases, yet certain characteristics of the Syrian example can offer preliminary indications about when parallel situations are more likely to occur. The first aspect of the Syrian case that would seem to be a necessary condition for a regime to consider collaborating with hostile militants is a severely threatened, unstable government. Only a government faced with an existential threat, and confronting the very real possibility of a foreign intervention, would consider working with the very insurgency that threatens it. In the case of Syria, Assad was especially attuned to the threat of insurgency given that the protests that eventually deteriorated into civil war began in the context of the 2011 Arab Spring. Governments that support insurgents on their own soil, it seems reasonable to say, would also need to be autocratic in nature, since only a government relatively immune to constituent disapproval—and able to constrict the flow of information—could realistically entertain the idea of supporting insurgents.

Another condition apparently necessary to the success of an insurgent-regime cooperative strategy, is a fractured opposition. Assad's strategy in Syria was premised on the possibility of fuelling infighting among Sunni insurgents. Without pre-existing divisions among the rebels, the support he provided would have contributed directly to military actions against the regime, instead of abetting inter-insurgent violence. Importantly, in order for an Assad-like strategy to work, the divisions among the opposing forces must be deep, and not limited to debates over appropriate military strategy or even means-related questions like the morality of certain forms of violent resistance. Instead, the divisions must be ends-related, much as, say, the FSA and IS disagreement over the extent to which Islamic law should be the basis of future governance in Syria. It is such disagreements that pitted them against each other. If the dispute had been more minor, no doubt, the Assad regime would have remained the more pressing and the more dangerous threat to all



elements of the insurgent cause.

### Conclusion

The case of Syria provides a wealth of possible future research directions for scholars. Traditional scholarship on the relation of insurgents and governments has centered on state-sponsored militant groups, which are sponsored by governments to attack *other* governments. Alternatively, there is also significant research on civilian victimization, whereby governments commit hostile acts against their own citizens, and either claim credit for them to suppress dissent, or disguise their involvement to justify the removal of civil liberties. Finally, there has been some discussion of how competition between militant groups affects their longevity and attainment of their goals.[29] Yet scholarship is scarce on the relations between governments and the militant groups that both oppose them and are supported by them, probably because of the seeming illogic of this situation. Most observers assume, quite reasonably, that hostile actors will act in a hostile manner toward one another. Yet the evidence examined in this Research Note demonstrates that this is not always the case. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that, under certain circumstances, a strategy such as that chosen by Assad could be repeated by another besieged regime, as some accounts maintain that it has already been the case in Algeria.

This Research Note makes several contributions to the literature on insurgent-government relations: it demonstrates that Syria has made use of an insurgent-regime cooperative strategy; discusses circumstances under which this is more likely to occur elsewhere; and contributes more generally to an understanding of the circumstances under which hostile actors are likely to collaborate tacitly. In the future, more primary sources-based research is needed to discover whether verifiable instances of insurgent-regime cooperation have in fact occurred elsewhere. Potential candidate states can be identified by consulting the conditions outlined in the course of this Research Note.

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### Notes

[1] The Assad government's tendency to avoid engaging IS and ANF was more pronounced in the early stages of the conflict, for reasons discussed below.

[2] For evidence of cooperation between the Assad regime and Islamist rebels, see Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, "Syria's Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals," *The Telegraph*, January 20, 2014; Richard Spencer, "Syria's duplicity over al-Qaeda means West will not trust Assad," *The Telegraph*, January 20, 2014; Julian Borger and Mona Mahmood, "EU decision to lift Syrian oil sanctions boosts jihadist groups," *The Guardian*, May 19, 2013; Ian Black, "Assad and Maliki unite against common enemy Isis," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2014; Aryn Baker, "Is the Assad Regime in League with al-Qaeda?" *Time*, January 27, 2014; Cassandra Vinograd and Ammar Cheikh Omar, "Syria, ISIS Have Been 'Ignoring' Each Other on the Battlefield, Data Suggests," *NBC News*, December 11, 2014.

[3] This Research Note does not seek to argue that the Assad regime is actively cooperating with IS or ANF, but rather that each, at times, has benefitted from the other's presence in Syria, for reasons discussed in a later section. The scope of their cooperation has mainly been one of mutual, implicit avoidance, contrary to the conspiracy theories voiced by many Syrian rebel groups. This has also not precluded direct, armed confrontation, especially as IS continued since early 2014 to grow stronger in Syria and Iraq. The purpose of this Research Note, therefore, is not to illuminate an active collaboration between Assad and jihadists, but rather to explore the more general question of under what circumstances target governments and militant groups each benefits from having the other as a foil.

[4] For an analysis of the various regional and international players in the Syrian Civil War, see Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

[5] Michael Gordon, "Iran's Support Emboldens Assad, Envoy Says," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2013; Stacy Meichtry, "Russian support of Assad upends peace



talks,” *The Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, February 14, 2014; Sam Dagher, “Hezbollah Chief pledges to aid Assad regime,” *The Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, May 1, 2013; Michael Gordon and Mark Landler, “Move to Expand Support to Syrian Rebels Gains Speed Among Western Nations,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2013; Ben Brumfield and Barbara Starr, “Kerry, key allies in Qatar for talks on Syrian rebels’ support,” *CNN Wire*, June 22, 2013; Nic Robertson, “Saudi support for Syrian rebels shaped by tribal, religious ties,” *CNN Wire*, August 20, 2012; Toby Harnden Washington, “Eleven states pledge ‘all necessary’ help for Syria rebels,” *The Sunday Times* (London), June 23, 2013.

[6] Joshua Landis, “The Syrian Uprising of 2011: Why the Assad Regime is Likely to Survive to 2013,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 72-84; Ian Black, “Splits widen within Syrian opposition,” *The Guardian*, July 25, 2012.

[7] For an analysis of the Sinjar Records, see Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, “Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” *Combating Terrorism Center* (West Point); for a discussion of the Syrian government’s connections to jihadist groups, see Matthew Levitt, “Syria’s Financial Support for Jihad,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter 2010); and Ryan Mauro, “Has Damascus Stopped Supporting Terrorists?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 2009).

[8] Raniah Salloum, “From Jail to Jihad: Former Prisoners Fight in Syrian Insurgency,” *Der Spiegel Online*, October 10, 2013; Jason Lewis, “Syria releases the 7/7 ‘mastermind,’” *The Telegraph*, February 4, 2012.

[9] For an example of Assad’s frequent characterization of insurgent groups as “terrorists,” see:

[http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=307&Itemid=468](http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=307&Itemid=468).

[10] Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, “Syria’s Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals.”

[11] Ibid.

[12] See, for example, Martin Chulov, “Syrian opposition turns on al-Qaida-affiliated Isis jihadists near Aleppo,” *The Guardian*, January 3, 2014; Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Group linked to al Qaeda regains ground in northeast Syria,” *Reuters*, January 12, 2014; Dominic Evans, “Syrian rebels launch fierce offensive against al Qaeda fighters,” *Reuters*, January 4, 2014; Cassandra Vinograd and Ammar Cheikh Omar, “Syria, ISIS Have Been ‘Ignoring’ Each Other on the Battlefield, Data Suggests.”

[13] Ibid; Julian Borger and Mona Mahmood, “EU decision to lift Syrian oil sanctions boosts jihadist groups.”

[14] See, for example, Aymenn Al-Tamimi, “The Assad Regime and Jihadis: Collaborators and Allies?” *Syria Comment* (blog operated by Joshua Landis), available at <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/assad-regime-jihadis-collaborators-allies/>.

[15] “Syrian troops beheaded’ in Raqqa,” *Aljazeera*, July 26, 2014; “Al-Nusra Front jihadists claim Damascus suicide bombs,” *The Telegraph*, May 12, 2012; “Syrian warplanes hit Islamic State-run bakery, training camp: monitor,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2014; Mohammad Ghannam, “2 Military Bases in Syria Fall to Rebels,” *New York Times*, December 15, 2014.

[16] Quoted in Jamie Dettmer, “Washington and London Ignored Warnings about the ISIS Offensive in Iraq,” *The Daily Beast*, June 24, 2014.

[17] “Islamic State killed 270 in Syrian gas field battle,” *Reuters*, July 19, 2014.

[18] “Maliki confirms Syrian planes have bombed ISIS positions,” *The Guardian*, June 26, 2014; “Syrian warplanes hit Islamic State-run bakery, training camp: monitor,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2014.

[19] “U.S., Britain cut aid to rebels in northern Syria after Islamic radicals beat Western-backed opposition forces,” *CBS/Reuters*, December 11, 2013.

[20] Ann Curry, “Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister: We Warned About ISIS All Along,” *NBC News*, September 29, 2014.

[21] “The jihadists may have gone too far,” *The Economist*, January 11, 2014; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “ISIS is Losing its Greatest Weapon: Momentum,” *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2015.

[22] See, for example, Ian Black, “Bashar al-Assad is West’s ally against Isis extremists, says Syria,” *The Guardian*, July 13, 2014.

[23] Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, “Syria’s Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals.”

[24] Though oil deals have only made up a small fraction of IS’s funds, they alone are significant. For analyses of the provenance of IS funding, see Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters (Eds.), “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria,” *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounders*, available at <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state-iraq-syria/p14811>; Robert Tait, “ISIS’ half-a-billion-dollar bank heist makes it world’s richest terror group,” *The Telegraph*, June 14, 2014; Eoghan Macguire and Randi Kaye,

“How has ISIS become one of the richest ever militant groups?” *CNN*, June 22, 2014. And, while oil revenues have declined in recent months as a result of military defeats and falling crude oil prices, they remain exceptional by the standards of most militant groups.

