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# RESEARCH STUDY

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## **EICTP VIENNA RESEARCH PAPERS ON TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM AND COUNTER TERRORISM: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

VOLUME I

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**EICTP VIENNA RESEARCH PAPERS  
ON TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM AND  
COUNTER TERRORISM:  
CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

VOLUME I

## **IMPRINT**

The European Institute for Counter Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP) is a research association operating worldwide and with its headquarters in Vienna, Austria. As a non-profit institution the focus of EICTP is on key topics around security policy-related issues. It carries out projects with renowned partners in Austria and abroad, maintains close relationships with high-level research organizations and a network of prominent experts and scholars, offers profound sets of actions, consultations and strategies related to counter-terrorism, hybrid conflicts, and de-radicalization measures and aims at creating policy-related recommendations based on research and expert assessments for decision-makers.

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## FOREWORD

Identifying and analyzing the central security policy challenges for Europe is a major priority for the European Institute for Counter Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP).

With focus on EICTP's activities and its aims of overcoming intercultural, interreligious differences, transnational terrorist networks and hybrid conflicts manifest a substantially growing threat to global security. Given an increasing necessity to understand systematic developments, paradigmatic shifts and recent trends in the sphere of politically motivated violence against innocent victims, we devote ourselves to in-depth analyses and studies of such uncertainty scenarios. We consider it a key task to make the effects of prevention and (non-)intervention transparent and assessable.

It is therefore our aim to actively contribute well-founded strategies, provide feasible solution approaches and suggest options for action to policymakers. This is expected to be conducive to strengthening confidence in public order for a stable, strategic environment for promoting cooperation with European neighbours and partners beyond.

By means of this major research study, a collection of state of the art contributions by world-leading experts in the field on the subject of transnational terrorism and its multifaceted implications, EICTP intends to provide a first-hand account dealing with the imminent sub-conventional threats to current international security environments. Reflections introduced and elaborated cover a wide range of issues dealing, among others, with strategic and hybrid terrorism, the systemic dimension, prevalent actors, counter-narratives, the crime terror-nexus, the role of digitalization and the spiral dynamic between Islamist and right-wing terrorism. The expert papers should provide a condensed overview of current developments, structural linkages and important academic debates centering around transnational, Salafi-jihadi terrorism and counter-terrorism.

EICTP aims at applying its holistic and solution-oriented approach of connecting the competencies of an international expert network with contacts and practical experiences from conflict regions. This publication is part of EICTP's contribution and raises important questions that are subject to further analytical investigation.

On behalf of EICTP I wish you an enjoyable and insightful reading!

Sincerely,

Herbert Scheibner  
EICTP President





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# **INTRODUCTION TO COMBINED EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS: THE CASE OF HYBRID TERRORISM-SYSTEMIC LESSONS FROM RECENT EUROPEAN PLOTS**

**by Nicolas Stockhammer**

*"A hybrid threat is a phenomenon resulting from convergence and interconnection of different elements, which together form a more complex and multidimensional threat"*<sup>1</sup>

*"Today's terrorist leaders think strategically. They have benefitted from decades of experience, observing their predecessors, enabling them to create new kinds of organizations and formulate strategies that exploit the disadvantages of the democratic state. Intellectually states have not kept up, and radical rethinking is in order"*

*Brian Jenkins*

## **Abstract**

The Paris terror attacks of November 13, 2015 may well be regarded as "Europe's 9/11". An unprecedented type of hybrid attack scenario, both in scope and scale, had been executed, directed against the soft centers of Europe. Transnational terrorism has in the last decade apparently undergone a considerable morphological transformation. The genesis of a modified, convergent form of extremist violence which deliberately absorbs known procedures can be assumed. Jihadist terrorism has become hybrid and changed its ugly face. Europe currently faces series of attacks that reflect a toxic mixture of projected (network) attack scenarios and opportunity-based assaults. This systemic shift impacts (inter-)national counter-terrorism efforts in many ways and a networked, coordinated counter-strategy is needed.

## **Prologue**

The devastating Paris terror attacks mark the beginning of a breaking new wave of Islamist terrorism against the soft centers of Europe.<sup>2</sup> Three squadrons of terrorists had simultaneously staged coordinated attacks on six locations throughout Paris, including the Bataclan concert hall, the Stade de France, and at least two restaurants, with 137 killed and some three hundred seriously injured. Promptly ISIS claimed responsibility for the massacres. The Western world was left in a state of shock, and for a good reason. As Thomas Hegghammer rightly observed, this was "one of the most complex terrorist operations ever carried out in Europe".<sup>3</sup>

But already the Charlie-Hebdo attacks of January 2015 involved "an intricate interplay between personal factors and group dynamics, between extremists in Europe and groups overseas, between social grievances and religious-political ideology."<sup>4</sup> In some way, this incident falsely indicated operational contingency with neither an elaborated strategy nor a generic system behind it. Not only a specific European phenomenon, society's saturated volatile Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie (economy of attention; Franck/Honneth) had apparently led to a profound shift of awareness. All eyes were then directed to Ukraine and sporadic intra-European crises such as the recurring Grexit and Brexit debates. This also applies to media's growing interest in the considerable wave of refugees rolling towards Europe that

had by then slowly started to emerge. Fatally, in 2015 neither the political decision-makers nor the media really contextualized the refugee crisis with the dramatic security-political developments at the continent's contested Southern periphery ("ring of fire") in the Middle-Eastern-Northern-African region. Notwithstanding, there were already then well-informed observers who considered Europe to be mainly a sideshow on the global terrorist theatre and consistently jihadist attacks largely as spin-offs and repercussion of the civil wars, repression and insurgencies in the Arab world. Regardless, without doubt, Europe was in the focus of Islamist terrorism. These shocking attacks were no unforeseeable "black swan" incident, but rather the inevitable consequence of a dangerous persistent trend.

### **1. A Jihadist Apocalypse?**

Eventually an unprecedented type of hybrid attack scenario, both in scope and scale, had been executed on European soil.<sup>5</sup> For David Kilcullen the Parisian November attacks of 2015 "represent the start of a sustained urban guerilla campaign".<sup>6</sup> They "signaled the existence of a paramilitary underground- a better organized, more capable version of the ISIS internationale though not yet at the level of a full-blown Wilayat-operating in cities within France, Belgium and Germany, and possibly also Denmark and the Netherlands".<sup>7</sup>

The assaults were planned, coordinated, and executed by a team of returnees ("homebounds"), i.e., returning foreign fighters from the jihad in Syria and Iraq. James R. Clapper, then director of US-National Intelligence, stated in the aftermath of the attacks in 2016: "Foreign fighters who have trained in Iraq and in Syria might potentially leverage skills and experience to plan and execute attacks in the West. Involvement of returned foreign fighters in terrorist plotting increases the effectiveness and lethality of terrorist attacks."<sup>8</sup> This was surely an accurate analysis, but unfortunately too late. The jihadist perpetrators merged established *modi operandi* combining the meanwhile proven and tested "Mumbai style" tactics<sup>9</sup> (referring to the "running gun battle" attacks in Mumbai in 2008 - a kinetic form of desperado terrorism utilizing rifles)<sup>10</sup> simultaneously with a non-kinetic one that is based on the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).<sup>11</sup> Kilcullen attests them a "high degree of battle discipline".<sup>12</sup> ISIS adopted what had been some sort of an al-Qaeda trademark: synchronized and well-coordinated, brutal terrorist attacks against the "soft belly" of the West. Independently and meticulously prearranged and staged, this well executed staccato of projected (= organized and directed) attacks overburdened Parisian police forces' limited reactive capacities and transcended their ability to keep up efforts stabilizing the difficult security situation. Suddenly, the government's counter-terrorist mission was at once about (further) prevention, protection, persecution and reaction. Then French president Hollande didn't hesitate to proclaim a state of emergency in France, which formally entitled his government to involve the armed forces in its counter-terrorist measures.<sup>13</sup>

It appeared evident that this kind of carefully designed plot was rather an attack on the sovereignty of the state than just on indiscriminate victims. Moreover, this projected terrorist

incident resembled in its quality more a military strike than an ordinary crime. In such a constellation rather conceived as an act of warfare than a criminal deed, the question was whether to react with means according to the crime (law enforcement and prosecution) or the war paradigm ("war on terror") in countering this adaptive form of extremist violence.<sup>14</sup> If projected terrorism is understood as a type, or at least, a means of warfare, then this proposition necessarily entails implications on the twofold character of terrorism. When it comes to inspired single actor plots that are substantiated in occasional terrorist assaults, for good reasons a criminal typology can be prepended. A distinction between projected or occasional terrorism can only be drawn following thorough investigation, since the differences can be in some cases minimal.

In particular, within the last decade, transnational terrorism has apparently undergone a considerable morphological transformation.<sup>15</sup> As the separating lines between war and crime have disappeared or at least become blurred in the beginning of the 21st century, it can occasionally be difficult to detect what rationale (i.e. intrinsic motivation) lies behind a terrorist attack. By taking advantage of this obvious lack of conceptual and institutional clarity (albeit not everywhere in Europe), the jihadist mindset deliberately aims with its activities at the small interface between internal and external security, which directly affects a major vulnerability of European security architecture. Therefore, some EU member states currently discuss the idea of implementing a homeland security system inspired by the existing US model.<sup>16</sup> Have Western states and even scholars missed a trend with relation to transnational terrorism and its recent multi-dimensional phenomenology? Perhaps to some extent.

## **2. Hybridity as Patchwork: "Hybrid Terrorism"**

The academic discussion on hybrid forms of warfare has approximately been around since 2007 now. However, there is yet no clear consent on either purpose or usefulness of this vague concept to describe an elusive phenomenon. Most of the conflicts in history have been defined by the use of asymmetries to exploit an opponent's weaknesses. To achieve this end, simultaneously regular/irregular and conventional/unconventional tactics have been employed further leading to complex conflict constellations. Similarly, the rise of cyber warfare has not fundamentally changed the nature of warfare as a whole, but rather mutated its character and expanded it into a new dimension.

### *2.1. Asymmetry*

Asymmetry is the "key concept for understanding hybrid warfare". Irregular warfare has always been the preferred tool of the weak and a "method of offsetting imbalances between forces and capabilities".<sup>17</sup> At the "strategic level, the enemy using asymmetrical tactics exploits the fears of the populace, thereby undermining the government, compromising its alliances, and affecting its economy. To achieve this, the protagonist uses tactics like guerrilla warfare, hit-and-run attacks, sabotage, terrorism, and psychological warfare. By these means, the weak seeks to deny victory to the strong, who already loses if he doesn't win".<sup>18</sup> One could assert

that groups using terrorist means and strategies are usually inferior to the state's police and military potential in terms of logistics and personnel. On the other hand, they operate out of the clandestine and have the tactical element of surprise on their side, which compensates the initial instrumental inferiority.<sup>19</sup>

Asymmetry is just one end of a scale on the spectrum of a conflict typology, not reduced to a one-dimensional scheme, as Herfried Münkler prominently highlighted.<sup>20</sup> Terrorism is according to this categorization hence the "purest form of asymmetry".<sup>21</sup> It is important to add that the fundamental characteristic of asymmetry is the willful breach of common norms or ethical standards and the consequent denial of reciprocity by one (irregular) party: The purpose for a (predominantly) non-state actor is to exploit the vulnerabilities of the enemy by intentionally breaking rules that the adversary feels bound to or that are morally impossible to be given up by the latter. Superiority is not only a result of applying superior means, but taking advantage of the conventional foe's major drawback: the self-imposed obligation to follow rules and laws. This unsolicited commitment is at once a tactical weakness but also a strength. Terrorists, however, constantly aim at provoking democracies to overreact, inducing them to enforcing restrictive security measures and limiting freedom. Attacked states may exaggerate in their reactions and could even be incited to wage war against a phantom. Then such a provocation turns out to be successful.<sup>22</sup>

## *2.2. It's about convergence, stupid!*

Asymmetry presupposed, the evolving dynamic of versatile conflict is best characterized by convergence. This includes the convergence of the physical and psychological, the kinetic and non-kinetic aspects, as well that of combatants and noncombatants. Moreover, one may observe the convergence of military force and the interagency community, of states and non-state actors, and of the capabilities they are armed with. Of greatest relevance are the converging modes of war. This implies that any future conflict will be multi-variant rather than one single form of warfare. Resulting from that, greater attention should be drawn to increasingly blurring and blending forms of war in combination with incrementing frequency and lethality. This conglomerate constitutes "hybrid warfare," in which the adversary will most likely resort to unique combinational threats specifically targeting vulnerabilities of a superior enemy: "Modern adversaries make use of conventional/unconventional, regular/irregular, overt/covert means, and exploit all the dimensions of war to combat the Western superiority in conventional warfare. Hybrid threats exploit the "full-spectrum" of modern warfare; they are not restricted to conventional means".<sup>23</sup>

Is hybrid warfare thus the continuation of warfare by other means? Only partially. Convergence may however add a new dimension to warfare. It is about comprehensiveness. Tactics will be combined, readapted and employed as a mixture thus multiplying the threat. Instead of separate challengers with fundamentally different approaches (conventional, irregular, or terrorist), we can expect to face enemies who will employ all forms of war and tactics, perhaps

even simultaneously. "In practice, any threat can be hybrid as long as it is not limited to a single form and dimension of warfare. When any threat or use of force is defined as hybrid, the term loses its value and causes confusion instead of clarifying the "reality" of modern warfare".<sup>24</sup> Scholars and practitioners alike nowadays use the term "hybrid warfare" in different ways: From "gray zone strategies", "competition short of conflict", "active measures", to "new generation warfare" or "postmodern warfare". Despite subtle differences, all these terms point to the same thing: Actors using multiple instruments of power, with an emphasis on non-military tools, to pursue their national interests outside their borders—often at the expense of other actors' interests and those of their allies.