[25] Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, “Syria’s Assad accused of boosting al-Qaeda with secret oil deals.”

[26] See, for example, An Employee of the *New York Times* and Ben Hubbard, “Life in a Jihadist Capital: Order With a Darker Side: In a Syrian City, ISIS Puts Its Vision Into Practice,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2014; Cassandra Vinograd and Ammar Cheikh Omar, “Syria, ISIS Have Been ‘Ignoring’ Each Other on the Battlefield, Data Suggests.”

[27] See GIA (Groupe Islamique Armée), *MEDEA*, available at <http://www.medeabe/en/countries/algeria/gia-armed-islamic-group/>; Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson (interviewers), “Anwar N. Haddam: An Islamist Vision for Algeria,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (September 1996), pp. 69-80.

[28] Andrew Higgins, “How Israel Helped to Spawn Hamas,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2009.

[29] For a recent example, see Brian J. Phillips, “Enemies With Benefits? Violent Rivalry and Terrorist Group Longevity,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2015), pp. 62-75.

**“I’m down for a Jihad”:**

## **How 100 Years of Gang Research Can Inform the Study of Terrorism, Radicalization and Extremism**

**by Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz**

### ***Abstract [1]***

*One of the difficult tasks in the social sciences is integrative, interdisciplinary work. There are many commonalities across the social sciences in method, theory, and policy. The study of gangs has a tradition in the U.S. that dates back nearly 100 years, with an emerging focus in Europe and other parts of the world. This Research Note argues that there is considerable overlap between the study of gangs and that of radicalized groups. Both fields examine violence conducted largely in a group context. Group structure, demographics, marginalization, strength of membership bonds, leaving the group, and the role of prison in expanding membership are all issues the two have in common. There are lessons those who study radicalized groups can take from the long tradition of gang research. This Research Note identifies twelve lessons learned (mistakes and successes) from the study of gangs that have relevance to the study of radicalized and extremist groups.*

**Keywords:** gangs; criminology; terrorist groups; organized crime; terrorism research.

### ***Introduction***

How can the study of gangs, gang members, and gang crime provide insights and guidance for the study of radicalization, extremism and terrorism? It is our contention in this short Research Note that lessons learned in the study of gangs have direct applicability to understanding terrorist groups and acts. While the study of political radicalization has a long tradition, the recent global concern over terrorism has focused increased attention and resources on the issue. Many criminologists paid little attention to acts of terror prior to the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.[2] Thus there has been some “catching up” in understanding radicalization and extremism, with several independent groups of scholars holding that much can be learned through the comparative study of radicalization and extremism with other groups of criminological, political, and sociological relevance.[3]

The study of gangs and radicalized groups share a great deal in common. The two fields of research are similar in that they both study hard-to-reach populations that engage in criminal actions. Both groups are composed primarily of young men. Gangs and terrorist groups tend to be loosely organized as opposed to maintaining rigid organizational hierarchies. The violence that these groups engage in is public and involves victimization and harm to members of the general public. The violence used by gangs and radicalized groups is also disproportionate to the degree of harm, marginalization, or disrespect experienced among extremists or gang members. Group processes are central to the processes of recruitment, the engagement in violence, mobilization and forms of collective behavior. In both the study of gangs and terrorism there is a “dark” figure of crime, that is, the volume of crime engaged in by these groups is not well known or understood. Much like terrorism, the study of gangs is also plagued by a number of “myths”. Such myths (gangs are well organized, gangs control drug sales, gang membership is permanent, gangs are organized globally, only males join gangs etc.) created misunderstandings of what gangs, gang members and gang crime are like. [4]

Of course, there are important differences between gangs and terrorist groups. Notably, gangs generally lack political beliefs and ideology, violence among terrorists has a different motive than that of gangs, and the

international component to terrorism differentiates it from the vast majority of local gang activity. There is another difference between gangs and terrorism that is revealed in two recent reviews of the respective literatures. Kris Christman's systematic review of the literature on religious radicalization and violent extremism included 319 works, six of which were published in the 1980s and fourteen in the 1990s.[5] This illustrates the recency of research on such groups. The literature on gangs, on the other hand, is comprised of around 5,000 works that date prior to the 1920s with a fifty-year tradition of empirical research, illustrating the long history gang research has come from. [6] It is against this background that gang research might offer some insights (and mistakes) to research on terrorism and radicalization. Indeed, despite some of the substantive differences between gangs and terrorism, we posit that the overlap is consequential for both areas of study.

This Research Note therefore identifies ways that the study of gangs can inform the study of terrorism, radicalization, and extremism. We examine the overlap between the two areas primarily by focusing on what research on terrorism and radicalization might learn from the history and evolution of gang research. We specifically identify twelve "lessons learned" from gang research that can inform research into terrorism and extremism. Given the long history of studying gangs, and the sheer magnitude of the literature, there are several areas of research that the study of these topics can look to, to find methods, theory, and policy to speed the process of developing models and ways to study these important topics.

### ***Lessons Learned in Gang Research: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly***

The principles of sound research are equally applicable to a number of areas of inquiry. There are some aspects of social science research, however, that are more important to the study of groups. This includes radicalized extremist groups and gangs. We proceed by identifying twelve principles, in no particular order of significance, derived from gang research that we believe are applicable to research on groups involved in terrorism or radicalized groups. We remind readers that gang research has not reached some broad or final consensus and that there are both strengths and weaknesses in this literature. To be sure, there are also aspects of research on terrorism and extremism that can inform gang research.

**First: triangulation of ideas and methods.** Multi-method, multi-disciplinary studies paint a more diverse and accurate picture of gangs than single method studies; the same is true of terror groups. Much research on gangs depended on either ethnographic studies of a small number of gangs or gang members or law enforcement data. Moreover, the study of gangs originated in the discipline of sociology (Frederic Thrasher). [7] While much of the research on gangs in the last two decades is found in criminology, there is a much more interdisciplinary flavor to the study of gangs today than even as recently as the turn of the century.[8] Of course, triangulating ideas and methods is easier said than done.

Triangulation of multiple data sources is particularly important in a nascent area of research; it allows researchers to describe the group from multiple perspectives and more fully assess the reliability and validity of information. Through the use of multiple data sources, gang researchers learned that gangs have many more females, are younger and more diverse when it used school surveys of gang members rather than relying solely on law enforcement data. Combining several methods (trial transcripts, Lexis-Nexus, scenarios, experiments, survey research, school, law enforcement, prison and jail data) pushed the field of gang research ahead. Much of the best research and most developed substantive areas of study on gangs comes from studies that have combined multiple sources of data. Among the best examples is Jim Short and Fred Strodbeck's Youth Studies Program in Chicago from the 1960s, which combined gang-level data and field notes from detached workers, youth personality inventories and self-reported activities, police records and census

reports.[9] A contemporary example is found in the work of Beth Huebner and her colleagues in St. Louis, who combined geocoded data from law enforcement gang intelligence on gang member residences, police records of gun assaults and gun seizures, medical examiner records of drug-related deaths, and U.S. Census data on neighborhood structural conditions.[10] Triangulation often calls for innovative methods, such as the use of social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Indeed, research on terror groups is more sophisticated than the study of gangs on this particular issue.[11] Much terrorist research now is based on data pulled from such social media. The external validity of such data is hard to establish,[12] which is why it is important to combine, for example, online resources with survey or ethnographic methodologies.

**Second:** *understand the symmetries and asymmetries across the selection and the (dis-) engagement processes into and out of groups.* Gang studies paid virtually no attention to the process of getting out of the gang until recently. So much attention was paid to the risk factors for gang membership and the consequences of gang membership that few realized that the youth and young adults who join gangs invariably leave gangs. It is therefore important to find out what prompts disengagement and whether the disengagement process is the inverse of selection into gangs. If joining gangs is characterized by illicit opportunities, excitement, gang networks, and status voids, would conventional replacements facilitate disengagement? Gang research found that natural social processes—disillusionment with gang life, maturation, family, romantic relationships—had a good deal to do with getting out of the gang.[13] Dramatic departures were rare as most members just “walked away.” This research was bolstered by longitudinal research that demonstrated gang membership was generally of short duration, typically less than two years. Extremism research has shown more interest in the disengagement process and the findings from this work are generally consonant with that of the study of gang disengagement.[14] Linking the process of disengagement from groups to life course theory has also proven to be valuable. Doing so contextualizes the role of gang membership in the life course rather than viewing it as static with no attention to the dynamics of life change. Such an analytic lens also underscores that the vast majority of gang members move past their time in the gang to more traditional activities.

**Third:** *study the collective—the clique, cell, group, or organization—do not just pay lip service to it.* The study of gangs has taught us time and again that the group is more powerful than the individual. Because groups motivate individuals to act in ways they would not otherwise do, it therefore is critical to understand the collective features of the group and how it relates to crime and deviance. Group structure differs from gang to gang and is not monolithic, which is why it is equally important to understand the role of group process within the group. Focusing on group process naturally leads to asking questions about the catalysts for actions of various sorts. Identifying the steps in engaging in violence, whether in the gang or terror context is important. Both individual and group motivations are important. Understanding the role of group process and organizational structure in recruitment, adopting group norms and engaging in violence are key issues in understanding both gang and terror groups and acts.[15] It is important not to squabble over generalizing whether extremist groups are hierarchical, decentralized, or leaderless, but instead to determine how each of the organizational structures relate to different group processes and accordingly different collective and per capita rates of crime and deviance. Admittedly, gang research has largely come up short in studying gangs as groups, instead opting to studying gang members as individuals. We would encourage extremist research to pay strong attention to units of analysis and, what we describe next, levels of explanation.