Herfried Münkler stresses in his recent works upon "fluidity" as the most significant feature of future warfare: It's not about seizing control over territory anymore. Prospective conflicts will be mostly about the control of streams and waves (cyber-dynamics, capital streams, "waves" of migrants, flow of energy resources etc.).<sup>25</sup> So we may well assume that engaged players will more and more refer to tactics that evolve from and correspond with this new fluid logic. Also sub-conventional organizations like major terrorist groups have pretty much adjusted to the fluidity that specifies our decade. Particularly the use of social media for propaganda (creating narratives) and recruiting purposes indicates a comprehensive understanding of the necessity to seize control over (information) streams.

### *2.3. Hybrid Terrorism*

Brian Jenkins notably argued that structurally there could be nothing "new" about terrorism: "Terrorists blow up things, kill people or seize hostages. Every terrorist incident is merely a variation on these three activities."<sup>26</sup> Jenkins is right in his basic approach regarding the types of operations – obviously, as the reservoir of operative options gradually remains the same. But when it comes to motivation (why?), means (what?), execution (how?) and targeting (against what and whom?), the setting has significantly changed over the years.<sup>27</sup> Bearing this in mind, is hybrid more somewhat than new? When it comes to the character of terrorism- yes, regarding its nature probably not. Nowadays a lot of things are called "hybrid". Car engines, robots, software and even wrist-watches. Why then coin the inflationary term "hybrid" as the significant attribute of transnational terrorism? Does this terminological entry have something to do with "hybrid warfare"? Only conditionally, because both of them make use of tactical advantages resulting from asymmetry, however, access and means vary. The term "hybrid" rather refers to a structural interdependency, the intentional merging of different forms, which in sum creates something new. Elements of preexisting patterns prevail and are recombined with previously unrecognized elements and thus re-established. For the most part, it is about pooling different "ingredients" to produce more effective results, or to create a new form, probably the preliminary stage of a paradigmatic development. In the specific context of Islamist terrorism, this means the genesis of a more or less modified form of violence which deliberately absorbs known procedures, but at the same time, triggers special dynamics, such as the creation of a loose franchise network, what in turn results in a shift of emphasis under

the primacy of unconditional systemic adaptation- and a formerly unknown ability to learn from experience. It is primarily about tactical innovation.

A hybrid threat thus arises from the convergent interaction of various elements of violence, which together manifest a considerably more substantial threat. Explosives, for example, develop their complete destructive potential only when combined with the appropriate substances. This is exactly the case for the currently dominant form of jihadist terrorism. Petter Nesser called (European manifestations of) jihadi terrorism since 2011 a "heterogeneous threat".<sup>28</sup> His nomenclature points to the multidimensional aspect covering recent expressions of transnational terrorism combining group or individual attacks, "homebounds" or "homegrown" involved, connections with abroad or none etc. Also, the deliberate combination of different building blocks, the "LEGO principle" of terrorist action (assassins, scenarios, armament, etc.) renders current organized terrorist attacks more complex in anticipation, and thus more dangerous. On that account, suitable adaptive response from defense authorities must be complex as well. At a first glance, seemingly unorthodox connections (target selection, tactical approach, armament, effects etc.) are made, taken into account for tactical preparation, and used by commandos (or single actors). These scenarios, however, reveal in their effectiveness and lethality an unprecedented, negative quality.

Two "major" European terrorist assaults in 2016, in Nice and Berlin, that have exacerbated insecurity and a subjective high threat perception among the population, can serve as meaningful examples of this. Not to forget the symbolic dimension of the attacks (the French national holiday of July 14 and a Christmas market). "Violence and symbolic value seem to have merged" in recent salafi-jihadi plots.<sup>29</sup> Against the backdrop of this convergence, the traditional framing of Islamist terrorism of the 2010s must be structurally questioned and re-classified. Resulting from a hybrid phenomenology, counter-terrorism ambitions face an increased difficulty to adjust to flexible dynamics of a loose network terrorism. There is justified criticism that institutions in charge of combatting terrorism have not caught up yet with these developments and were only prepared for the "wars of yesterday". Terrorists have meanwhile also recognized this fact. Therefore, they consciously practice a hybrid, violent "double game" performing organized networked plots and inspired single actor attacks alike.

#### *2.4. Multidimensional Warfare*

From the perspective of counter-terrorism research, this latest alarming development towards an ambivalent overall approach of jihadist terrorism could even mean a profound systemic shift.<sup>30</sup> At least a new understanding of transnational terrorism is crucial, bearing in mind that the nature of terrorism may indeed timeless but its characteristics are constantly changing.<sup>31</sup> Martha Crenshaw emphasizes that "Today's terrorism is not a fundamentally or qualitatively new phenomenon", draws upon the "evolving historical context" and criticizes that emerging differences are "of degree".<sup>32</sup> This observation is basically not wrong. Bruce Hoffman, in opposition to this view, perceives terrorism as "constantly changing and evolving – indeed, far

more rapidly and consequentially during the period of time since September 11, 2001...(today)... we face a different enemy than we confronted in 2001 and 2002, and in 2011 and 2012."<sup>33</sup>

In this light the "new" includes or even absorbs older forms. But significant and continuous systemic change is unquestionable. Maybe it is not a manifest revolution, but it indicates an apparent tactical evolution, as modified parameters seem to emerge. Recent developments suggest a turn towards convergence of different elements concerning rationale, planning, *modi operandi*, organization, perpetrators etc. This interdependence massively impacts the quality of attacks and thus affects the character of transnational terrorism. Likewise, Boaz Ganor focusing on prevailing forms of terrorism, introduced the term "multidimensional warfare".<sup>34</sup> Ganor argues that modern terrorism has to be understood as a dynamic type of warfare, that has "many facets". Accordingly, "various *modi operandi*", used against a "variety of targets" in "multiple arenas" at "varying levels of intensity" causing anywhere "from a few to tens of thousands of casualties", come into play under such circumstances.<sup>35</sup> Islamist terrorists capitalize on this multidimensional approach, as the sheer plurality of options makes their tactics hard to anticipate and even harder to prevent. Much of this reshaping is primarily based on the terrorist organizations' strong anarchical ability to adapt to changing security environments. This leads to an increasing flexibility in execution and the imagined omnipresence of a serious, at once elusive and amorphous threat. Also, with regard to motivation, intention and ideology, it is difficult to grasp current jihadist groups as there are multiple heterogeneous influences that are individually construed.

### **3. Layers of Hybridity**

#### *3.1. Hybrid Motivation*

What are the root causes underlying the ongoing spread of jihadist terrorism in the past decade? ISIS, for instance, can be regarded as a symptom and a catalyst of nine major problems and trends<sup>36</sup> that are driving jihadist terrorism around the globe and will continue to do so, even though ISIS as a terrorist militia seems to be largely defeated. Its other operative terrorist branch will nonetheless persist and may even expand its ruthless activities. According to a recent New America study, the major drivers for transnational jihadism are:

1. The regional civil war in the Middle East between Sunni and Shia;
2. the collapse of Arab governance around the region;
3. the collapse of economies in war-torn Muslim states;
4. the population bulge in the Middle East and North Africa;
5. the tidal wave of Muslim immigration into Europe;
6. the marginalization of Muslims in Europe;
7. the rise of European ultranationalist parties;
8. the spread of militant Salafism;
9. Social Media's amplification of anger caused by all of these trends.<sup>37</sup>

These generic foundations of jihadism strongly suggest that a successor of ISIS is likely to emerge in the coming years. At least its violent ideology and multidimensional warfare principles will live on. Moreover, a jihadist organization requires, as any other extremist group, a clear enemy concept. Historically the "near enemy-far enemy" distinction was often used to differentiate between organizations that primarily target local (in most cases Muslim) regimes and groups that focus on Western targets. Hybrid terror organizations like ISIS have contributed to render this antagonism obsolete. "Many jihadist groups are displaying ambiguous rhetoric and behavior with regard to who they consider as their main enemy", as Thomas Hegghammer underlines.<sup>38</sup> And: "When enemy hierarchies become unclear, undefined, or heterogeneous, then this is most often a sign of increasing radicalization and political isolation".<sup>39</sup> More importantly, Hegghammer registers a dynamic towards a "hybrid ideology" among jihadist groups. An ideologically hybridized group is one, as he asserts, whose "behavior and ideological discourse display influences of more than one type of ideal rationale in near equal measure".<sup>40</sup>

There is evidence that during the peak-phase of ISIS when the organization was rising to power, gathered control over an extensive territory, it seized "sovereignty of interpretation" over the jihad, in the sense that fighting the close enemy in the "caliphate" was prioritized. Along with a forthcoming recession, facing a superior coalition of enemies and an unfolding erosion of the "caliphate", the distant enemy (Europe) was set more and more in the focus of the organization's activities. Hand in hand with this turn towards the distant enemy goes a relatively heterogeneous targeting behavior. Attacks could likewise focus on a highly symbolic target such as a Christmas market, or just on a random place such as a regional commuter train in Germany. There was no clear evidence as to a tactical preference, although the strategic value of attacking the symbols of the foe was obvious to the planning elite of ISIS. Such perfidious deeds were meant to consolidate the ideological foundations of the then perceived legitimate jihadist successor of al-Qaeda.

Their specific archaic and immanent interpretation of jihad was the core of what had somewhat become a global jihadist ideology. It was conveyed by a "social movement" and disappointed, young Muslims all over the world could hook up with this modern style of jihad, that now ultimately had a face. Other than Usama bin Laden's approach, daily propaganda and footage from the fight against the "infidel aggressors" fueled the idea of jihad. This had the taste of adventure and incorporated the apocalyptic ideology of the ultimate battle against the infidels, the kuffār. When the source of jihadist inspiration, the vision of a caliphate, seemed to run dry, the jihadist tactics had to be adapted accordingly. Terrorism was regarded as a cheaper and yet not less effective alternative to guerilla warfare. ISIS had without doubt learned from al-Qaeda's successes and failures, and constantly attempted to outperform its predecessor organization. Hence, for ISIS' operative leaders the first thing to tackle was to develop an appropriate, multidimensional terrorist strategy that would be both cost-efficient and effective.



### 3.2. Hybrid Strategy

According to Bruce Hoffman the basic "principle of jihad is the ideological bond that unites this amorphous movement, transcending its loose structure, diverse membership, and geographic separation".<sup>41</sup> A common ideological foundation allows to cultivate a loose network. Fluid terrorist organizations like ISIS are more or less structured like a "franchise of terror".<sup>42</sup> Herfried Münkler raises the question, whether ISIS has a strategic plan that is more than the indiscriminate spread of fear and terror. His consideration: "This is difficult to find under the conditions of a franchise system, as anyone who is willing to kill can choose targets and victims according to their own preference and opportunity."<sup>43</sup> Maybe there is no strategic plan or even a "grand strategy" behind a loose organization such as ISIS, but there are definitely some "mosaics" of strategic orientation that can be detected. In their groundbreaking study "The Strategies of Terrorism" Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter filtered out five principal strategic principles, predominantly relevant for 21st century terrorist campaigns: [1] attrition, [2] intimidation, [3] provocation, [4] spoiling, and [5] outbidding.<sup>44</sup> An attrition strategy is merely about terrorists seeking to "persuade the enemy that the terrorists are strong enough to impose considerable costs if the enemy continues a particular policy".<sup>45</sup> Intimidation is the attempt to "convince the population that the terrorists are strong enough to punish disobedience and that the government is too weak to stop them, so that people behave as the terrorists wish".<sup>46</sup> A provocation strategy seeks to "induce the enemy to respond to terrorism with indiscriminate violence, which radicalizes the population and moves them to support the terrorists".<sup>47</sup> Spoilers attack in an effort to "persuade the enemy that moderates on the terrorists' side are weak and untrustworthy, thus undermining attempts to reach a peace settlement".<sup>48</sup> Last but not least, "groups engaged in outbidding use violence to convince the public that the terrorists have greater resolve to fight the enemy than rival groups, and therefore are worthy of support".<sup>49</sup> Without doubt, understanding these five distinct strategic motivations of transnational terrorism is crucial for designing effective anti-terror-policies. Currently, the imperatives of attrition, which comprises exhaustion, as well as intimidation and provocation seem to overlap spoiling and outbidding strategies. Attrition and exhaustion are achieved by a strategy of ceaseless violence, whereas provocation is rather subject to a strategy of communication.

### 3.3. Multidimensional Communication

With reference to communication, terrorists aim at conveying a message of violence and fear to the various intended recipients: the wider national and international public, governments, the media, supporters and competitors, and in particular their own group. Contents and intentions, however, vary. While the public and the media should be shocked, supporters should be motivated to continue with their endorsement and financial aid, and also be reaffirmed in their allegiance, competitors should be deterred- governments and executive branches should be provoked to inconsiderate counter-action. This multitude of different simultaneous messages reflects a multidimensional communicative approach of a terrorist campaign as executed by al-Qaeda and more recently by ISIS. Terrorism is an instrument to address different audiences,

a pathological form of communication. Violence reinforces the claims of the terrorists as it attracts attention of media and the populace. Subjective, sometimes paranoid anxiety generated by exaggerated media coverage often becomes larger than the objective threat. This can be seen as a psycho-cultural phenomenon. Creating fear, just like the use of violence, has meanwhile become an end in itself for jihadist terrorists. This caused: "...a new, dangerous knock-on effect to emerge: a pull of empowerment that encourages extremists in the West to commit attacks in their homeland. They should stir up fear and mistrust among the population. ISIS still uses fear as a strategic weapon, only the goals change."<sup>50</sup>

#### 3.4. *Boundless Violence*

A shocking terrorist incident in early June 2016 can be categorized as paradigmatic for this trend towards boundless violence. In Magnanville, a suburb west of Paris, a self-radicalized jihadist brutally stabbed a police officer and subsequently his partner, also a member of a police commissariat in front of their three-year-old son. The entire horrific act was live-streamed via the Internet.<sup>51</sup> At the same time the Islamist expressed his loyalty for ISIS and the jihad on Facebook. Of course, communicating by means of violence is still in the focus of such atrocities, but the stark expressive display of violence seems very disturbing: the terrorist is delirious by his deed - even while it is in progress - and the feeling of situational omnipotence is a condensate of this beastly violence. All that happened before the eyes of the heavily traumatized child of the victims. By this incredible deed moral borders that have long been regarded as taboo had been deliberately transcended. Quite evident the focus seems to have shifted now to brute violence as a statement, not a message wrapped with force. The act itself has become the message. The ethos of the "economic use of force"<sup>52</sup> (Peter Waldmann) that had determined past waves of terrorism, has somehow eroded: It is no longer consciously calculated what extent of violence is necessary to achieve the goal - predominantly there is a randomness and arbitrariness concerning the targeting, the selection of victims, expected casualties and any collateral damage. For quite some time, at the latest with the emergence of ISIS as a key player in the field of transnational terrorism, the ruthless use of force has evidently developed into an end in itself. That aspect reflects the performative dimension of terrorism.

In the aftermath of the Manchester plot in 2017, when jihadists staged a suicide bombing attack during an Ariana Grande pop concert killing several teenagers, Kenan Malik observes "increasingly blurred lines between ideological violence and sociopathic rage. There is now what we might call a 'jihadi state of mind', in which some mixture of social disengagement, moral dissolution, unleavened misanthropy and inchoate rage drives some to see the most abhorrent expressions of violence as a kind of revolt."<sup>53</sup> All these aspects go together, creating a deadly bundle of motivations, leading to boundless, indiscriminate violence against particularly young victims. The message was clear: Anybody can become a victim. The initially constituting factors like age, origin, religion, social status and other possible determinants for targeting, do not play a significant role anymore for the current generation of lone acting jihadist perpetrators.

### *3.5. The Anarchy of the Chameleon*

The main objective of terrorist organizations or single actors with allegiance to such groups, is to destabilize and to create disorientation. Perpetrators multiply terrorist violence and are able to tactically "learn anarchically" (Herfried Münkler): They act in the sense of a "trial and error procedure" and in principle they are not bound by any rules, which manifests real asymmetry. Through a constant testing, the "strategists" of terror identify structural weaknesses of the defensive system. Like a chameleon they adapt to permanently changing security precautions and are tactically highly flexible. Terrorists want to provoke a "false counteraction" by the security authorities, such as a drastic intensification of security measures: "Terrorism is a strategy that works through the mechanism of provoking a reaction, terrorists are trappers, and the more likely it is that the state gets caught in the trap, the faster it gets provoked and reacts 'blindly'."<sup>54</sup> Within their tactical disposition lies a core ambivalence: Terrorists want to attract attention and recruit followers, but also sustainably split the attacked societies. Following such a hybrid approach, not only radical elements are in the terrorist's focus, but above all, moderate forces that gradually feel marginalized. According to this intentionality, a sustainable spiral of violence is triggered, that can hardly be encountered by one-dimensional, often ineffective de-radicalization campaigns.

### *3.6. Hybrid Radicalization*

In his recent work Peter Neumann describes five building blocks or risk factors that play a more or less important role in radicalization in different ways: "grievance, needs, ideas, people and violence".<sup>55</sup> At the beginning of every radicalization process is a frustration and thus the susceptibility to a (violent) ideology, which promises to satisfy certain, generally quite justified human needs, such as the urge for orientation, a sense of community, identity or sheer thirst for adventure. The underlying frustration coupled with these needs is consciously directed by the ideology into a political or religious project, usually associated with revanchist claims. In addition, the social environment and the influence of other individuals (amplifiers, catalysts) as well as violence, either as own experience or transitive against others are important. This process can unfold gradually and manifests itself differently, just as the inhibition threshold for violence in individuals is different in each case. The so-called "turbo" or "flash" radicalization, an individual short-time development process leading to extremist views, which is often subject to media reporting, however, seems to be a myth. In the aftermath of the November 2015 attacks there was a broad, not solely academic discussion in France on radicalization and if there was a significant development towards more radical forms within Islam or whether Islam was just misused as a religious stalking-horse for violence. A protagonist, the French political scientist Olivier Roy considers the religious component of the attacks to be just a pretext. Unlike his intellectual adversary, Gilles Kepel, a scholar of Islamic Studies, he doesn't recognize a "radicalization of Islam" but rather an "Islamization of radicalism".<sup>56</sup> According to Roy, the young French "banlieue-terrorists" usually have no idea about the Qur'an or the Algerian War (1954 to 1962). But these young men (it is mostly a male phenomenon) tend to adopt the religious or anti-colonial slogans after their indoctrination by Syrian recruiters.

They smoked, consumed alcohol, drugs and pornography, often being converts, as Roy claims. Many of the jihadist terrorists have an actual background and even a judicial track record as petty criminals. "One of the most significant facts about IS recruits in Europe is their close proximity to 'ordinary' crime. In most Western European countries, more than half of the group's recruits have criminal pasts, often as members of gangs, drug dealers, thieves or burglars. For many of these young men, joining IS was a way of seeking redemption. In the words of a Danish fighter, 'it's not good enough just praying with all the shit I've done'<sup>57</sup>, as Peter Neumann points out. What is rightly summarized under the "crime-terror-nexus" is probably a most significant characteristic of hybrid terrorism.<sup>58</sup> Peter Neumann and his research team discovered that it "is not the merging of criminals and terrorists as organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus. Criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps that have consequences for how individuals radicalise and operate. This is what we call the new crime-terror nexus".<sup>59</sup> The inhibition threshold for such predisposed criminals to morph into jihadist perpetrators is relatively low. Given this undeniable dynamic, which is detached from any spiritual roots even of an extremist religious interpretation of political Islam, Olivier Roy's aforementioned hypotheses of a "Islamization of radicalism" gains further credibility. The perpetrators' nihilism, even their reflexes of violence are in stark contradiction to the Sunni tradition that still served as spiritual or ideological fundament for the 9/11 attackers. What about their mental constitution? The forensic psychologist Jerome Endrass carved out four attacker prototypes: "The first category concerns the mentally ill – for example schizophrenics; secondly, people with personality disorders (e.g. narcissistic personality disorders); thirdly, those who feel drawn to the authoritarian and belligerent character of jihad; and fourthly Muslims who feel despised and discriminated against in Europe and perceive jihad as an invitation to avenge themselves."<sup>60</sup> Again, despite clear categorization, we are facing a mixed typology of perpetrators. Seldom there is a linear, monolithic psychopathology. The same rule seems to apply for terrorist organizations.

### *3.7. Hybrid Organization*

According to Boaz Ganor's prevalent classification, ISIS is a "hybrid organization" of violence.<sup>61</sup> It is widely conceived as a "popular terrorist organization", that comprises "thousands of activists, who are buoyed on waves of support from an extensive community".<sup>62</sup>

A hybrid terrorist organization "subsumes two, and sometimes three, components: a militant-terrorist wing, a political wing, and a wing devoted to providing social welfare services. All three wings are directly or indirectly subject to the organization's leadership and operate according to the policies it delineates".<sup>63</sup> ISIS is at once a classic terrorist militia with a longtime focus on the "near" enemy in the territory of interest, the meanwhile eroded "caliphate" in the Levant and on the other hand a fully-fledged and newly proportioned terrorist organization whose proponents practice a mixture of "state terror" and insurgent terrorism against vulnerable European metropolises. This structural ambivalence is highly dangerous, which can be very

well documented by the still ongoing jihadist migration ("homebound jihadists") from the war zone in Syria and Iraq. Attacks against soft targets in the homeland of many these returning jihadist foreign fighters become foreseeable. Hardly anyone dares to predict the threat Europe is facing, considering the relatively large number of returning jihadists, regardless of them being traumatized or further radicalized. But especially homegrown jihadism (i.e. mostly self-radicalized and individual offenders) has become virulent as recent plots in France, Sweden, Germany, UK and Spain seem to prove. There is strong evidence that this is currently the endemic expression of the jihadist threat.

### *3.8. Hybrid Attack Scenarios*

Since the Jewish Museum attack in Brussels in May 2014, "jihadists have been responsible for plotting more than a hundred attacks in Europe..."and "...in 41 instances, they were successful", as Peter Neumann summarizes.<sup>64</sup> He concedes that both, character and dynamics of Islamist terrorist assaults is likely to change. This refers to scope, composition and complexity. Jihadist terror nourishes fear by its immediacy, apparent randomness and demonstrative arbitrariness in target and victim selection. The logistics of transnational terrorism borrows from the principle of guerrilla warfare, seeking advantage of clandestineness, because a phantom is hard to fight. The current trend in terrorist attack scenarios in the West – whether projected or opportunity-induced – clearly portends towards structured planning, fast execution and appropriate arming of the assassins (rapid-fire rifles and explosives vests). However, one could assume "increasing complexity" of attack scenarios for the near future, as soon as returning foreign fighters, usually experienced and trained, become involved.<sup>65</sup> Following that complexity proposition, at the level of "projected terrorism", suitable attack targets will likely be rather selected according to the "Desperado scheme", possibly including IEDs or chemical agents. Just like in Paris 2015 and Brussels 2016. With reference to the simplicity hypothesis, at the level of opportunity-based terrorism, random amok (e.g. vehicular terrorism) or explosives attacks, at the tourist hot spots of major European cities, will continue to be in the focus of terrorist attacks.

Scholars should for different reasons take a closer look at recent cases of vehicular terrorism. The car rampage in Nice on 14 July 2016, carried out by the Tunisian Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, killing 86 victims and injuring 458 persons, can be regarded as a symptom of a jihadist shift towards indiscriminate violence as an end in itself. An arithmetic of the highest possible number of victims is connected with the sinister claim to unfold maximum publicity. The fact that someone turns a truck into a bulldozer and randomly mows down people, mainly children and teenagers, indicates the perfidious nefariousness of the jihadists. A similar incident occurred on 19 December 2016, when the Tunisian Anis Amri, a failed asylum seeker, drove a heavy truck (20 tons) carrying steel beams into a crowded Christmas market in Breitscheidplatz next to Kurfürstendamm, leaving 12 people dead and 56 injured. The latest noteworthy terrorist vehicular incident took place in Barcelona on the afternoon of 17 August 2017, when 22-year-old Moroccan Younes Abouyaaqoub drove a van into pedestrians on La Rambla promenade

killing 13 people and injuring at least 130 others. Abouyaaqoub managed to escape the scene by foot, then killed another person trying to steal the victim's car. Nine hours later, five members of the same terrorist cell, drove into pedestrians in nearby Cambrils, killing one woman and injuring six others. All five attackers were killed by police forces. As early as in 2014, former ISIS propagandist al-Adnani called for attacks against "disbelievers" in their own environment with even the simplest means: "Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him."<sup>66</sup> Such vile assassinations can hardly be anticipated and certainly not prevented by the security authorities. They are sort of an Achilles' heel of counter-terrorism. The Islamists' tactical change of attitude corresponds to an operational shift towards low-tech scenarios. It no longer requires complex logistics to carry out a terrorist attack with great resonance. In addition, there is a current trend towards individual offenders decoupled from networks who attack soft destinations on their own initiative, such as the tranquil seaside resort on the Côte d'Azur. Not only the choice of a tourist destination as a target of attack, but also that of the French national holiday as a time for the rampage have quite a symbolic meaning: the "decadent" West should be hit where it most indulges in its liberal, relaxed lifestyle: when celebrating a national holiday. The signal effect is devastating.