**Fourth:** *definitions matter.* Consistent, validated definitions of gang members, gangs and gang activities are relatively recent in gang research. Such definitional clarity is needed for understanding terrorism, radicalization, and extremism. Indeed, definitions of groups and behavior are the core of a scientific approach to understanding phenomena. A better understanding of the differences within and between groups involved in terrorism as well as groups involved in crime more generally is important to understanding how to



respond to such groups. Individuals, groups, and group activities need to be distinguished clearly, as advised by Jim Short.[16] Paying attention to the clear definitions of concepts is key to moving a solid agenda of research on groups of all types ahead. For example, the words terrorism, radicalization and extremism are often used inter-changeably yet these refer to quite different phenomena. A typology of extremism would differentiate between political extremism, religious extremism, environmental extremism, and other forms of extremist beliefs. This raises the important question of whether extremist groups—as well as extremist individuals—are defined by their beliefs or by their behaviors. Gang research has struggled over the years with tautological critiques about the extent to which crime (and even violence) should be included in the definition of a gang.[17] If behavior is a definitional requirement it will change the meaning and magnitude of the problem. An example of this is found in Cheryl Maxson and Malcolm Klein's study of gang homicides, where they found that shifting the definition from motive-based (i.e., homicide to further the collective goals of the gangs) to member-based (i.e., a gang member was involved) produced twice as many gang homicides.[18] We think this has important implications for the study of violent extremism, as illustrated in the comparison of the Suicide Attack Database and the Global Terrorism Database in the Washington Post.[19] Efforts should be made to assess the reliability and validity of databases across units of analysis.

**Fifth:** *do not forget the women.* Gender matters a great deal for gang activity and group process. While men comprise the largest group of gang members and terror groups, women exert considerable influence on the behavior and membership of such groups. There is a reason that the cover to John Horgan's book is so captivating, almost shocking—it is unexpected that a woman, smiling with a head cover while holding a weapon, would ever be “walking away from terrorism.” In this context, we encourage terrorism research not just to “add gender and stir,” which means going behind simply the concentration on acts of terror and the similarities of male and female radicalized extremists.[20] Rather, this means attempting to understand how gender is used to instigate conflict, when it is used as a strength, and when it is—on balance – a source of a weakness in extremist groups. These are issues the gang literature has confronted, albeit not perfectly, for some time.[21]

**Sixth:** *knowledge of the efficacy of programs should be proportional to the investment in such programs.* It is curious that interventions are not well understood or evaluated in the gang world. Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson lament in their review of program evaluation that everything is “promising”.[23] That said, *everything* can not be promising. The experience from gang interventions is that there has been forty years of interventions and very few high quality evaluations. Perhaps as much as \$100 million has been spent on gang programming and yet we still do not know what works.[23] Programs, policies, and interventions in the terrorism world need to have serious full-scale evaluations, or run the risk of following the futile path of an abundance of ‘promising’ evaluations attempts at a great expense to funding agencies. This is a tall task in the area of extremist research, where empirical findings rarely come with a control group let alone move outside of the realm of case studies. When rigorous evaluation is hard to come by, it would be profitable to take advantage of natural experiments—random or exogenous shocks—to assess the efficacy of policies and programs.

**Seventh:** *distinguish instrumental from symbolic activities.* This relates to our point above about definitions, yet is worthwhile to emphasize it also in the context of motive and method. There is a great deal of braggadocio and symbolic violence in gangs and much less instrumental violence. Separating the one from the other is important for theory and policy alike. Similarly, there is a great deal more “talk” about gang violence than actual violence and a lot more talk about “being hard” and riding “missions” for the gang than occur (i.e., “I’m down for a Jihad”). Indeed, gang life is often portrayed as exciting and glamorous and extremist life as “five-star jihad” and revolutionary.[24] The symbology of gangs as well as terror groups has



been greatly enhanced by the expansion of online outlets and social media.[25] It is now easier than ever before for gangs and terror groups to express violent messages, whether or not they actually intend to act on those messages. Often the threat of violence – for both gangs and terror groups – is enough to accomplish an objective. Researchers need to integrate approaches to include this reality into their methodology, particularly because official sources tend to exaggerate the extent of the problem and violence related to it. This is counter-productive as it gives groups more recognition than they merit and recognition is an important commodity to such groups,

**Eighth:** *research must be held accountable for false positives and false negatives.* Gang research has not done a good job of assessing risk for involvement in crime. We can say with great confidence that gang membership increases criminal behavior—there are scores of studies with rigorous methodology that lend support to such a conclusion. However, not all gang members are criminals and not all criminals are gang members. That is, we know a lot about how rates of criminal behavior are higher between gang and non-gang populations as well as how this behavior changes upon entering and existing gangs. Yet little is known about distinguishing high-rate gang offenders from low-rate gang (and from non-) offenders. The message here is that research on terrorism and radicalization should assess risk carefully and assign interventions accordingly. Phelan Wyrick identifies a “pyramid” of problems and responses, arguing that the small number of the most serious offenders should receive the most serious of interventions.[26] This has served to focus intervention and prevention efforts more effectively and efficiently. This harkens back to the point that blanket labels of “gang member” or “radical” (or extremist) should be used with caution or used in tandem with behaviors rather than beliefs. Indeed, following the conclusions John Monahan reached on terrorism risk assessment is a good pathway forward,[27] but issues of over- and under-identification will remain problematic.

**Ninth:** *understand the network of opposition underpinning extra-legal groups.* Gangs are oppositional groups that thrive on enemies and conflict, real and constructed. Indeed, no gang could survive without a rival. There is a reason that it is almost impossible to find a city with only one gang. Conflicts and enemies spawn an oppositional culture – a culture in which defeating enemies is more important than achieving goals. Without such elements of an oppositional culture, gangs could not exist. This oppositional aspect of gangs has a direct referent to groups that engage in terrorist activities. The symbols, activities, and causes of radicalized groups reflect their oppositional nature.[28] In most cases the government or certain cultures is the rival for terrorist groups and often a major goal of such groups is to provoke a reaction or in some cases an over-reaction.[29] Indeed this is one of the areas where the correspondence between terrorism and gang research is the strongest: both need enemies to exist and grow.

**Tenth:** *there is a need for theory making and theory testing.* Where advances have been made in the study of gang worlds, these reflect equilibrium between theory making and theory testing. Any tilt in the scales will either lead to the over- or under-abundance of ideas that will advance the literature. This was the case in the “golden era” of gang research around 1960, when sociological theory was steeped in the culture of the gang. Yet as Malcolm Klein noted about the state of gang theories in the 1960s: “many of the theoretical statements about gangs currently so widely accepted as fact are nothing of the sort. Rather, they are either undemonstrated, non-demonstrable, or actually demonstrated to be in error.”[30] Likewise, much of the gang research over the last twenty years has moved toward empiricism, mostly at the individual-level study of gang members, at the expense of advances in theory.[31] The extremism literature appears to suffer from an over-abundance of theory and an under-abundance of testing.[32] The fact that terrorist acts are rare events in most countries, as are radicalization processes and extremist beliefs, violent extremist researchers are hard pressed to have access to readily available data sources, let alone data capable to testing theories. The survey and longitudinal research revolution in the social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s set in motion an explosion

of gang research (actually, gang member research) based on many of the ideas and theories found in the fieldwork and theories of prior decades.

**Eleventh:** *pay close attention to the role of prison.* This is an area of gang research that needs development in method, theory and policy. Access to inmates is often not easy and even when authorities cooperate with research, subjects are often reluctant to be interviewed. It is well-established that the disorganized street gang member comes out of prison with more discipline, having been a member of a more organized gang in prison. The structure of prison gangs and the development of well-disciplined roles in such groups elevate gang members and their gang to a different, more organized state. We know that while in prison, gang members change both behavior and attitudes. In the U.S., prisons have been the site of producing radicalized beliefs including religious extremism, anti-government extremism and the tenets of hate groups. There is some evidence that imprisonment plays a role in radicalizing individuals and “producing” terrorists.[33] As little as we understand about the role of imprisonment on radicalization, we understand even less about the transition from prison to the street on the part of gang members and extremists.[34] Further, prison gangs often stay in touch with their street gang and gang associates through the re-cycling of individuals through prison and other communication methods. Such links between the street and the prison, the prison and the street are important mechanisms of the transmission of motives, methods and radicalized beliefs.

**Twelfth:** *comparative research will offer greater returns to knowledge than research conducted in isolation.* A special emphasis should be placed on the emergence of groups and cultures and how they each differ in form and function. The field of public health inquires whether close contact is required for the transmission of disease. Do gangs and extremist group spread through direct contact with other gang members or extremists or are there some alternative dissemination mechanisms? This was a key issue for gang researchers in the 1980s and 1990s when gang activity expanded greatly across the United States. It was necessary to determine whether gangs were franchising into new territories or whether gang symbology was being adopted by marginalized youth.[35] An analogous vein of this problem is found in Latin America for “pandilla” (i.e., homegrown, localized) and “mara” (i.e., transnational roots, deportation) gangs. These very questions are of unquestionable import to the study of terrorism, radicalization, and extremism, especially with the increasing importance placed on the movement of extremist persons (e.g., foreign fighters) and the transmission of extremist beliefs (e.g., homegrown radicals). By its nature research on terrorism and extremism is comparative and crosses state boundaries, yet a comparative research agenda is ripe for addressing questions that reach the very core of the study of extra-legal groups. The gang world has only recently embarked on such an agenda with the emergence of the important Eurogang research platform.[36] That platform can be a model for developing consensus definitions, methods, and international collaboration efforts.

## Conclusion

There are many points of divergence between the study of, and response to, gangs and groups involved in terrorism. That said, the points of overlap are so substantial that it would be disappointing not to learn from the successes (and the many failures) of gang research. These include characteristics of the individuals involved, the groups and their activities. We would advocate for a theoretical platform organized around Jim Short’s levels of explanation and a comparative research platform organized along the lines of the Eurogang program of research. Together this would provide a collection of ideas and theory and a core methodological basis to study them.

It took gang research nearly 100 years to reach a semblance of a solid base of scientific knowledge. Malcolm Klein lamented that it took gang research too long to get there and that this process would have been

hastened with greater loyalty to a comparative research agenda.[37] Indeed, one only has to look at the homicide counts in the U.S. and see that there have been over 30,000 gang-related deaths since the 1990s to agree with the sentiment expressed by Klein. The threat of extremism and terrorism is too great to ignore the success or repeat the missteps of gang research, practice, and policy.

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## Notes

[1] The phrase "I'm Down" is common street parlance for "I am in agreement with" or "I will do that".

We are grateful to the helpful comments of the reviewers and Paul Gill, co-editor of this issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Dr. Gary LaFree (START Center) also provided valuable feedback. Errors and shortcomings remain the province of the authors.

[2] Richard Rosenfeld (2004), 'Terrorism and Criminology,' In Mathieu Deflem (Ed.), *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Criminological Perspectives*, (London: Elsevier) pp. 19–32.

[3] Examples include: Mary Beth Altier, Christian N Thoroughgood, and John G Horgan (2014), 'Turning Away From Terrorism: Lessons from Psychology, Sociology, and Criminology,' *Journal of Peace Research* 51(5): pp. 647 – 661; Maura Conway (2007), 'Terrorism, the Internet, and International Relations: The Governance Conundrum.' In: Dunn, Myriam, Victor Mauer, and Felisha Krishna-Hensel (Eds.), *Power and Security in the Information Age: Investigating the Role of the State in Cyberspace* (London: Ashgate), pp. 95 – 127; Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz (2011), "Gangs, Terrorism, and Radicalization," *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4: 151 -166; Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz (2014), "Gangs: Another Form of Organized Crime?" in Letizia Paoli (Ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime* (Oxford: University Press); John G. Horgan (2008). 'Deradicalization or Disengagement?' *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2(4): pp.1-5; Gary LaFree and Laura Dugan (2004), 'How does studying terrorism compare to studying crime?' In Mathieu Deflem (Ed.), *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Criminological Perspectives*, (London: Elsevier), pp. 53–74.

[4] These myths were identified originally by James C. Howell (2007). Menacing or mimicking? Realities of youth gangs, *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 58(2), 39-50; see, for an international comparative take on gangs and violence, Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz (2010), 'Gang Violence Worldwide: Context, Culture, and Country. In Glenn McDonald (Ed.), *Small Arms Survey, 2010* (Cambridge:University Press), pp. 128 -155.

[5] Kris Christman. (2012). *Preventing Religious Radicalization and Violent Extremism: A Systematic Review of the Research Evidence*. Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

[6] David C. Pyrooz and Meghan M. Mitchell (2015), 'Little Gang Research, Big Gang Research.' In: Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz (Eds.). *The Handbook of Gangs*. (New York: Wiley), forthcoming.

[7] Frederic M. Thrasher (1927), *The gang: A study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[8] Examples are found in the following works: Brenda C. Coughlin and Sudhir Venkatesh (2003), 'The Urban Street Gang After 1970,' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29: 41 – 64; Liran Goldman, Howard Giles, and Michael A. Hogg (2014), 'Going to Extremes: Social Identity and Communication Processes Associated with Gang Membership.' *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 17(6), pp. 813 – 32; Jane Wood, and Emma Alleyne (2010), 'Street Gang Theory and Research: Where Are We

Now and Where Do We Go from Here?' *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15 (2), pp. 100 – 111; Karen Joe-Laidler and Geoffrey P. Hunt (2012), 'Moving Beyond the Gang-Drug-Violence Connection,' *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 19 (6), p. 442–452.

[9] James F. Short Jr. and Fred L. Strodbeck (1965), *Group Process and Gang Delinquency*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. See the recent review of Jim Short's work, particularly the YSP project, in; Lorine A Hughes (2015), 'The Legacy of James F. Short, Jr.' In Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz (Eds.). *The Handbook of Gangs*. (New York: Wiley), forthcoming.

[10] Beth M. Huebner, Kimberly Martin, Richard K. Moule Jr, David C. Pyrooz, and Scott H. Decker (2014), 'Dangerous Places: Gang Members and Neighborhood Levels of Gun Assault,' *Justice Quarterly*, forthcoming. DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2014.984751

[11] Maura Conway (2006), 'Terrorism and the Internet: New Media—New Threat?' *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59 (2), pp. 283–298.

[12] Nick Bilton (2014, August 27), 'Ferguson Reveals a Twitter Loop,' *New York Times*.

[13] Scott H. Decker, David C. Pyrooz, and Richard K. Moule Jr. (2014), 'Disengagement from Gangs as Role Transitions,' *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 24 (2): 268–83; David C. Pyrooz and Scott H. Decker. 2011; 'Motives and Methods for Leaving the Gang: Understanding the Process of Gang Desistance,' *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 39(5): 417–425.

[14] Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan (Eds.), (2008). *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, New York: Routledge; John Horgan (2009). *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement From Radical and Extremist Movements*, New York: Routledge; Gary LaFree and Erin Miller (2008), 'Desistance from terrorism: What can we learn from criminology?' *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 1(3), 203–230.

[15] Marc Sageman (2004), *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Marc Sageman (2008), *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

[16] James F. Short, Jr. (1985), 'The Level of Explanation Problem,' In Robert F. Meier (Ed.), *Theoretical Methods in Criminology* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage), pp. 51–74.

[17] Malcolm W. Klein and Cheryl L. Maxson (2006), *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*, New York: Oxford University Press.

[18] Cheryl L. Maxson and Malcolm W. Klein (1990), 'Street gang violence: Twice as great, or half as great?' In: C. Ron Huff (Ed.), *Gangs in America* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage), pp. 71–100.

[19] Representatives of the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism wrote a critique of the Global Terrorism Database, collected and maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, saying that it exaggerated the number of terrorist attacks due to shifting methodology (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/07/21/government-data-exaggerate-the-increase-in-terrorist-attacks/>). In a response by the senior staff from START, they pointed out that regardless of methodology, there is overwhelming overlap, with correlations around 0.90 or greater, despite independent methodologies (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/08/06/the-challenges-of-collecting-terrorism-data/>). We see these debates as a healthy sign for the advancement and growth of the terrorism literature.

[20] Feminists such as Meda Chesney-Lind and Joanne Belknap argue that criminologists' simply added gender to their models without attempting to fully understand the differences in role and meaning for women's involvement in crime. - Joanne Belknap, J. (2007), *The invisible woman: Gender, crime, and justice* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; Meda Chesney-Lind (1997), *Girls, women, and crime*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[21] Some of the best work on this topic includes: G. David Curry (1998), 'Female Gang Involvement' *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 35(1), 100–118; Panfil, Vanessa, and Dana Peterson. 2015. Gender, Sexuality, and Gangs: Re-envisioning Diversity. In Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz (Eds.), *Handbook of Gangs*. New York: Wiley; Jody Miller (2001), *One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs, and Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press; in particular, see Mac Klein's forward to Jody Miller's book, where he acknowledges how ignoring women misses out on roughly one quarter of the gang population. Malcolm W. Klein, M.W. (2001). Forward. In J. Miller's *One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs, and Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[22] Malcolm W. Klein and Cheryl L. Maxson (2006), *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*, New York: Oxford University Press; Jason Gravel, Martin Bouchard, Karine Descormiers, Jennifer S. Wong, and Carlo Morselli (2013), 'Keeping Promises: A Systematic Review and a New Classification of Gang Control Strategies.' *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 41(4), pp. 228–242.

[23] Malcolm W. Klein and Cheryl L. Maxson (2006), *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*, New York: Oxford University Press.

[24] The work of Scott H. Decker and Barrik Van Winkle and Jack Katz illustrate this. Scott H. Decker and Barrik Van Winkle, B. (1996), *Life in the Gang: Family,*

*Friends, and Violence*. Cambridge: University Press.

Jack Katz (1988), *Seductions of Crime*. New York: Basic Books; Arin Roussinos's *Vice* piece on "jihad selfies" (<http://www.vice.com/read/syrian-jihadist-selfies-tell-us-a-lot-about-their-war>) and Aaron Zelin's blog on *jihadology* are prime examples (<http://jihadology.net>).

[25] Maura Conway (2010), 'Terrorism and the Internet: A Review of the History, Issues, and Responses.' In: Pauline Reich (Ed.), *Cybercrime and Security* (Oxford: University Press).