### *3.9. Hybrid Perpetrators*

Transnational terrorism in its present form is in principle indiscriminate. Attacks like in Paris, Brussels or Berlin could happen anywhere and anytime in Europe, but also abroad. Above all, however, assassinations that took place in a martyr style – i.e. at the expense of the perpetrator's own death such as e.g. the axe-attack in the German city Würzburg, indicate a perfidious form of "occasional terrorism" and a rampant free-rider problem. Virtually everyone may join this terror cooperative, it's like joining a franchise system. Even converts or petty-criminals. At the moment Europe is confronted with a mixture of self-radicalized individuals and copy cats. Also homebounds melt into the scene of homegrown: former foreign terrorist fighters are absorbed by existing clandestine structures. Altogether this is a fertile breeding ground for radicalization and potential terrorist attacks carried out by lone actors. Lone actors, who act arbitrarily and detached from command structures, often without direct affiliation to an Islamist network are a special case.<sup>67</sup> Spaaij defines "lone wolves" as persons who '(a) operate individually, (b) do not belong to an organized group or network; and (c) whose modi operandi are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or hierarchy.<sup>68</sup>

Declaring allegiance to a terrorist organization often happens at the assassins' own initiative and then mostly in connection with an attack already carried out. Unlike a decade ago, it's possible to observe a strong preference for relatively simple plots, especially among single actors.<sup>69</sup> These only require a suicide assassin, equipped with an AK-47 or driving a truck into a crowd, killing innocent people in a densely populated urban area.<sup>70</sup> Such manifestations of violence are becoming more likely and make effective anticipation infinitely more difficult. Still,

some counter-terrorism experts fear that we may soon face attacks using chemical substances such as mustard gas or even biological agents (e.g. smallpox) in the near future. To get an idea of ongoing developments, it makes sense to shed a light at the prototypical perpetrator regarding its respectively preferred attack scheme.

#### **4. Projected Terrorism**

Coordinated terror plots (projected terror) will continue, as the major attacks in Paris and Brussels prove. Still we are facing an interchanging instrumentalization of projected terrorism and opportunistic terrorism (occasional terrorism). Under "projected terrorism" above all we summarize pre-structured scenarios coordinated by group leaders like the jihadist "mastermind" of the Paris assassinations, Salah Abdeslam. Generally, this type of networked operation requires relatively static, less flexible logistics but also a demanding and complex preparation. Attackers, in most cases skilled homebound jihadists, were usually recruited and specifically trained by ISIS (related) commanders. After having gone through a terrorist boot camp, they were transferred to the underground of European cities. Under such a clandestine, hostile environment in the forefront of an attack, foreign fighters were "...sometimes part of attack cells, whereas in other instances they functioned as handlers or advisors of cells, leaving the scene before attacks were set in motion".<sup>71</sup> Therefore these attacks can be legitimately regarded as a form of expeditionary terrorism.

With reference to a recent study (Nesser/Stenerson/Oftedal 2016) it can be assumed that "...attack cells are built by entrepreneurs".<sup>72</sup> These jihadist mediators are trying to recruit "misfits and drifters" among their social networks for violent jihad. Entrepreneurs are typically "resourceful, politicized and activist-minded, and they serve as a link with groups in conflict zones".<sup>73</sup> Moreover, they "socialize, politicize and manipulate the misfits and drifters that commonly involve criminals and socially deprived people, and turn them into tools for terrorist groups".<sup>74</sup> For the Norwegian researcher team this explains why "seemingly non-political and non-ideological people (such as petty criminals) end up engaging in political violence in accordance with the ideology of ISIS". It seems like a consistent trend in Europe. The major difference now is that interaction (recruitment, radicalization) takes place online. Unfortunately, we only know little about the structure of networks behind the latest wave of ISIS-terrorism in Europe. But certainly there is a hierarchical pattern: "mostly misfits and drifters as foot soldiers, while entrepreneurs are in coordinating roles, both within attack cells and surrounding networks".<sup>75</sup> Counter-terrorist approaches have to consider this entrepreneur-driven structure of contemporary projected, jihadist terrorism. A vivid example for such a dynamic is the "Abaaoud network", named after the planner of the Paris November attacks. Several members of this network such as the El-Bakraoui brothers, were "misfits known for criminal activity, and many of them did not appear to be particularly religious (e.g. smoking and drinking, doing drugs or keeping girlfriends out of marriage). Many hailed from segregated suburbs or working class-areas, had low education and survived on odd jobs".<sup>76</sup>

Somehow resuming the security-relevant developments in Europe between 2014 and 2016, Petter Nesser identifies two main changes concerning ISIS network dynamics and terrorist cell formation: "The first is an increase in the use of social media to recruit and instruct terrorist operatives and the second is the use of refugee streams to transfer operatives and recruitment efforts aimed at refugees."<sup>77</sup> The latter aspect has gradually lost its significance due to an at least partial "containment" of the migrant influx to Europe. The role of social media as a catalyst of recruitment and channel for terrorist instruction has definitely remained constant.<sup>78</sup> What kind of instructions? Tactical instructions? These questions are worth a closer inspection and automatically lead to another: What are the tactical implications of projected terrorist attacks in their current expression?

#### *4.1. Salafi-Jihadi "Auftragstaktik"*

Beginning with November 13, 2015 in Paris an essentially new pattern of convergent jihadist tactics had ultimately become evident and this disturbing impression was further confirmed by the March 2016 attack in Brussels. What are the tactical implications that came along with this type of terrorist assault? Within this range of a "projected", networked operation, the currently preferred salafi-jihadi method for carrying out larger scale terrorist attacks in Europe, involves an adaptation of "Auftragstaktik", an operational leadership doctrine with the highest possible degree of flexibility in order fulfilment. It is predicated on a strategic battlefield principle, deeply rooted in the legendary Prussian field marshal Moltke's (the Elder) classic combat doctrine of maximum situational flexibility<sup>79</sup>. A key component of this German command system was the comparably wide bandwidth in execution options given to combat officers in fulfilling a mission. According to these tactical guidelines, commanders prescribe their subordinates a goal and a framework (time and/or target) to help them achieve this, endowing them with the greatest possible freedom of action. Symptomatically, the nowadays dominating form of hybrid terrorism provides assassins with a new operational toolkit regardless of them being directly mandated, they act on their own accord or even in a combination of both, they will be much more flexible than they have been up to now. The 9/11-like micro-management with detailed pre-structured processes has obviously been replaced in favor of a more efficient, free-floating (fluid) military procedure. Jihadist terrorists have gradually deviated from operationally and logistically complex attack scenarios in order to remain unpredictable for counter-terrorism approaches, due to augmented spontaneity derived from unspecific orders. Plots are usually arranged by a sub-unit of the terrorist network, a self-sufficient operating cell, whose integral part is the individual assassin. Under such circumstances, a perpetrator turns into an "appendage" of the executive body – an extended, invisible hand of jihad. The assassin squads of Paris and Brussels were organized and briefed in such a manner.

Notably, ISIS conceded that the terrorist organization adopted "Auftragstaktik" to provide their recruits with "complete tactical autonomy," with few fingerprints that could be tracked back to the group, and "no micromanaging."<sup>80</sup> This deliberate turn to "Auftragstaktik" requires an adequate response by executive counter-terrorism institutions – may it be intelligence-based or beforehand on a tactical level.



## 5. Opportunity terrorism

### 5.1. "McJihad"

Quite contrary to the network scheme of projected attack scenarios, there is "the prospect of continued attacks perpetrated by lone wolves or cells of individuals banding together to carry out entirely self-generated and self-directed incidents..."<sup>81</sup>, what can be best summarized under inspired "occasional terrorism". The terrorist act itself results from the combination of the operational propaganda and a favorable (i.e. opportunistic) environment. Virtually every radicalized person without ever having appeared as Islamist before could join the "Jihad 3G" of the 2010 decade.<sup>82</sup> Why refer to a "third generation" of jihad? The first generation of jihadists were still a kind of self-proclaimed holy warriors in the sense of the classical "mujaheddin", who interpreted their activities primarily as a liberation struggle against occupying forces. The second generation of assassins, who before were responsible for the attacks of September 11, were organized hierarchically and thoroughly trained. They received tactical directives and instructions from the "top management" of al-Quaeda, and at a strategic level there was a kind of jihadist "master plan" that envisaged weakening or destroying the main enemy, the United States. The birth of the third generation of jihad ("Jihad 3G" – Gilles Kepel) can be traced back to the youth protests of 2005 which set the Parisian Banlieues on fire. As a reflex of the forgotten, a generation of chronically disadvantaged young people who do not shrink from violence, originally mostly of North African origin.<sup>83</sup> Most of them were young men between 15 and 25 years old who were looking for rituals to prove their masculinity, which was perceived as constricted and circumcised.

The second significant turning point was the widespread failure of the "Arab Spring", which must be understood as a rebellion of a Muslim youth against social inequality, unemployment, and lack of prospects. A veritable jihadist movement emerged from the numerous radicalized of the "generation of the forgotten", regardless of them being fanatical returnees of war from Syria or homegrown Islamists in European states. Hybrid terrorism of the third generation is dialectically constructed as a new "McJihad", a specific kind of franchise of terror, derived from the former cultural struggle in the sense of the antagonism "Jihad vs. McWorld" (Benjamin Barber).<sup>84</sup> This is to be understood as a sophisticated system that deliberately exploits (communication) technologies, the capitalist orientation of the West and its obvious vulnerability as an open, liberal system for its own terrorist purposes.

The radicalized proponents could become part of "Jihad 3G" anytime, without lengthy admission procedures or initiation rites. No more preliminary lead time or complicated instructions are needed beforehand and also membership at ISIS or another jihadist terrorist organization is no longer necessary. You don't even have to bring in a proven "track record" as a jihadist. Likewise, there is no requirement for prior expressions of solidarity with a terrorist network anymore. Such a loose franchise system has proven efficient. Terrorist action is handled under the primacy of spontaneity paired with an unprecedented simplicity in implementation. As paradoxical as this may sound, this is an indication of "democratization" of Islamist terrorism since the original

"exclusivity" of the second generation of jihadists has been willingly given up. In the forefront of 9/11, among jihadist communities it has still been considered as "privilege" of being selected for the "holy war". The Internet has created a simplified access to information and a social media communication platform which has extensively been used by Islamist proponents. They fertilize these channels for their ideology of violence to target or even recruit new assassins, to incite doubters and finally to call for terrorist attacks. Under such favorable circumstances a turn towards simple, immediate schemes of attack seems evident. An involvement of foreign fighters is so far still widely regarded as an exception within the categories of homegrown cells or single actors, but it is possible that perpetrators had drawn inspiration (online) from them, prior to their attack.<sup>85</sup>

### *5.2. Jihadist Connections & Control*

There is in such cases no direct connection with a terrorist organization like ISIS (neither direct contact, nor financial or material support, no training). Recently, however, there is a trend towards "remote control", especially with self-radicalized assassins, without previous connections to any terrorist organization.

With reference to the aspect of remote control and connections, Hegghammer and Nesser proposed a typology that reflects the different link options between perpetrators and the relevant terrorist organization and the quality of preeminent relations:<sup>86</sup>

1. Training and top-level directives. This is the 9/11 attack example: The perpetrator is trained in a safe haven boot camp and tasked by an organization's top leadership to perform an attack in the West.
2. Training and mid-level directives. The perpetrator is trained in a safe haven boot camp and is encouraged by mid-level cadres to carry out a more or less specified attack in the West.
3. Training. The perpetrator is trained in a safe haven boot camp, but is not specifically instructed by anyone to attack in the West.
4. Remote contact with directives. The perpetrator communicates remotely (typically by telephone, email, or social media) and bilaterally with cadres of the organization and receives personal instructions to attack in the West.
5. Remote contact without directives. The attacker communicates remotely and bilaterally with members of the organization, but does not receive instructions to attack in the West.
6. Sympathy, no contact. The attacker expresses ideological support for the group through his propaganda consumption, written or spoken statements, or some other aspect of his behavior, but does not communicate bilaterally with anyone in the organization.

The recent ISIS plots in Europe rather suggest prior connections according to a scheme as described under 4,5 and 6. Again, in this context it is necessary to distinguish between

opportunity-based assaults and those which are carefully planned projected scenarios, including two or more attack squads. In particular, the "sympathy no contact" mode of ideologically inspired assaults that has turned out to be a common practice among single actors, during the last 3-5 years, poses a serious problem to counter-terrorism efforts, as in most cases there is no evident prior contact between a later perpetrator and the organization. Basically, any expression of sympathy for, and ideological support of jihadism by a suspect could manifest to a real threat. This is of course only one of the manifold complex issues.

#### **6. The Reciprocity between Salafi-Jihadi Terrorism and Right-Wing Terrorism**

Salafi-jihadi and right-wing extremist terrorism are both interlinked and in some respects even mutually dependent. They are in a constant interrelation (reciprocity) that is fed by exclusive alterity ("us against them") and also by common enemy conceptions ("the Jews"). But most of all, their deeply rooted hatred and ultimate antipathy towards one another, Islamists against right wing extremists/white supremacists/neo-Nazis and vice versa, are fundamental drivers for escalation and dynamics that structurally lead to violence. Terrorist attacks therefore often have a response character, and the respective radicalization processes are often based on opposing narratives and the use of explicit enemy images.