David C. Pyrooz, Scott H. Decker, and Richard K. Moule Jr. (2013), 'Criminal and Routine Activities in Online Settings: Gangs, Offenders, and the Internet.' *Justice Quarterly*, forthcoming. DOI:10.1080/07418825.2013.778326;

Gabriel Weimann (2004), *www.terror.net: How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

[26] Phelan Wyrick (2006). 'Gang Prevention: How to Make the "Front End" of Your Anti-Gang Effort Work,' *U.S. Attorneys' Bulletin* 4(3), pp. 52–60.

[27] These conclusions included: (1) clear definitions of the terrorist activities to be studied, (2) tailoring the development of the identification risk factors to terrorism particularly and not violence generally, (3) focusing on building a knowledge base on "robust" risk factors most likely to be related to terrorism, and (4) developing an infrastructure of access to terrorists and non-terrorists to establish the validity of risk factors. See John Monahan (2012), 'The Individual Risk Assessment of Terrorism,' *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 18(2), 167–205.

[28] Marc Sageman (2004). *Understanding terrorist networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press;

Marc Sageman (2008). *Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

[29] Tore Bjorgo (2013), *Strategies for Preventing Terrorism*, New York: Palgrave.

[30] Malcolm W. Klein (1971). *Street Gangs and Street Workers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, p. 28

[31] Scott H. Decker, Chris Melde and David C. Pyrooz (2013), 'What do we know about gangs and gang members and where do we go from here?' *Justice Quarterly*, 30 (3), pp. 369–402.

[32] Randy Borum (2011), 'Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories.' *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(4), 7–36; Donatella Della Porta, and Gary LaFree (2012), 'Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization,' *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6, pp. 4–10.

[33] Dina Temple-Raston (2015), "French Prisons Prove to be Effective Incubators for Islamic Extremism," *Parallels*, January 22.

[34] Mark Fleisher and Scott Decker (2001), "An Overview of the Challenge of Prison Gangs," *Correctional Management Quarterly*, 5, 1–9.

[35] Malcolm W. Klein and Cheryl L. Maxson (2006), *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*, New York: Oxford University Press.

[36] The Eurogang homepage is hosted by the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (<http://www.umsl.edu/ccj/Eurogang/euroganghome.html>). The Eurogang manual provides an excellent overview of the Eurogang program of research. Frank M. Weerman, Cheryl L. Maxson, Finn-Aage Esbensen, Judith Aldridge, Juanjo Medina, and Frank Van Gemert (2009), *Eurogang Program Manual: Background, Development, and Use of the Eurogang Instruments in Multi-Site, Multi-Method Comparative Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.umsl.edu/ccj/Eurogang/EurogangManual.pdf>

[37] Malcolm W. Klein (2005), 'The Value of Comparisons in Street Gang Research,' *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 21 (2), pp.135–152.



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### III. Book Reviews

**Patrick Cockburn, *The Jihadis Return: the Rise of ISIS and the new Sunni Uprising*. New York and London: OR Books 2014.**

144 pp., US\$ 15.00 / £ 9.00 [Paperback]; ISBN 978-1-939293-95-6.

**Loretta Napoleoni, *The Islamist Phoenix: the Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*. New York and Oakland: Seven Stories Press 2014.**

136 pp., US\$ 11.95 [Paperback]; ISBN 978-1-60980-628-6.

Reviewed by Teun van Dongen

With the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) continuing to make gains in Syria and Iraq, where it controls large swaths of territory, the need to understand the insurgent group is paramount. The problem, however, is that it is exceedingly dangerous to obtain the type of inside information that is necessary to develop a deep understanding of the way the group functions. The Islamic State's atrocities are well-documented, of course, but we have little to go on when it comes to the group's inner workings. Against this background, one would be inclined to welcome the fact that in recent months Patrick Cockburn and Loretta Napoleoni each published a book about the Islamic State. Cockburn is a veteran Middle East correspondent for the British newspaper *The Independent* and wrote several books about the conflicts that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein, and Napoleoni is a well-known expert on the financing of terrorism and author of a book about Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who led al Qaeda in Iraq, one of ISIS' predecessors. But while Cockburn and Napoleoni both have good credentials to write on these issues, their books show that they, too, are finding it difficult to shed new light on the Islamic State's emir Al-Baghdadi and his forces.

Cockburn's book, *The rise of ISIS and the new Sunni uprising*, is strongly focused on the contextual factors that enabled the Islamic State to emerge victorious in the current Iraqi/Syrian conflict. Cockburn convincingly explains that the Islamic State's rise was made possible by the anti-Sunni bias of the Iraqi Shi'ite government, the export of Wahhabism from Saudi-Arabia and the susceptibility of the Sunni population to media outlets other than state propaganda and unreliable Western reporting.

But while he does a good job explaining the context in which the Islamic State seized power in the portions of territory under its control, the group itself is strangely absent from Cockburn's account. Perhaps because he lacks the information needed to do so, Cockburn says almost nothing about what the Islamic State itself did to get where it is today. Thus, the rise of ISIS comes across as a natural phenomenon that followed necessarily from a confluence of several enabling factors. Some ham-fisted comparisons to Nazi Germany and fascism aside, Cockburn does little to elucidate the nature and actions of the group whose rise he tries to explain.

Unlike *The jihadis return*, Loretta Napoleoni's *The Islamist Phoenix: the Islamic State and the redrawing of the Middle East* does discuss the Islamic State directly. Napoleoni ably chronicles the origins and resurrection of the organisation that became the Islamic State and compares it to other terrorist groups that controlled territory, arguing that what is new about the Islamic State is the group's swift success rather than its terrorist nature as such.

Unfortunately, Napoleoni's book, like Cockburn's, is hamstrung by a lack of reliable inside information. The Islamic State puts out vast amounts of propaganda, but keeps a lid on its inner workings, the result being that little is known about Al-Baghdadi's organisation beyond its cruelty and its military successes. As Napoleoni's



book is largely based on media reports and analyses of these successes, her account is less than balanced. Indeed, she is so impressed by the Islamic State's sudden rise that she frequently overstates the group's political ingenuity. For instance, she repeatedly stresses the Islamic State's political skills and pragmatism, but fails to observe that the group's publicly displayed cruelty was instrumental in mobilising the international coalition that is currently blocking its northward offensive. Add to this the puzzling claims Napoleoni occasionally makes, the most bewildering being that "[t]he Caliphate is no more violent and barbarous than any other armed organization in recent memory" (p. 45) and that the Islamic State wants to rule "with the consent of the governed" (p. 36), and it is clear that her book is seriously flawed.

All of this is not to say that the two books are outright failures. They adequately lay down the background and history of the current conflict and will be highly readable introductions for readers who are new to the topic. At the same time, though, lacking new information, Cockburn and Napoleoni do not add much to the freely available media reporting and commentary on the Islamic State, which begs the question to what extent we can know and understand the Islamic State at all. After all, if even the books of two seasoned and rightfully celebrated authors like Cockburn and Napoleoni are ultimately forgettable efforts, perhaps we should accept that the Islamic State will remain a black box, at least for the time being.

*About the reviewer: Teun van Dongen is an independent national and international security expert. In November 2014 he successfully defended his PhD dissertation 'The Science of Fighting Terrorism. The Relation between Terrorist Actor Type and Counterterrorism Effectiveness' (579 pp.) at Leiden University.*

## Counterterrorism Bookshelf:

### 16 Books on Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism-related Subjects

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

*This column consists of capsule reviews of books published by various publishers, with the authors listed in alphabetical order. Please note that most of these books were recently published, with several published over the past several years but deserving renewed interest.*

**Yaniv Barzilai, *102 Days of War: How Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda & the Taliban Survived 2001***

(Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2013). 194 pp., US \$ 19.96 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1612345338.

A detailed, authoritative and extensively footnoted account of how al Qaida, led by Osama bin Laden, succeeded in escaping from Afghanistan into Pakistan, following the United States-led intervention that overthrew the Taliban regime in late 2001. The book also chronicles the Pakistani government's efforts to assist the Taliban's retreat into Pakistan. Al Qaida and the Taliban were not defeated at the time, the author writes, because "The absence of unanimity over the objectives for Operation Enduring Freedom reflected a lack of united strategic vision that would ultimately enable al Qaeda to continue its existence in the region. While most of the [United States] civilian and military leaders recognized that al Qaeda and the Taliban were the enemies, a clear and unified understanding of how to defeat these adversaries never emerged. The President and his subordinates considered the primary objective to be to remove Afghanistan as a safe haven for terrorism" (pp. 46-47). In the Epilogue, the author concludes that in contrast to the Battle of Tora Bora, which took place in December 2001, where U.S.-led forces had failed to prevent al Qaida's escape from Afghanistan, the U.S. government, under President Barack Obama, succeeded in finally killing bin Laden in his hideaway in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011, because this operation "was planned during a stable and routine time of the Obama presidency," where counterterrorism campaign planners "had the time to proceed through a deliberate and composed decision-making process." (p. 125). The author is a foreign service officer in the U.S. Department of State.

**Paul Berman, *The Flight of the Intellectuals: The Controversy Over Islamism and the Press*** (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011). 304 pp., US \$ 11.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1935554448.

Taking the form of a polemic, this well-written book examines the intellectual atmosphere in the West that caused prominent non-Muslim intellectuals and journalists, such as Timothy G. Ash and Ian Buruma, to "fumble badly" in their appeasement of Islamist ideas and accompanying terrorist violence, with Swiss- and UK-based Tariq Ramadan (the grandson of Hassan al Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood), succeeding in 'deceiving' his Western audience that Islamism is compatible with Western democratic and pluralistic values. This polemic is set against the larger context of how some Western intellectuals responded to the Rushdie Affair (when the Iranian Islamic Republic had issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie in February 1989 in reaction to the publication of his novel "The Satanic Verses" the previous year), with the author concluding that "The Rushdies of today find themselves under criticism, contrasted unfavorably in the very best of magazines with Tariq Ramadan, who is celebrated as a bridge between cultures – Ramadan, an alumnus of the anti-Rushdie Islamic Foundation in Britain." (p. 298). Paul Berman is an American writer on politics and literature.

**Robert J. Bunker and Charles “Sid” Heal (Eds.), *Fifth Dimensional Operations: Space-Time-Cyber Dimensionality in Conflict and War*** [A Terrorism Research Center Book] (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse LLC, 2014). 290 pp., US \$ 21.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1491738726.

The contributors to this edited volume examine what is termed “fifth dimensional operations” in conflict and war, which, as explained by Charles “Sid” Heal, one of the contributors, is cyberspace, with the other four consisting of the three dimensional “space” (length, width and height/depth), with the fourth dimension being “time.” The fifth dimension plays an important role in counterterrorism, Robert Bunker explains in his introductory chapter, because it is in the “cyber” battlespace that a terrorist operative’s movements might come under camera surveillance, which would make it possible to eventually apprehend him in “physical” space. As Mr. Heal explains, “Of critical importance is to understand that each of these five dimensions is fundamentally distinct from one another and rules for one dimension are completely irrelevant for another. For example, speed in space means nothing without time and there is no distance in time. Likewise, in cyberspace, time and space are completely irrelevant for one simple reason: knowledge can reside in more than one place at the same time” (p. 129). Mr. Heal then concludes that “Despite their fundamental differences all five dimensions interact with one another with humans the common ‘go between’ or element” (p.129). The book is composed of an introduction, 14 chapters (most of which were previously published, beginning in 1998), a postscript, a symbol key and glossary, and appendices. Dr. Bunker is a Visiting Professor and Minerva Chair, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, while Mr. Heal is a retired Commander, Los Angeles Sheriffs Department.

**Ophir Falk and Henry Morgenstern (Eds.), *Suicide Terror: Understanding and Confronting the Threat*** (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009). 336 pp., US \$ 107.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-470-44776-5.

The contributors to this edited volume examine the threat of suicide terrorism in all its dimensions. This ranges from a general overview, how the global jihad, including al Qaida, employs suicide terrorism, the use of suicide terrorism against Israel and the United States, and how suicide terrorism is employed worldwide in countries such as Lebanon, Sri Lanka, India, Turkey, and Chechnya. They also discuss high-risk future scenarios in suicide terrorism (such as against energy facilities, civilian aircraft, maritime targets, and subways), countermeasures against suicide terrorism, and medical management of suicide terrorist incidents. Much of the material will be of special interest to law enforcement and public safety practitioners as it deals with the types of weapons and tactics employed by the groups and the operatives who carry out suicide bombings. There is also an invaluable chapter by Shmuel C. Shapira and Leonard A. Cole on the medical components in managing those injured by such mass casualty incidents. While most of the incidents covered in the book do involve suicide bombing tactics, a few do not, such as the March 2003 Madrid train bombings. One of the book’s future scenarios involves a MANPAD attack against a civilian airliner, which represents a more conventional ‘attack and escape’ tactic. While the book’s sections on profiling the characteristics of suicide operatives are weak, this volume’s discussions of the mechanics and modus operandi of suicide terrorism represent an important contribution to the literature on this topic. Mr. Falk, an attorney, is a noted Israeli counterterrorism expert, and Mr. Morgenstern is President of the American-based Security Solutions International.

**Edward Follis and Douglas Century, *The Dark Art: My Undercover Life in Global Narco-Terrorism*** (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2014). 288 pp., US \$ 28.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1592408931.

This is a highly engaging personal account by a former Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agent of his 27-

year career, including operating as an undercover agent in drug cartel hotspots such as Mexico and the front lines of counterterrorism in Afghanistan after 9/11, where he served as a DEA attaché at the American Embassy in Kabul, and dealt with the country's criminal drug lords. With the discipline of threat convergence involving the close intersection of terrorism and criminality becoming increasingly prominent in terrorism and counterterrorism studies, readers will benefit from the author's description of his numerous encounters with 'narco-terrorists', including his conclusion that "Indeed, narco-terrorism is now the face of twenty-first-century organized crime. Far-flung groups like the Taliban, Hamas, Hezbollah, and FARC...are two-headed monsters: hybrids of highly structured global drug-trafficking cartels and politically motivated terrorists" (p. 248).

**Stephen A. Harmon, *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region: Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012-2013*** (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014). 273 pp., US \$ 119.95 [Hardcover], ISBN-13: 978-1409454755.

A comprehensive account of the historical origins, current manifestations, and possible future trends regarding terrorist and insurgent outbreaks in the Sahara-Sahel region, focusing, in particular, on Algeria, Mali, and Nigeria. The volume includes a discussion of the effectiveness of international and regional initiatives to counter the spread of these insurgencies. Among the author's numerous findings are that "southern Libya may become the Sahara's new terrorist haven now that northern Mali has been largely denied to them," and that "The problems facing Mali are not particular to one country but are regional issues: Islamic extremism and the terrorism it frequently generates; the organized criminal networks that thrive off of the price differentials resulting from arguably artificial borders in the Sahara-Sahel zone; and the problem of corruption in political and economic relations that eats away at the social contract and the economic base of society" (pp. 228-229). Dr. Harmon is a Professor in Pittsburg State University's Department of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences.

**Shane Harris, *@War: The Rise of the Military-Internet Complex*** (Boston, MA: An Eamon Dolan Book/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014). 304 pages, US\$27.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0544251793.

An interesting journalistic examination of the latest technological trends in the American government's attempt to 'control' cyberspace, where its relentless cyber adversaries range from states (such as China and Iran) to sub-state actors, such as the Anonymous hacktivist group and overseas criminal cyber networks. Developing the capabilities to mount such countermeasures is so challenging and pervasive, the author writes, that the American government has mobilized the country's private sector to support the development of cutting edge cyber tools to counter its cyber adversaries, as well as to build up its own cyber 'offensive' capability, with cyber-warfare becoming a crucial component in a state's modern warfare arsenal on the 'ground' and in 'cyber' space. As to future trends, the author points out that, in one such trend, to protect people from cyber threats (especially in the form of cyber breaches of one's bank accounts or other types of personal stored information), companies are likely to create "Internet safe zones," consisting of new domain names for their websites. The author is a senior writer with the "Foreign Policy" magazine and a Fellow at the Washington, DC-based New America Foundation.

**Jennifer Hesterman, *Soft Target Hardening: Protecting People from Attack*** (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2015). 321 pp., US \$ 62.96 [Hardcover], ISBN 9781482244212.

Since this reviewer wrote the book's Foreword, this should not be considered a review, but a capsule write-up

of the book's contents. The volume's chapters cover topics such as defining soft targets (e.g., schools, religious houses of worship, hospitals, shopping malls, sports and entertainment venues), motivations by terrorists to target such facilities, and how such soft targets can be hardened through various security measures to deter terrorists from attacking them. The appendices include various checklists on risk mitigation, including a bomb threat standoff chart. The author is a retired Colonel in the U.S. Air Force who had commanded emergency response forces at military facilities. She is currently a private consultant.

**Arif Jamal, *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*** (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2009). 303 pp., US \$ 26.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 9781933633596.

A comprehensive account of the Pakistani-supported Islamist jihad in Indian-controlled Kashmir, from its inception in 1947 until early 2008. It focuses, in particular, on the rise of Hizbul Mujahideen, the largest jihad group in Kashmir, while briefly discussing other prominent Pakistani jihadi militant groups such as Lashkar-i-Taiba and the Jaish-i-Mohammad. Although the book's coverage is dated, it still provides a valuable background for understanding current developments in Kashmir, especially in light of the author's forecast that "If the jihadis continue spreading their influence, which is the most likely emerging scenario, they will ultimately extend their control to the borders of Jammu and Kashmir in the East and of Afghanistan in the West, connecting the two. If the territory between Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan come under control of jihadis, they would be able to freely move between Kashmir and Afghanistan" (pp. 271-272). While current development in Kashmir likely preclude a jihadi military victory in that territory, the author is likely correct in his prediction of increasing territorial control by the Pakistani-backed Taliban in Afghanistan, thereby providing their Kashmiri insurgents greater incentives to continue their armed struggle in Indian Kashmir. The author is a leading Pakistani journalist.

**Roy Licklider (Ed.), *New Armies From Old: Merging Competing Military Forces After Civil Wars*** (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014). 320 pp., US \$ 54.95 [Hardcover], US \$ 34.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1626160439.