Both forms of terrorism find a common ground in the rejection of Western democracies and their constitutions, strive for a revolutionary change of system and share anti-Semitism and anti-pluralism as ideological elements. The right-wing extremist attack on Muslims in a mosque in Christchurch/New Zealand in March 2019, which resulted in 51 deaths and dozens of injuries, makes it clear that right-wing extremist terrorists consider Muslims as opponents and potential targets of attacks on an ideological and tactical-operational level. Emerging from this, a spiral of violence among these two phenomenological variations of politically motivated assaults could develop in the future. The European "migration crisis" in 2015 (more than one million Muslims have fled to various European states, above all to Germany, in recent years) is also an issue that right-wing extremists and right-wing extremist terrorists have used and will continue to use ideologically and propagandistically. Linked to the refugee debate is a pronounced Islamophobia – a folk-racist rejection of Muslims – among right-wing extremists worldwide. A possible interaction with the increasingly violent personal potential of Salafism, which has been growing for years in Europe, is Islamophobic agitation and violence on the side of right-wing extremists. In addition, gatherings and demonstrations within the spectrum of Islamism and right-wing extremism offer possible targets for attacks by each other terrorist branch and its affiliates. Particular attention should be drawn upon the existence of thousands of websites full of jihadist and right-wing extremist propaganda and appeals for recruitment which make virtual radicalization possible and all the more likely.

Moreover, many Islamists as well as a vast majority among right-wing extremists are also active in the so-called gaming scene. Many of the very recent attackers were heavy consumers and avid players of first-person shooter games. The radicalized lone perpetrators, recently rather

white supremacists, regard themselves as the main protagonists in a deadly drama in which they can live out their narcissistic ambitions to glorify violence in a way that is effective for the public. The viewers' experience is unfiltered, as it is streamed live on particular platforms like 4chan or 8chan. Intentionally provided as a real time stream via helmet camera from a first-person shooter's perspective and operated according to the aesthetics of a sniper computer game, they show countless innocent victims being brutally executed in front of the attackers' running cameras. Also ISIS, again and again, took advantage of this new and simple technological option to transmit live stream pictures of executions and immense brutality directly to a broad audience.

All this is meant to reinforce the message of inhuman hatred on three levels: On the one hand, the perpetrators want to incite other extremists and win them for their cause. On the other hand, the intention is to create insecurity in its broadest sense, among the attacked community. The strategic aim is to make politicians realize that they are unable to protect the population and especially those groups initially targeted by the terrorists.

## **7. Lessons for Counter-Terrorism Ambitions**

### *7.1. The Cyclic 5-Stages-Approach*

Counter-terrorism (CT) "refers to all measures aimed at thwarting terrorist plots and dismantling terrorist organizations. This typically includes the arrest of suspected members, the disruption of terrorist attacks, recruitment, propaganda, travel, and logistics, countering terrorist finance, the protection of potential targets, and the pooling and exchange of data with foreign countries".<sup>87</sup> During all five cyclic CT stages (prevention-protection-prosecution-reaction-deterrence), whereas the order may change, the core business of intelligence is to gather information and use it accordingly against the terrorist threat.

### *7.2. (Counter-)Intelligence*

Without doubt, an appropriate counter-terrorism strategy should be based on intelligence. Relevant information should be collected and distributed among international security agencies. Probably the most prominent and efficient policing method to detect, identify and consequently arrest terrorist suspects in Europe is the so-called "grid search". It is predominantly used to identify potential endangerers by collecting mass data from both, public and private databases. Such databases may include resident registrations, criminal record datasets, but also information on customers of public and private companies and most interestingly, communications data. By increasingly applying these "grids" to the search, investigators aim at generating a manageable amount of individuals, which can facilitate the potential identification of the suspect(s).

It is no secret, however, that despite ongoing attempts to improve this situation, coordination between European intelligence services is relatively poor, with no comprehensive, shared list of suspected extremists. Several individual databases already exist, but so far there is no

substantial overarching logic behind these efforts. Currently there already exist some meta-data based projects that focus on comprehensiveness, accessibility and interpretation. Much research and development is invested in solutions which are meant to turn this huge bulk of collected data into actionable intelligence.

Intelligence, properly employed, "implies understanding the motivations, leadership structure, and modus operandi of terrorist organizations, and developing a plan that can anticipate and adapt to their constantly morphing operations. Importantly, the ideological dimension should not be ignored because it explains the extremes to which terrorists are willing to arrive."<sup>88</sup> Any counter-terrorist measure must address both, the terrorist's capability and intention (or "motivation"). These two factors are reciprocally intertwined. Boaz Ganor assumes that "Terrorism is likely to end if one of these factors is neutralized—that is, if a terrorist organization's operational capability is impaired or if its motivation diminishes".<sup>89</sup> Tackling the terrorist's motivation is much more complex than thwarting their capabilities.

### *7.3. Prevention and De-radicalization*

The terrorist's intention to resort to means of violence usually evolves in the course of the radicalization process (compare Peter Neumann's classification above) and comprises, besides others, predominantly micro- and macro-sociological but also psychological or ideological aspects. As the internet has become the major field of jihadist propaganda and communication, it is necessary to seize control over, infiltrate or even destroy these channels in order to prevent radicalization. This may include, but is not restricted to the following measures:

- Collecting and interpreting data
- Identifying potential ideological influences
- Closing, restricting or controlling illegal channels of (ideological) communication
- Fighting the catalysts (persons, propaganda) of extremist ideologies being summarized under "political Islam"
- Engaging in a close monitoring of online activities of Salafist groups and in particular entities that cultivate a politically motivated interpretation of Islam that is prone to extremist narratives and has a potential to radicalize individuals
- Observing (online) activities of innocuously seeming groups and moments sympathizing with or fostering a political Islam
- Weakening, undermining or infiltrating organizations that foster such ideologies
- Destroying networks (if necessary)
- Providing an adequate counter-narrative
- Addressing the (individual) root causes of radicalization
- Engaging in individual de-radicalization (if necessary)
- Being active on site- getting in touch with local stakeholders and cooperate
- Cooperation with moderate Islamic/Arabic states
- Securing independent re-evaluation and revision of existing integration measures and

objectives, as many of these measures are not effective, especially when it comes to education of adolescents and children and prevention of radicalization.

- Elaborating suitable conceptions, education initiatives and/or packages of measures for kindergartens, schools and secondary educative organizations such as youth associations.
- Offering tailored language and integration courses that introduce the attendees to the typical local way of living, value principles and constitutional norms.
- Providing customized resocialization programs, de-radicalization programs and, in principle, programs to provide practical help to the various groups and individuals affected by terrorist violence.

The "measures" suggested here can only be a superficial account on what could be done. Countering terrorism and in particular its motivational core that is a product of a radicalization process is difficult and has to be tailored to the real, i.e. individual conditions. There is no patent solution after all.

#### *7.4. Strengthening of physical security*

A third and often underrated core principle in the European struggle against terrorism is the aspect of improvement of physical security. Without saying this goes primarily on a national basis. Measures include a further strengthening of police forces (personnel, equipment), but also with regard to systemic terrorist attacks, the protection of critical national infrastructure, which is in most cases a task for the military. Attempts to implement community policing (similar to neighborhood watch) as well as public monitoring initiatives have been made in several European states. With respect to protection of urban environments, some European capitals have built up barriers and bollards as preventive measures to physically protect pedestrian zones and to preempt rampages. There have also been broad and considerable efforts to intensify CCTV surveillance in public areas. Quite a recent phenomenon is the increasing drone (UAV) "traffic" in public spaces and the inherent risk of a terrorist misuse of this new technology. Governments all over Europe have reacted to this new kind of threat and initialized a drone defense, in particular with regard to larger public events. In the face of latest developments, aviation security has somewhat become a major security concern throughout Europe and there are attempts to coordinately strengthen it.

#### *7.5. The EU's Counter-Terrorism – A Paper Tiger?*

Meanwhile, some European states have got an idea what kind of multidimensional terrorism they are facing. But how to respond to such a hybrid terrorism in a structured and organized manner? The EU's Counter-Terrorism Policy, often referred to as a "paper tiger"<sup>90</sup>, is limited to grand announcements of a 'comprehensive' security approach, while still heavily relying on classical investigative police work. One cornerstone of the EU's structural fight against terrorism, in addition to the previously mentioned preventive measures, is "elementary precaution" against attacks. For example, recently, as immediate reaction to the Nice and Berlin rampage attacks, public areas such as shopping streets and open market areas in Germany and Austria have

been “protected” by special constructions such as bollards, to avoid unauthorized access. This tactical approach to protection can be only a limited one, as terrorists can draw from an almost unlimited reservoir of attack scenarios, which require an equally wide range of counter-measures. Unfortunately, organizations in charge of protection will therefore always lag at least one step behind. Other parts of the EU Counter-Terrorism Policy deal with the prosecution of terrorists and with the response to such attacks: as these are reactive in character they can rightly be regarded as subsidiary.

#### *7.6. Networked Counter Hybridity*

An effective counter-terrorism strategy, however, must be set up broadly and needs to anticipate the realities of a virtually unlimited spectrum of attacks. This can only be properly done if the required interdepartmental and international cooperation between security authorities is implemented accordingly. The possibilities of military contributions at a European level have not yet been fully taken into account nor sufficiently discussed, and the field is deliberately left open to the respective interior departments, who still seem set in their conventional ways handling attacks mostly tactically, without proper strategic assessment nor anticipative conclusion. Yet European authorities, as a manifestation of strict compliance with the rule of law, preferably tend to search appropriate responses to terrorist attacks within the criminal justice paradigm. This is surely plausible, but not sufficient. One may ask what is done in order to deter from future attacks? Not much, even though it is evident that deterrence is probably the best prevention.

With regard to prevention, counter-terrorist agencies and security authorities have regularly been publicly accused of having waited too long, as the future attacker had allegedly been under close surveillance or on a list of potential endangerers.<sup>91</sup> Probably the most prominent example is the recent case of Anis Amri, the Berlin attacker, who had been scrutinized by German police authorities long before his activities started. Albeit concrete evidence that Amri could be involved in preparations of a terrorist plot they failed to foil the attack.<sup>92</sup> As in other constellations, the reason for the authorities' failure was a frightening lack of cooperation. Also, a lot of red tape made mistakes possible.

Former US-General Stanley McChrystal famously expressed that it “takes a network to defeat a network”.<sup>93</sup> This is all the more true with current terrorist networks. Networked hybrid terrorism can only be countered by a networked (i.e. cooperative and complementary) hybrid counter-terrorism. Comprehensiveness is the imperative of the hour and unrestricted international cooperation (e.g. common databases) is key to a successful counter-terrorism policy.

Ultimately, counter-terrorism is a game with, and against time. Time is the most important resource in the fight against terrorism. This principle should underlie any effort to prevent, protect, prosecute or react. Even concerning deterrence, the time factor is essential.

Counter-terrorist ambitions and measures should follow their own timely agenda and not any requirements indicated by public (i.e. mostly media-driven) expectations. In opposition to conventional opinion, counter-terrorism should be a calm and opaque intelligence business. The adversary should intentionally be left insecure about possible (re-)actions, measures and procedures. The time factor can hence be a useful weapon in the fight against a phantom. All this is patchwork on the road to comprehensiveness. Nevertheless, there will pass some time until the necessary steps in the direction of a fully comprehensive, international network against transnational terrorism are taken. Approaches, however, exist.



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## **EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS**



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**THE SYSTEMIC DIMENSION OF JIHADIST VIOLENCE:  
A ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF JIHADIST TERRORISM**  
*by Alex P. Schmid*





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# THE SYSTEMIC DIMENSION OF JIHADIST VIOLENCE: A ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF JIHADIST TERRORISM

*by Alex P. Schmid*

## Introduction

Since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the international system increasingly consists of states (193 sovereign states by 2019 in the United Nations), some of them based on ethnicity, others based on religion and yet others on other characteristics like a common history or a particular geographic territory. The system is not stable but held together by normative rules agreed upon in international treaties and, more pragmatically, by temporary coalitions of member states which seek to stabilize it by creating balances of power against unilateral attempts to establish hegemony. Much of the world's territorial history can be viewed as a succession of competing rising and falling great and not-so-great powers. Some of the more successful ones expanded mainly over land and others mainly overseas and a few expanded in both ways to form empires, based on military might, religious missionary zeal, commercial or technological superiority or a combination of such factors. The term colonialism has been associated mainly with the expansion of European states since 1492 (Spain, Portugal, England, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy). Land-based expansion has historically been more frequent but politically received less condemnation, perhaps because it was often more incremental and linked to greater population movements.