The contributors to this edited volume examine different categories that characterize the way that states that emerge from protracted civil war attempt to integrate former rival militaries (including terrorist and guerrilla forces) into their newly reformed and reconstituted military armies. The volume's case studies attempt to answer three overarching research questions: "(1) Why has military integration been used? (2) What particular strategies seem to work better under what circumstances? (3) Has successful integration made the resumption of civil war less likely?" (p.3). To apply this conceptual framework, the volume's chapters cover military integration cases such as Sudan (1971), Zimbabwe (1980), Lebanon (1989), Cambodia (1991), Angola (1994), Bosnia (1995), South Africa (1997), and Burundi (2004). The concluding chapter by Roy Licklider is especially insightful, as he discusses the nature of those integration efforts that were most effective (e.g., when former adversaries are integrated as individuals rather than units). He finds that international assistance is often useful, that quotas actually do work, and, citing one of the volume's contributors, that "the success of military integration depends on the political will of the local elites." (pp. 260-261) This volume's conceptual framework and findings are especially pertinent to the current period, particularly in shedding light on the factors that appear to be absent in the unsuccessful military integration efforts in Iraq's Shi'ite dominated military. Roy Licklider is Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.



**Kirk S. Lippold, *Front Burner: Al Qaeda's Attack on the USS Cole*** (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2012). 408 pp., US \$ 27.99 [Hardcover], US \$ 16.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1610391245.

A personal account by the commander of the USS Cole of the events that preceded and followed the suicide terrorist attack by al Qaida operatives against his ship when it was docked in the port of Aden in Yemen on October 12, 2000. Seventeen American sailors were killed and 37 were wounded in the attack, with the ship itself being saved and eventually refurbished for future sailing. What makes Commander Lippold's book of special interest is his detailed and objective account, including his inclusion and discussion of numerous government reports and investigations about the circumstances that led to the attack, particularly an examination of the effectiveness of the anti-terrorism force protection measures that were in place at the time, including the threat environment in Yemen. Also of interest is Commander Lippold's account of the aftermath of the attack and the circumstances that prevented him from being further promoted in the Navy.

**Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath*** (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2014). 272 pp., US \$ 19.99 [Hardcover], US\$ 13.55 [Paperback], ISBN: 9781935554004.

This is a balanced and objective discussion of the chain of events that followed the 1988 publication of Salman Rushdie's novel, "The Satanic Verses," that led to the issuance of the fatwa by the Iranian Islamist government the following year. The fatwa called for Rushdie's assassination and the murder of anyone associated with the book's publication or selling. This chain of events, the author writes, also transformed the relationship between the radicalized version of Islam and the West into a war of terror that became unconstrained geographically, leading to its current explosive manifestation. In one of the book's numerous insightful passages about the impact of the Rushdie affair on Western writers, Mr. Malik quotes the British novelist Hanif Kureishi's observation that "The fatwa 'created a climate of terror and fear. Writers had to think about what they were writing in a way they never had to before. Free speech became an issue as it had not been before. Liberals had to take a stand, to defend an ideology [i.e., liberalism and free speech] they had not really had to think about before.'" (p. 202) One may not, however, necessarily agree with the author's conclusion that Western 'overreaction' "helped build a culture of grievance in which being offended has become a badge of identity, cleared a space for radical Islamists to flourish, and made secular and progressive arguments less sayable, particularly within Muslim communities" (p. 210). Nevertheless, the issues raised by Mr. Malik's important book form the very essence of the intellectual debate currently raging in the West about how to deal with integration problems and grievances being expressed by many segments in Muslim communities in Western societies. These can now be better understood within the context of the earlier Rushdie affair. Mr. Malik is an English writer and broadcaster.

**Angel Rabasa and Cheryl Benar, *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*** (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015). 245 pp., US \$ 32.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 9781107437203.

A detailed and comprehensive examination of the size and demography of Europe's Muslim populations, the origins, patterns and networks of Islamist radicalization, mobilization and recruitment into violent extremist movements in these societies, the nature of jihadist ideology and strategy, case studies of Islamist terrorist operations and tactics in Europe, and the types of responses by the continent's governments against such threats. Also discussed are recent developments, particularly the impact of the civil wars in Iraq and Syria on the radicalization and mobilization of Western Muslims, turning several thousands into becoming foreign fighters on behalf of al-Qaida type insurgents in those conflicts. One of the authors' findings, which is pertinent to the current period, is that "The grievances that propel radicalization and violence are largely



vicarious in nature. The motivating factors need not be, and often are not, part of the personal experience of the individual. More frequently, radicalization is fostered by narratives of Muslim oppression in areas of conflict outside of Europe” (p. 192). Both authors are senior analysts at the RAND Corporation.

**David Scharia, *Judicial Review of National Security*** (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015). 296 pp., US \$ 85.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 9780199393367.

An important examination of how the Israeli Supreme Court has developed an informal set of judicial tools, which the author terms “advisory dialogue,” that enable it to review the legality of certain types of military actions, particularly within the context of an ongoing counterterrorism campaign (such as a hostage taking event or imminent targeted killing operation), that require urgent review, to ensure that both expeditious counter-measures against suspected terrorists and the rule of law are adhered to in a timely manner by all government bodies, ranging from the Executive, the Attorney General, the intelligence community, and the military. This is important, the author writes, so that not only in the case of Israel but in other countries, as well, “By exercising judicial review through advisory dialogue courts can overcome several of their institutional disadvantages on questions pertaining to national security. It could mitigate the tension between the wish to promote human rights and the wish to avoid inter-branch conflict in time of emergency” (p. 235) Dr. Scharia is the Coordinator of the Legal and Criminal Justice Group at the United Nations Security Council’s Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED). He had previously worked in Israel at the Supreme Court division in the Attorney General’s office.

**Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *The Senate Intelligence Committee Report on Torture: Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program*** (Brooklyn, New York: Melville House, 2014). 576 pp., US \$ 16.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 9781612194851.

This volume, re-published by a commercial publisher, is the complete official declassified and redacted summary report of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s investigation of the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) so-called “enhanced” interrogation and covert detention program established in the aftermath of al Qaida’s 9/11 attacks. This unclassified summary report is based on the full report, numbering some 6,700 pages, which remains classified, and which took five years to produce, together with this volume released by the U.S. government in early December 2014. This volume is divided into seven sections, including background on the Senate committee’s study, the overall history and operation of the CIA’s detention and interrogation program, intelligence acquired through the interrogation program, a review of the CIA’s reporting on its interrogation program to the media, the Department of Justice, Congress, and other bodies, and several appendices. This summary report, as well as the full report, have been criticized by the CIA and Republican members of Congress for providing an inaccurate account of the interrogation program and its effectiveness—unlike “The 9/11 Commission Report” (officially known as the “Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States”), which was published in July 2004 and was widely praised for its objectivity and insight.

**Brian Glyn Williams, *Predators: The CIA’s Drone War on al Qaeda*** (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2013). 256 pp., US \$ 29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1612346175.

A comprehensive and detailed examination of the effectiveness of the U.S. intelligence and military services’ armed drone campaign against suspected terrorist operatives associated with al Qaeda and its affiliates (including the Pakistani Taliban), whether in Pakistan, Yemen, or elsewhere. Following a discussion of how

drones evolved to become an important component in the American counterterrorism campaign against al Qaeda—which is illustrated with numerous case studies of their use against such terrorist operatives—the author devotes two chapters to a discussion of the arguments “for” and “against” their use. The employment of drones, the author points out, “have saved civilian lives” by disrupting potential plots to carry out terrorist acts in the West (p. 170), and their “constant threat of attack or surveillance has forced the Taliban and al Qaeda to dismantle their training camps in favor of hidden classrooms or dugouts in the mountains,” (p.181). He also finds that drones have weakened these organizations’ leadership by eliminating top leaders, thereby forcing them to elevate inexperienced mid-level operatives “to higher positions in the organization” (p.181). Arguments against their use, according to the author, include the fact that they “are not perfect; they can (and do) make mistakes that lead to [collateral] civilian deaths” (p. 213). The author concludes that “drones represent the future of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in remote, unpoliced lands, such as Pakistan’s FATA region, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya. Where U.S. troops cannot be placed on the ground, drones will increasingly fly to strike at those whom America deems to be its enemies” (p. 229). Brian Williams is professor of Islamic history at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth.

*About the Reviewer: Dr. Joshua Sinai is the Book Reviews Editor of ‘Perspectives on Terrorism’. He can be reached at: [Joshua.sinai@comcast.net](mailto:Joshua.sinai@comcast.net).*

## IV. Resources

### Bibliography: Terrorism in, or Originating from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia (Part 1)

Compiled and Selected by Judith Tinnes

[Bibliographic Series of Perspectives on Terrorism - BSPT-JT-2015-1]

#### Abstract

*This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on terrorism in the Caucasus region, Central Asia, and Russia as well as terrorist activity originating from these regions abroad. Though focusing on recent (non-Russian language) literature, the bibliography is not restricted to a particular time period and covers publications up to December 2014. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing more than 200 core and periphery sources in the field of Terrorism Studies. Additionally, full-text and reference retrieval systems have been employed to expand the search.*

**Keywords:** bibliography; resources; literature; Caucasus; Central Asia; Russia, terrorism

NB: All websites were last visited on 01.01.2015.–See also Note for the Reader at the end of this literature list.