A major example of the land-based type is the expansion of Islam between the conquest of Mecca by Mohammad in 629 and the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. The gradual decline and ultimate rapid final fall of the last Islamic empire – the one of the Ottomans (1299-1922) – has been experienced as a humiliation by many Muslims and contrasted to the rapid rise under the first Caliphs after Prophet Mohammed himself had united the tribes on the Arab peninsula<sup>1</sup>.

To understand the root cause of contemporary jihadist terrorism, one has to look at the distant past. Many Muslims have seen the rapid military expansion of early Islam as an expression of a divine favor. After the death of the Prophet in 632, one of his successors, Caliph Omar, conquered Damascus in 635, Jerusalem in 637, Egypt in 641, and Iran and Azerbaijan in 643. After Omar's death in 644, subsequent caliphs continued this series of conquests. By 670 North Africa had been conquered and in 677 Constantinople was besieged (but it was taken only much later by Mehmed the Conqueror). By 711 Andalusia had been conquered. One hundred years after the death of the Prophet, Islamic rule stretched from Spain to China. Muslim soldiers were also trying to advance over the Pyrenees into France but Karl Martell managed to stop them in 732 in the battles of Tours and Poitiers. In the Islamic tradition, these early conquests came to be regarded as the 'quintessential jihads'.<sup>2</sup>

There was an attempt by Christians, initiated mainly from France, to undo one of these conquests. In November 1095 Pope Urban II had called for a military campaign (much later termed 'crusade') to liberate the Holy Land. It resulted in the reconquest of Jerusalem in July 1099. However, Jerusalem was lost again in 1187 to Saladin and Islamic rulers pushed back Christian rulers, conquering in 1453 Constantinople and renaming it Istanbul. Subsequently Muslim soldiers were advancing into the Balkans, and then under Suleiman the Magnificent (who

ruled from 1520 to 1566) into the Ukraine and Hungary. Twice, in 1529 and 1683, Ottoman armies stood at the gates of Vienna.<sup>3</sup> By that time, Islam had also reached deep into Sub-Saharan Africa, into Central and South West Asia and reached as far east as the southern Philippines. While the hold of Islam over its more distant conquests started to weaken in the 18th century and while in the 19th century Christian countries like Greece (1832), Serbia (1878) and Bulgaria (1908) regained their freedom, the religion of Islam and a nominal Caliphate outlived the loss of political control until 1924 when the institution of the Caliphate was abolished by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who had replaced the last Sultan in 1922 when becoming president of the secular republic of Turkey.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of World War I, the Caliphate had been no more than a symbol of Islamic unity. It had, in fact, ceased to be a political institution with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258, 626 years after the death of the Prophet for which Caliphs (khalifah = successor) had to be found after his death. Yet the idea of a Caliphate as a political-religious dominion uniting the Muslim community not only in religious but also in political terms lingered on and its formal abolishment in March 1924 was and continues to be seen by many as a painful break with a glorious history. Yet as a belief system, Islam is still strong and in fact growing.

### **Islam Today**

Today Islam has nearly 1,600,000,000 believers in seven geographic spheres. In the words of Ed Husain, author of *The House of Islam*:<sup>5</sup>

1. The first is the Arabic-speaking domain from Iraq to Mauritania, home of approximately 400 million Muslims. (...)
2. The Persian sphere, consisting of modern-day Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, is the second zone of the House of Islam. Here, the 100-million-strong population speaks Farsi, Dari or Tajik – different dialects of the same language. (...)
3. Sub-Saharan Africa, home to some 250 million Muslims, is the third zone.
4. The fourth sphere is the Indian subcontinent (...). Today, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal and Sri Lanka make up this domain, which has...around 400 million. (...)
5. The fifth concentration is Turkic. It spans around 170 million Muslims who speak mostly Turkish, but also include others of backgrounds such as Azeri, Chechens, Chinese Uighur, Uzbek, Kirghiz and Turkmen. (...)
6. Sixth is the Malay area of South East Asia which consists of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and sizeable minorities in Thailand and the Philippines. More than 200 million Muslims live here. (...)
7. The seventh and final home for Muslims is the West. Roughly 60 million of today's Muslims live in the West as minorities and new immigrant communities...."(...)

Today 80 percent of all Muslims live outside the Arab world and as many as one in five human beings are considered Muslims. With their higher fertility rate, Muslims might, if present trends continue, number 3,000,000,000 by 2050<sup>6</sup>. However, their demographic strength is not

matched by similar political, economic, cultural or military strength. Yet religion is very much alive in Muslim-majority countries, much more than Christianity in those countries that were not so recently considering themselves Christian nations. The main push factor behind the recent spread of a literalist version of Islam has been Saudi Arabia which came into existence in 1932 and regards itself as an Islamic state and calls the Quran its constitution. In more than five decades the Saudi Kingdom has spent an estimated \$200 billion of its oil money on strengthening Wahhabism – its particular version of Salafism – in the world.<sup>7</sup> It had also supported, together with the United States, the Afghan mujahedeen resistance against the Soviet occupation (1979-1989).

The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan under President Mikhail Gorbachev was portrayed by Arab foreign fighters who had joined the resistance of local mujahedeen as a victory over one of the two superpowers of the Cold War period, encouraging some of them to challenge the other remaining superpower America in its wake. Ten years before, in 1979, a Shi'ite theocracy had come to power in Iran. It has also challenged the United States and, in recent years, managed to extend its influence into Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, while secretly seeking to become a nuclear power threatening Israel and Saudi Arabia – two Western allies. A further threat to the West arose in Syria and Iraq when the so-called Islamic State, a ultra-militant Sunni jihadist movement, strengthened by former intelligence and military elements of Saddam Hussein's deposed regime, sought to resurrect the institution of the Caliphate in mid-2014. This attempt by the Islamic State was greeted with enthusiasm by some of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims – especially by many of the 50 million Salafists among them – and led to an influx of some 42,000 foreign fighters from more than 80 countries before this self-proclaimed Caliphate was militarily defeated as a coherent territorial unit in 2018 by a coalition of more than 60 states, led by the United States.

The American-British intervention in Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the proxy wars in Syria by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and some Western states as well after 2011 have destabilized an already volatile region, producing millions of refugees, dozens of non-state armed groups of which most are religiously inspired. The hostility between Sunnis and Shi'ites, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the vying for influence by Russia and the United States, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the concern of the international community about the safety of shipping in a region that supplies much of the world's oil and gas and the lack of significant economic development in much of the Middle East combined with the repressiveness of most of its regimes are some of the main factors that form a backdrop to the rise of Salafi jihadism since the end of the Cold War.

While other regions, notably China but also India, have become world players, Muslim countries – except those lucky few who have enough oil and gas to export – have played no major role in recent world history and, given the declining role of fossil fuels in the world economy, are unlikely to catch up with other world regions due to the generally low levels of education

of their populations and the lack of industrial or technological infrastructures. Poverty is widespread, the number of young people unable to find adequate gainful employment is very high as is corruption and inequality. Good governance is largely absent, as are widespread state welfare provisions in all but a few oil-rich states. All these factors combine to make armed rebellion under the banner of Islamist jihad a tempting option. This option to break this blocked development has been placed on the table long before 9/11.

### **Jihad as Instrument to (Re-)Gain Political Power for Islam**

Ninety years had passed between the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) and its attempted resurrection by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in mid-2014. However, the idea to restore Muslim power first came to the fore only four years after the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. A semi-secret society – the Muslim Brotherhood (MB – ‘al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen’) – had been set up in March 1928 in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), a school teacher. He propagated jihad as instrument to restore Islam’s past glory, summarizing the mission of the MB in the formula: ‘Allah is our objective, the Qur’an is our constitution, the Prophet is our leader, jihad is our path, and death in the name of Allah is our goal’.<sup>8</sup> He even managed to shorten this battle cry into ‘Islam is the solution’ (‘Al-Islam huwa al-hall’)<sup>9</sup>. But what was the problem? Partly it was colonialism – Great Britain still controlled directly (until 1956) the Suez Canal and, indirectly, much of Egypt’s domestic politics, although the country had nominally gained independence in 1922. Next to colonialism, Western secularism had been seen as a threat ever since Napoleon Bonaparte had arrived in Alexandria in 1798, bringing to Egypt ideas from the French revolution. Most of all, however, the problem was that while Muslims consider Islam to be the last and the best of all religions, most followers of Islam did generally less well than the infidels in the world – a humiliating experience hurting the dignity of many Muslims.

In 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood had begun to gain ground in Egypt at a time when fascism and National Socialism were gaining strength in Europe. Like Mussolini and Hitler, Hassan al-Banna created within the Muslim Brotherhood a paramilitary organization (Kata’ib – ‘battalions’)<sup>10</sup> that served to protect him and attack his enemies. It would later assassinate Nokrashy Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister. In response Hassan al-Banna was killed by the Egyptian secret police in 1949. However, his organization, numbering some two million members by the time it was outlawed in Egypt in December 1948, lives on and today it has an overt or covert presence in more than seventy countries.<sup>11</sup> Many, if not most of recent and present jihadist leaders have passed through the Muslim Brotherhood organization. After al-Banna’s assassination, another Egyptian member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), author of a 30-volumes commentary on the Qur’an, carried the torch of jihad further. His hanging by President Nasser in 1966 made him a martyr, amplifying the reach of his teachings.

At the time of Qutb’s death some Arab rulers still used nationalism, and to some extent socialism, as their ideological tools. The turn towards religion came only in 1979, most decidedly

in Iran, a non-Arab Muslim country which had been under American control ever since the CIA and the British MI6 staged a coup in 1953, forcing Iran's liberal president Mohammad Mosaddegh to resign and making the Shah their willing tool.

Today, most of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa are ruled by autocrats - kings or generals who at best pay lip service to some rudimentary democratic principles. These rulers tend to present themselves as sole bulwark against the rise to power of jihadists, after having successfully repressed (except in Tunisia) the rise of the democratic forces of the Arab Spring of 2011. With no choice between repressive dictatorships and extremist jihadist groups, many Muslims see no future in their homelands. A recent Gallup poll held in 120 countries asked people whether they want to emigrate; more than 30 percent of the respondents in the Middle East and Africa expressed such a wish.<sup>12</sup> Their desired destinations are, however, not other Muslim countries but Western democracies. However, since 2015 when more than one million refugees arrived in Western Europe from Syria and other Muslim countries, Western democracies have become much less than welcoming, partly due to the cultural baggage many of these Muslims bring with them, including their disrespect for infidels and their treatment of women as second class people.

Most of the more than 70 million refugees and internally displaced persons today hail from Muslim-majority countries.<sup>13</sup> In Europe, in response to this influx, right-wing populist parties have booked electoral gains with their nationalist and xenophobic slogans. After the financial crisis and a worldwide recession originating in the United States in 2008, liberal democracies have come under attack for other reasons as well: inequality has grown sharply, the welfare state has come under stress as the very rich manage to hide much of their income and wealth in foreign tax shelters. The link between democracy and economic growth by means of social market capitalism, taken for granted in Europe for much of the post-World War II period, has become strained. Outside Europe liberal democracy is no longer seen as a model for development since the authoritarian Communist Party of China, with an aggressive authoritarian model of mercantile state capitalism, has outperformed other economies and replaced Russia as only other superpower able to successfully challenge the United States. While also home to a large Muslim population, China has managed to suppress Islamist challenges with draconian policies of forced re-education of more than a million mostly Uighur Muslims in closed camps. In defense of these drastic de-radicalization measures, the Chinese authorities claimed to have been facing thousands of attacks from jihadists in recent years.<sup>14</sup> Yet China has not been the main target of jihadists.

### **The Global Salafi Jihadist Movement**

In recent years, hardly a day has passed without jihadist attacks.<sup>15</sup> According to a publication of the Tony Blair Foundation, 121 Islamist terrorist groups conducted 7,841 attacks in 2017 – on the average 21 every day – killing 84,000 people in 66 countries, of whom nearly 22,000 were civilians.<sup>16 17</sup>

In the period 2011-2016, al-Qaeda alone conducted 5,887 attacks while ISIS conducted 4,343 attacks worldwide.<sup>18</sup> In late 2018, some 230,000 Salafi jihadists have, according to a study by Anthony Cordesman, been operating in nearly 70 countries. They have the support of many manor Muslims and the sympathy of tens of millions others.<sup>19</sup> So far, most of the jihadist attacks have taken place outside Europe, but in recent years Western societies have also experienced more terrorism, including vigilante terrorism from white right-wing extremists reacting (and provoking) violent extremism from Islamists. Although there has been an increase in right-wing terrorism in recent years, the dominance of Islamist terrorism remains unchallenged: almost one third of all major active terrorist groups (some 120 out of some 370) are Islamist.<sup>20</sup> Most of the terrorist violence takes place in the Middle East and Northern Africa, that is, in Muslim majority states.<sup>21</sup>

The main driver behind these attacks is the ideology of Salafi jihadism.<sup>22</sup> Salafism as a reform movement within Islam emerged in the 18th and 19th century and was revived again in the 1970s. It comes in three variants, (i) a quietist, almost apolitical version, (ii) a political assertive variant and (iii) an aggressive jihadist variant.<sup>23</sup> Jihadism has become the most aggressive social movement in contemporary Sunni Islam. It claims to be in possession of a blueprint to break the political paralysis caused by the repressive, corrupt and foreign-supported regimes of many Arab and Muslim countries. The structure of this ideology is threefold:

1. There is a basic grievance – the Muslim world is in chaos and a Zionist-Christian alliance is held responsible for most, if not all, that is wrong in Muslim countries and the way Muslims are humiliated, discriminated and/or (mis-)treated in the world. The collusion of corrupt Muslim rulers with the West keeps Muslims impotent and those who follow them have turned away from 'True Islam' by allowing Western ways in Muslim lands.
2. There is a vision of the good society: a single political entity – the Caliphate – that replaces corrupt, apostate rulers under Western influence, by a rule under sharia wherever there are Muslims so that Allah's will be done and order is restored; and
3. there is a path to the realization of the vision: the eradication, in a violent jihad, led by a heroic vanguard, to get rid of Western influence in the Muslim world. However, great sacrifices are needed to turn the tables. Every true Muslim has to engage in a violent jihad against the invading Crusaders to defend their faith and Muslim lands from enemies near and far in order to achieve victory and humiliate the oppressors".<sup>24</sup>

Currently al-Qaeda and the Islamic State are the vanguards of the jihadist movement. Their goals reach beyond the Muslim world alone. In an essay with the title 'Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West', the late Usama bin Laden wrote:

"[O]ur talks with the infidel West and our conflict with them ultimately revolve around one issue, and it is: Does Islam, or does it not, force people by the power of the sword to submit to its authority corporeally if not spiritually? Yes. There are only three choices in Islam: either willing submission [i.e. conversion]; or payment of the jizya [poll-tax paid by non-Muslims], thereby bodily, though not spiritual, submission to the authority of Islam; or the sword – for it is not right to let him [an infidel] live. The matter is summed up for every person alive: either submit, or live under the suzerainty of Islam, or die [...] Such, then, is the basis of the relationship between the infidel and the Muslim. Battle, animosity, and hatred – directed from the Muslim to the infidel – is the foundation of our religion".<sup>25</sup>

While some analysts have considered bin Laden 'moderate' in comparison to ISIS' leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (a.k.a. Caliph Ibrahim), both share a similar interpretation of the role of Islam. Abu Bakr:

"Islam was never a religion of peace. Islam is the religion of fighting. No-one should believe that the war that we are waging is the war of the Islamic State. It is the war of all Muslims, but the Islamic State is spearheading it. It is the war of Muslims against infidels".<sup>26</sup>

We find such an offensive line of thought not only with jihadists like Bin Laden and Abu Bakr but, in milder forms, also with other Islamists who themselves are not directly engaging in violence. Islamist extremists have built their ideology on foundations that are not far removed from Wahhabism as practiced and propagated by Saudi Arabia which portrays itself as social carrier of mainstream Islam. While Saudi Arabia has used petro-dollars and missionary work (dawah) as main instruments to bring people to a fundamentalist (i.e. literalist) version of Islam,<sup>27</sup> violent extremists rely on jihad, seen by Islamist extremists as the 'sixth pillar' of Islam.<sup>28</sup>

### **Jihad and Terrorism**

According to John Esposito, editor of the Oxford Dictionary of Islam "Jihad is the only legal warfare in Islam, and it is carefully controlled in Islamic Law".<sup>29</sup> According to Shahab Ahmed, a Harvard scholar, the orthodox and majoritarian understanding of jihad is that jihad means, above all, "fighting the infidel".<sup>30</sup> However, there are also other interpretations, e.g. that there is a 'greater jihad' and a 'lesser jihad', with the greater jihad' being the fight in every human soul against negative, socially or religiously harmful impulses, and the 'lesser jihad', being the armed struggle in defense of Islam. This particular distinction of greater and lesser jihad is, however, not Quranic, but based on one single hadith – out of many thousands of sayings later attributed to the Prophet.<sup>31</sup> The specific hadith referring to the 'greater jihad' surfaced only centuries after the death of the Prophet and is widely regarded as 'weak' in terms of being an authentic statement of the Prophet.<sup>32</sup>

Literally, jihad means “struggle in the path of God” (jihad fi sabil Allah), and jihadists are those who embrace jihad as their calling.<sup>33</sup> The Quran promises those who die in the jihad that they will get direct access to paradise.<sup>34</sup> There is among Islamic scholars some dispute as to whether this type of struggle is legitimate only when it is defensive or whether jihad is also legitimate when it is offensive.<sup>35</sup> There is also controversy in Islam whether only a legitimate authority like the ruler of a state can declare jihad or – as today’s jihadists who follow the Palestinian theologian and militant Abd Allah Azzam (the mentor of Usama Bin Laden) held – that it is an individual obligation (fard al-’ayn) for each Muslim, indeed the sixth pillar of Islam, as the current generation of Salafi jihadists claim.<sup>36</sup> The acceptance of the idea that jihad is an individual obligation for every Muslim if a Muslim country is attacked, has ideologically justified the phenomenon of ‘foreign fighters’.<sup>37</sup> Most of them are Salafi-jihadists. In his book, ‘Salafi-Jihadism’. The History of an Idea’, Shiraz Maher offers a detailed history of the rise of Salafist-Jihadism (al-Salafiyya al-jihadiyya). Summarizing Maher’s argument, Salafist jihadism can be defined as

Militant, Islam-based ideology involving the violent rejection of non-sharia-based states and the existing international order, calling for holy war against external non-Muslim enemies, seeking recovery of lands formerly Muslim and the overthrow of those local rulers in Muslim-majority countries who are not considered to be true Muslims and the replacement of their apostate regimes with strict sharia-based governance.<sup>38</sup>

This definition focuses on ends rather than means of warfare. Today, jihadism is mainly associated with terrorism, a means to an end involving such tactics as (suicide) bombings, hostage takings, kidnappings and the massacres of civilians. While jihadists also attack military and police forces, they prefer soft, civilian targets with higher news value. There is therefore considerable overlap between acts of terrorism and war crimes as defined in the laws of war.

International humanitarian law identifies a number of methods of conflict waging as ‘war crimes’:<sup>39</sup>

1. Willful killing of civilians and prisoners;
2. Taking of hostages;
3. Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities;
4. Attacking and bombarding, by whatever means, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended, and which are not military objectives;
5. Intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable institutions.



There can be little dispute that many, if not most, armed attacks of al-Qaeda and ISIS and other violent Islamist extremists engaging in a jihad constitute acts of terrorism, war crimes and, in some cases, crimes against humanity and in at least one case (IS' attack on Yazidis) as genocide.

All this also falls under the broad category of 'violent extremism'. Not only the means of these jihadist groups are extreme, also their objectives are, since their ambitions involve revolution and overthrow of heretic regimes in the Muslim world, the destruction of Israel, the abolition of national borders created in the Middle East after World War I, the reconquest of lands once under Muslim rule (e.g. Spain, 711-1492) and the establishment of a caliphate ultimately ruling over both Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide. In the case of the Islamic State, the end goal even includes bringing about the End of Times in an apocalyptic struggle.<sup>40</sup> All in all a totalitarian agenda for world rule.

### **Conclusion**

Based on a survey and analysis of major opinion polls in Muslim-majority countries as well as some diasporas in the West, I noted in 2017 that there is a substantial extremist milieu sympathizing, and in some cases actively supporting, Islamist extremism. I concluded that

Salafist Jihadism (al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya) has managed to establish itself as the dominant ideology of rebellion in the early 21st century.... For a brief moment in 2011, the Arab Spring with its non-violent mass demonstrations seemed to offer an alternative model of rebellion in the absence of democratic regimes but when these mass uprisings were crushed in all countries except Tunisia, jihadism as a non-mass based method of fighting repression and foreign intervention gained the upper hand in the minds of many militant youths. Young Muslims with rising expectations but low chances of realising them also have emerged in diasporas outside the Muslim world, especially among disgruntled young Muslims in Western Europe where militant Islamism forms a small but significant sub-culture among some 25 million Muslims.<sup>41</sup>

While in the 20th century, fascism and communism were the main violent extremist challenges to the international system, in the beginning of the 21st century Salafist Jihadism has become the main manifestation of violent extremism. It seeks to abolish the existing system of (nation-) states and replace it with a theocratic Islamic empire, thereby challenging the current global order. Despite the loss of the short-lived caliphate (2014-2018), the spirit of jihadism seems unbreakable as long as Muslim governments and Western democracies cannot offer Muslims realistic and practical alternatives to jihad as a method to improve their position. As Ed Husain, author of *The House of Islam* (2018) has rightly observed: "The House of Islam is on fire. Anger and hate are fanning the flames from room to room. We must act before it suffocates us."<sup>42</sup>

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- <sup>3</sup> David Nicolle. Historical Atlas of the Islamic World New York: Checkmark Books, 2003, p.166.
- <sup>4</sup> Dan Smith. The State of the Middle East. An atlas of Conflict and Resolution. London: Earthscan,2006, p.16.
- <sup>5</sup> Ed Husain. The House of Islam. A Global History. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, pp. 32-34.
- <sup>6</sup> Idem, p. 40, p.1. and p.34.
- <sup>7</sup> Idem, p. 162, p.13.
- <sup>8</sup> Cit. Efraim Karsh. Imperialismus im Namen Allahs. Von Muhammad bis Osama Bin Laden. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2007, p.314.(orig. published as Islamic Imperialism. A History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
- <sup>9</sup> Cit. Ed Husain, op. cit., p.120.
- <sup>10</sup> Ed Husain, op. cit., pp.125 -126.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. American Foreign Policy Council. World Almanac of Islamism. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, pp.1010-1026.
- <sup>12</sup> The figure of 31% for the Middle East and North Africa was cited in The Economist, September 7th, 2019, p.77.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. [unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html](http://unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html) .70,8 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Informationsbüro des Chinesischen Staatsrats. Kommentar: Weissbuch über Erfolg von Berufsausbildung in Xinjiang entlarvt westliche Lügen. 16 August 2019.
- <sup>15</sup> For an daily overview of such attacks in one specific year (2017) around the world, see: Paul Cliteur. In Naam van God. Elke dag een aanslag. Antwerp: Houtekiet, 2018, pp.115-251 (Dagboek van de terreuraanslagen 2017).
- <sup>16</sup> Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. Global Extremism Monitor., 2017; cit. CBS News, 13 September 2018. URL: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/islamist-extremism-caused-84000-deaths-worldwide-in-2017-a-new-report-says/> ; however, another data source, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) recorded 'only' 10,900 terrorist attacks in 2017 that killed more than 26,400 people worldwide – but not by jihadist alone (cf. URL: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>
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- <sup>18</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman. Rethinking the Threat of Islamic Extremism: The Changes Needed in U.S. Strategy. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2017; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/Sirius-2017-0094>; URL: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rethinking-threat-islamic-extremism-changes-needed-us-strategy>
- <sup>19</sup> Alex P. Schmid, "Data to Measure Sympathy and Support for Islamist Terrorism: A Look at Muslim Opinions on Al Qaeda and IS", The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 8, no.2 (2017), pp. 25-26; URL: <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ICCT-Schmid-Muslim-Opinion-Polls-Jan2017-1.pdf>
- <sup>20</sup> The number of 120 terrorist organisations is from the Tony Blair Institute; the one of 370 such groups is from START, University of Maryland; URL: [www.start.umd.edu/gtd/](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/)
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. Global Terrorism Database, maintained by START at the University of Maryland.
- <sup>22</sup> Shiraz Maher. Salafi-Jihadism. The History of an Idea. London: Penguin, 2017. Ed Husain concluded: "Jihadism is the logical conclusion of Salafism"- Op. cit., p. 142. Both Husain and Maher are former Islamic fundamentalists.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Quintan Wiktorowicz. Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> Alex P. Schmid. The Importance of Countering Al-Qaeda's 'Single Narrative'. In: National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (Ed.). Countering Violent Extremist Narratives. The Hague: NCTb,2010, p.47.
- <sup>25</sup> Cit. R. Ibrahim. The Al Qaeda Reader, p. 32.