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Foreign Fighters / The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) [<http://www.icct.nl/activities/projects/foreign-fighters>]

International Crimes Database (ICD) / foreign fighters + terrorism [<http://www.internationalcrimesdatabase.org/SearchResults/?q=foreign+fighters&cat=10&a=1>]

Response to foreign fighters / European Union [<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/foreign-fighters/>]

The XX Committee: intelligence, strategy, and security in a dangerous world [<http://20committee.com>]

***About the Compiler:*** Eric Price is a professional information specialist who joined 'Perspectives on Terrorism' as an Editorial Assistant after his retirement from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

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## V. Notes from the Editor

### News From TRI's National PhD Writers Networks

Compiled by Alex P. Schmid

The Terrorism Research Initiative maintains a dozen national (and in some cases regional) networks of post-graduates working on their doctoral dissertations. Their members collaborate with each other to varying degrees, with some networks being more active than others. If you are a PhD student and want to join one of these networks, contact the country coordinator. If you are from a country without a network, contact the Coordinator of TRI 's national networks at [apschmid@terrorismanalysts.com](mailto:apschmid@terrorismanalysts.com) . He will try to get you in touch with TRI scholars residing in your country.

#### *Country Coordinators:*

- The United Kingdom: [Gordon Clubb](#)
- The Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium): [Daan Weggeman](#)
- Russia: [Yulia Netesova](#)
- The United States: [Matthew Sweeney](#)
- Canada: [Nick Deshpande](#)
- South Africa Plus: [Petra Harvest](#)
- Australia: [Levi-Jay West](#)
- Norway: [Cato Hemmingby](#)
- Spain: [Miguel Peco](#)
- Brazil: [Jorge Lasmar](#)
- Nigeria: [Wale Adeboye](#)
- Pakistan: [Muhammad Feyyaz](#)

#### *News from TRI Country Chapters*

##### *Pakistan*

The Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI) has established its Pakistan chapter at the University of Management and Technology in Lahore. The UMT's School of Governance and Society (SGS) is collaborating with TRI in its projects. Recently, a five-day international workshop was held in Lahore where renowned national and international guests including UMT Rector Dr Hasan Sohaib Murad, SGS Director Rahatulain, TRI Country Coordinator Muhammad Feyyaz, Dr Neville Bolt (UK), Dr Richard Jackson (New Zealand) spoke on various aspects of terrorism. The workshop, which lasted from 19 – 23 January 2015, was titled 'Understanding Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism'. It was attended by members of the armed forces, intelligence services, universities, think tanks, academia (incl. UMT students) as well as representatives from civil society

organizations. The training curriculum comprised 22 lectures and three hands-on exercises, supervised by a group of scholars harnessed from nine different countries (UK, USA, Turkey, India, Switzerland, Romania, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Pakistan). Addressing the conference, Dr Hasan Sohaib Murad emphasized that terrorism was now a global issue of concern which needed to be addressed not only on the political and military levels, but also needs to be tackled theoretically, i.e. academically, and ideologically. The Rector applauded TRI for opening up its Pakistan chapter at UMT.

### *Norway*

The Norwegian National TRI network remains a small-knit group, mainly consisting of the few PhD-candidates at the Norwegian Police University College (PHS) and the Norwegian Defence Research Facility (FFI). The level of activities has been good, including participation in domestic and international conferences, as well as several publications. In addition, some of the PhD candidates from the TRI network have been lecturing at various institutions. Several PhD candidates have also spent time as visiting researchers abroad. While the number of PhD-positions is very limited in the field of terrorism research in Norway, the government has announced that it will create several new research positions in the area of right-wing extremism. The national Research Council is tasked with finding the most suitable institution for this. It is quite likely that this will lead to the creation of new PhD-positions. It should also be mentioned that the Norwegian node has benefited by good assistance from the Spanish TRI network group in one of its ongoing projects. This illustrates the intention, the value and the usefulness of the TRI network.

### *South Africa Plus*

There has been little activity in this part of the world during 2014 but it does not mean that the regional TRI chapter has been dormant. Two PhD students completed their studies and obtained their doctorates in 2014 while two others are awaiting results following submission. Two more are expected to complete by the end of the third quarter of 2015. Two new students have joined the network, one Zimbabwean and one Mozambican. While neither has registered at a university yet, then in South Africa this only has to be done by the end of March. The South Africa Plus country coordinator has completed and submitted her PhD thesis and is now awaiting the verdict of the external examiners.

### *United States*

The national coordination has passed from Neil Shortland to Matthew Sweeney, who is also studying at the University of Massachusetts' Lowell Campus School of Criminology and Justice Studies. He is currently going through the major journals in the field of terrorism research to identify more PhD thesis writers and their supervisors. So far he has identified over 60 professors supervising thesis writing. After completing his review of individuals, he will be contacting the major organizations to identify additional PhD thesis writers in the United States and invite them to join the network.

### *Nigeria*

TRI's Nigerian network was started in July 2014 by Wale Adeboye, University of Ibadan. As country coordinator he has been in discussion with various groups and individuals in academia as well as policy institutions in an effort to explore how TRI can facilitate cooperative efforts among Nigerian scholars from a broad range of disciplines and diverse backgrounds. The conflict escalation by the Boko Haram insurgent

group has increased the urgency for such collaboration. While the Nigeria government continues to spend very large sums of money on countering terrorism, such measures have not been properly evaluated; there is a need for this since some of the counter-measures taken so far might well have been counter-productive. Through TRI Nigeria, a strong case is now being made to engage academia in evaluating policies in terms of their effectiveness. TRI Nigeria is also attempting to bring policy-making and political and social science research come closer together, not only to lessen the threat of terrorism, but also to minimize misguided responses to it. TRI Nigeria currently has seven PhD thesis writers and is on a drive to increase this number in the near future.

### **Brazil**

The Brazilian branch of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI) is hosted at the Department of International Relations, PUC Minas, Belo Horizonte. Recently the Country Coordinator, Dr. Jorge Lasmar, and his colleague Dr. Danny Zahreddine—who also collaborates with the TRI network—received a two-year grant from the Minas Gerais State Government through its Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa da Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG) for risk analysis by means of mapping the vulnerabilities of major national events to possible international terrorist attacks. Both academics have been invited to give guest lectures and are frequently appearing in the media to discuss terrorism and related subjects. Jorge Lasmar, who is professor of International Law at Brazil's Milton Campus, also acted as a guest lecturer in a Counter-Terrorism Workshop for the Special Operations Unit of the Military Police of Minas Gerais. He has also been lecturing at a short course on terrorism at the State District Attorney School. Recently, two new PhD students joined the Brazilian PhD network: Ms. Patricia Prado is investigating “The Pedagogy of Martyrdom in Shia Narratives” while Ms. Suzane Vasconcelos is starting a comparative study on the vulnerabilities of airports to terrorism. This year, TRI's Brazilian network is organising a conference on *Transnational Terrorism and Political Violence*; it is scheduled for late 2015. Members of the Brazilian network are currently also setting up a blog as well as an online forum to promote Terrorism Studies and the exchange of information on the subject in Brazil.



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## TRI Award for Best PhD Thesis 2014: Last Call for Submissions

by Alex P. Schmid

The Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI) seeks to enhance the quality of research in the field of Terrorism Studies. For this purpose it has established an *Annual Award for the Best Doctoral Dissertation on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism*. Last year's call for PhD theses submitted in the year 2013 had resulted in 29 valid entries. The TRI Award jury, consisting of the directors of the Terrorism Research Initiative, identified three finalists and among them the winner—Dr. Tricia Bacon (American University, Washington, D.C.). See announcement in the August 2014 issue of our journal at

<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/356/html>

With this announcement, a final call is being made for *PhD theses submitted or defended at an academic institution in the year 2014*. The winner will be announced in the summer of 2015 and can expect an Award of US \$ 1.000,—plus a document signed by the chairman of the jury, acknowledging the granting of the TRI thesis award. Altogether three finalists will be identified. They will all receive a document signed by the jury. *The deadline for entries* (in English, or with translation into English) *is 31 March, 2015*. Theses should be submitted in electronic form to the chairman of the jury, Prof. em. Alex P. Schmid, at [apschmid@terrorismanalysts.com](mailto:apschmid@terrorismanalysts.com), together with a cover letter (1-3 pp.), explaining the merits of the submitted PhD thesis as seen by the author. Doctoral theses can be submitted by either the author or the academic supervisor of a thesis submitted in 2014.

## Word of Thanks for our External Peer Reviewers

### from the Editorial Team

*Perspectives on Terrorism* is the product of volunteer efforts – academics, professionals and practitioners who – for nine consecutive years – have been giving their time and providing their expertise to keep this free online journal alive and even increasing in circulation. While the main burden of producing six issues per year rests on the shoulders of the Editorial Team and those of the Editorial Board members, there are many others who assist us in bringing out timely articles and research notes.

The six Editorial Team members and the twenty Editorial Board members alone would not be able to handle and review the growing number of articles that reach us now on an almost daily basis. We could not deal with this volume of submissions without the selfless help of our esteemed external reviewers. Once a year we wish to thank them publicly by listing their names.

For reviewing article submitted to *Perspectives on Terrorism* in 2014, we wish to thank:

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Rogelio Alonso	Cas Mudde
Tore Bjorgo	Sam Mullins
C. Cliff	Brigitte Nacos
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Paul Kamolnick	Edith Wu
Daniel Koehler	Joe Young
Michael Kraft	Munir Zamir
Anthony Lemieux	Aaron Zelin
Peter Lehr	Jacob Zenn
Sarah Marsden	

We also wish to thank our regular members of the Editorial Board. They were approached most often and asked again and again to give us their professional assessment regarding the quality of the submissions reaching our journal.

Thank you all for making *Perspectives on Terrorism* a success!

Alex P. Schmid & James Forest (Editors)

Robert Wesley (Founding Editor)

Joseph Easson (Associate Editor for IT)

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