- <sup>26</sup> Cit. Frank Gardner, 'Islamic State Releases 'al-Baghdadi message'. BBC Middle East Service, 14 May 2015; URL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32744070>
- <sup>27</sup> Dawah refers to missionary work whereby persuasion is used to Islamise non-Muslim individuals, communities and the states they live in. Dawah is also used for efforts to revitalise the faith of lukewarm Muslims. Cf. Lemma 'Dawah' in John Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 64.
- <sup>28</sup> The traditional five pillars of Islam are: (i) declaration of faith [shahadah] (ii) observance of the five prescribed daily prayers [salat], (iii) almsgiving [zakah], (iv) fasting during Ramadan [sawn]; (v) performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a life-time [hajj]. – John L. Esposito, *op. cit.*, pp.247-248.
- <sup>29</sup> John L. Esposito., *op. cit.*, p. 160.
- <sup>30</sup> Shahab Ahmed. *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp.318-319.
- <sup>31</sup> Cf. URL: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/jihad\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/jihad_1.shtml)
- <sup>32</sup> None of the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence nor the Shi'ite tradition make a reference to the 'greater jihad'. –Wikislam, as quoted in Shahab Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 318.
- <sup>33</sup> Shahab Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp.318-319.
- <sup>34</sup> Ruud Peters. *Djihad tussen wettig gezag en revolutie. De Heilige Oorlog in de heedendaagse Islam*. In: Martin Gosman & Hans Bakker (Eds.). *Heilige Oorlogen. Een onderzoek naar historische en hedendaagse vormen van collectief religieus geweld*. Kampen: Kok Agora, 1991, pp.176-178.
- <sup>35</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin. 'Your Sons Are at Your Service': Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad. Dissertation, London, King's College, December 2017, p.195.
- <sup>36</sup> In his booklet 'Defending the Land of the Muslims Is Each Man's Most Important Duty', Azzam claimed that "If the enemy has entered Muslim lands, the jihad becomes an individual obligation according to all doctors of the law, all commentators of the Sacred Texts, and all the scholars of tradition (those who assembled the words and deeds of the Prophet". – Cit. Gilles Kepel. *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam*. 4th edition. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006, p.146.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Shiraz Maher. *Salafi Jihadism. The History of an Idea*. London: Penguin, 2016, pp. 8-19.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Dieter Fleck (Ed.). *The Handbook of Humanitarian Law in Armed Conflicts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Roberta Arnold. *The ICC as a New Instrument for Repressing Terrorism* Ardsley, N.Y.: Transnational Publishers, 2004, pp. 66-69.
- <sup>39</sup> Peter Romaniuk and Naureen Chowdhury Fink. *From Input to Impact. Evaluating Terrorism Prevention Programs*. New York: Center for Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation, 2012, p.5.
- <sup>40</sup> Based on Daniel Byman. *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement. What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp.47-50 & pp.170-172.
- <sup>41</sup> Alex P. Schmid, "Data to Measure Sympathy and Support for Islamist Terrorism: A Look at Muslim Opinions on Al Qaeda and IS", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 8, no.2 (2017), pp. 25-26; URL: <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ICCT-Schmid-Muslim-Opinion-Polls-Jan2017-1.pdf>
- <sup>42</sup> Ed Husain, *op. cit.*, p.284.



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**JIHADIST VIOLENCE. NEW TERRORIST ACTORS/GROUPS  
EMERGING. WHO WILL BE THE KEY PLAYERS IN THE  
NEXT DECADE?**

*by Bruce Hoffman*



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## **JIHADIST VIOLENCE. NEW TERRORIST ACTORS/GROUPS EMERGING. WHO WILL BE THE KEY PLAYERS IN THE NEXT DECADE?**

*by Bruce Hoffman*

Two conclusions emerge from any examination of contemporary jihadist violence. ISIS is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future; and, al-Qaeda hasn't gone away. Accordingly, it is unlikely that new terrorist actors or groups will emerge any time soon and that what new developments we see will be more in the realm of the creation by both terrorist movements of new franchises or branches and their appearance in new, fertile grounds for expansion in hitherto atypical jihadi operational grounds.

Terrorism and territory have never been coterminous. Terrorists historically have been able to prosecute sustained violent campaigns absent the accoutrements of governance, possession of vast geographical expanse or control over populations that the Islamic State once exercised. Continued access to sanctuary and safe haven, sufficient finances, a compelling ideology, and an enduring appeal have always been the fundamental requirements of terrorist organizations. Accordingly, ISIS's unremitting capacity for violence remains. Its battlefield defeats and the demise of the short-lived Islamic State have astonishingly neither eroded ISIS's appeal nor undermined its transnational reach. Indeed, while the physical caliphate was crumbling, ISIS was nonetheless spreading to new locales – such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Chad, and Sri Lanka.

The 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings underscore ISIS's undiminished allure to extremists even in places where ISIS hitherto had little to no presence. Sri Lankan authorities, for example, attribute the six simultaneous attacks on churches and luxury hotels that claimed the lives of 259 persons and wounded twice that number to two local groups – the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NJT, or National Monotheism Organization) and Jamiyyathul Millathu Ibrahim (JMI, Organization of the Faith of Ibrahim). Neither had any known prior connection to ISIS nor had they evidenced a capacity for the magnitude of violence unleashed last April. The NJT had previously been linked to the vandalization of Buddhist statues following anti-Muslim disturbances in 2018, with the JMI having emerged from complete obscurity.

According to a recent United Nations report, the attacks were apparently carried out without the knowledge or approval of ISIS's senior leadership. This only deepens the mysteries of the operation's genesis; the surprising rapidity with which both groups acquired the expertise to construct the devastatingly effective improvised explosive devices; and, the operational and logistical mastery required to execute coordinated attacks.<sup>2</sup> Historically, even a single successful suicide bombing has involved a long logistical "tail" involving many people, including: recruiters to radicalize and maintain the resolve of the bomber-martyrs; skilled bomb makers to fabricate the IEDs used in the assaults; and, operatives to identify and surveil potential targets without arousing suspicion. This is a formidable undertaking and one typically accomplished by persons with prior operational experience relying on an already existing organizational network.

Planning for so complex a terrorist operation likely predates the shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand just weeks before. Nonetheless the fact that two entirely local

collections of militants, with a hitherto limited capacity for violence, saw advantage in allying themselves with ISIS – despite the group’s declining fortunes – establishes a worrisome precedent that is unlikely to prove unique. A key dimension of the attacks may have been the terrorist cell’s ability to harness the experiences of at least one member who had left Sri Lanka in 2014 to join ISIS.<sup>3</sup> Jameel Mohammed Abdul Latheef reportedly traveled to Raqqa, Syria in 2014, where he is believed to have come into contact with the infamous British ISIS commander, Mohammed Emwazi, also known as “Jihadi John” – the person responsible for the mistreatment, and ultimately the beheadings, of the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff that same year.

Latheef’s survival and escape from Syria is by no means atypical. Only about 10,000 of the 40,000 foreign fighters who came to fight with ISIS in the Levant and Iraq in fact were killed. At least 15,000 were reportedly able to flee the caliphate before its collapse. Of this number, approximately 7,500 returned home – of whom only about half are imprisoned or being actively monitored by local authorities; 5,000 others were deported by Turkey without notification given either to the recipient governments or those countries of whom they are citizens; 2,500 more found sanctuary in the Sudan; and, about 2,700 others migrated to ISIS branches elsewhere. Approximately 8,000 are believed to be fighting in the remaining pockets of Syria where ISIS has a presence or in western Iraq where the group has launched a new insurgency.<sup>4</sup> The 2018 trial in Denmark of a former foreign fighter who is alleged to have ties to the ISIS cell responsible for the previous year’s suicide bombing of a Manchester, England concert venue underscores the challenges that security and intelligence services and law enforcement agencies face in tracking these individuals. This person was born in Somalia, lived in Britain, held a Finnish passport, went off to fight with ISIS in Syria, but then was arrested in Denmark during a police roundup of illegal immigrants that he was inadvertently swept up in.<sup>5</sup>

The odyssey that eventually led this former foreign fighter to Denmark suggests that the European network of ISIS’s external operations arm is still active. It was organized at least two years before the November 2015; having been created by the Amniyat Khalifa – also known also by its Turkish acronym, Enmi, and its Arabic one, Anmi – the secretive ISIS unit serves as both its internal security force and the unit responsible for external operations. In the latter context, it appears to have continued to function despite ISIS’s declining military and territorial fortunes. According to U.S. intelligence and defense officials quoted by Rukmini Callimachi in her revealing August 2016 New York Times article, ISIS had already deployed “hundreds of operatives” into the European Union with “hundreds more” having been dispatched to Turkey before the caliphate fell. This investment of operational personnel was doubtless designed to ensure that ISIS retained an effective international terrorist strike capability.<sup>6</sup> Whether the perpetrators of the aforementioned May 2017 suicide bombing of an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, that killed 22 persons, and of the pair of attacks three months later in Barcelona and Cambrils, Spain, where 16 persons perished, were part of this network is not known. What does seem apparent is that ISIS retains a powerful ability to inspire and motivate attacks



regardless of any diminution of its stature caused by its battlefield defeats in Syria and Iraq and the caliphate's demise.

Another noteworthy feature of both the Sri Lanka attacks and other ISIS operations in recent years is the frequency that siblings are involved. Two brothers, who were the sons of a wealthy Sri Lankan spice trader, were among the Easter Sunday bombers. Four sets of brothers comprised the ten-person terrorist cell in Catalonia responsible for the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks. Two brothers participated in the November 2015 Paris attacks and two brothers also carried out the March 2016 dual suicide bombings at the Brussels international airport and at a subway station in the city. Admittedly, siblings have long been involved in al-Qaeda as well as ISIS terrorist incidents. Two sets of two brothers were among the 19 hijackers on September 11th 2001. Two brothers were also implicated in the 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Aden; in the 2015 shootings at the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo, the French satirical newspaper; as well as in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing.

But in recent years ISIS has consistently turned terrorism into a family activity. A husband and wife, for instance, were responsible for the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California in December 2015. Three brothers were implicated in a plot to blow up an Etihad Airways passenger plane en route from Sydney to Abu Dhabi in July 2017. And three sets of families were implicated in the May 2018 suicide bombings of three churches in Surabaya, Indonesia, the country's second largest city. Among them was a family of six – including a nine-year old daughter and her three brothers, ages 18, 16 and 12; another family of six with four children, ages 10 through 17; and, a family of five, among whom was their eight year-old daughter. Penetrating an ISIS terrorist cell not comprised of close-knit family is arguably already sufficiently challenging for the authorities in any of these countries. But gaining access to an intimate, nuclear family presents different operational security challenges of an entirely more formidable magnitude.

Another aspect of ISIS's perverse embrace of family is the role women played as proponents of jihad. The situation of some 70,000 displaced persons, mainly women and children, currently detained in the Kurdish-run Al-Hol camp, has focused increased attention on the women, both indigenous and from elsewhere, who supported the Islamic State and indeed continue to do so.<sup>7</sup> There is no clear profile of even a small subset of these detainees: the European women who traveled to Syria to join ISIS and help build that state. Most are devout Muslims whose motivations reflect those of men who joined ISIS to fight: concern over the plight of Muslims worldwide and a profound sense of responsibility to defend the ummah against all threats – internal as well as external. The former include fears of local Shi'a domination and the latter Iranian domination and Western interference and influence. The same sense of adventure and perhaps personal rebellion that animated male foreign fighters were also factors with the women. In some instances, there was a salient desire to ensure their place in heaven (Jannah) by becoming part of the Islamic State – an intention also shared by the men who journeyed to the caliphate. Foreign women, like their male volunteer counterparts, also sought to be part of

something bigger than themselves and to collectively help to build a community united under Shar'ia law and sharing a common identity and purpose. There were other female volunteers, however, who were enthralled by a highly romanticized version of the Islamic State conveyed via Social Media and the Internet. In this context, the prospect of marriage to a fighter and the status it brought was still another enticement – especially to become the wife of a martyr.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, the danger from so-called lone actor attacks remains. The late ISIS commander Abu Muhammad al-Adnani's famous September 2014 summons to battle has long proven far more compelling than al-Qaeda's longstanding efforts to motivate and inspire individuals to engage in violence in support of its aims. In December 2001, for example, al-Qaeda's current leader and then number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, issued a similar call in his treatise titled, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. Published in a London-based Arabic-language newspaper, it explained that

Tracking down Americans and the Jews is not impossible. Killing them with a single bullet, a stab, or a device made up of a popular mix of explosives or hitting them with an iron rod is not impossible. Burning down their property with Molotov cocktails is not difficult. With the available means, small groups could prove to be a frightening horror for the Americans and the Jews.<sup>9</sup>

But al-Zawahiri was using an anachronistic media platform that was in the process of being rendered irrelevant by more immediate and pervasive twenty-first century technology. His print message consequently was thus seen by few and ignored by most. By comparison, al-Adnani's plea reverberated in a self-sustaining echo chamber that acquired its own momentum. "If you are not able to find an IED or a bullet," al-Adnani memorably declared, "then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman, or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him."<sup>9</sup> Hence, despite al-Adnani's 2016 killing, his words still resonate given the cumulative power of the Internet and Social Media: reaching an audience both faster and more effectively than al-Zawahiri could never have achieved, much less imagined.

ISIS's cultivation of lone actors became even more critical as the military operations of the global coalition of 79 countries mobilized to defeat it progressed. In response to this historically unprecedented onslaught, ISIS actively embraced the lone actor strategy to ensure its survival. Thus, far from the battlefields in Mosul and Raqqa, ISIS inspired its disciples to independently carry out vehicular, stabbing and shooting attacks in France and Finland, England and Australia, and the United States and Canada, among other countries.

Although these lone actor attacks are less sophisticated and their perpetrators less capable than their more professional, trained counterparts – such as the Paris November 2015 attacks – they can be just as homicidal. The truck driven into a crowd of Bastille Day celebrants in

Nice the following summer, that killed 86 persons, is an especially heinous example of this now commonplace threat.

In sum, ISIS today appears unbowed by its battlefield defeats and the loss of its caliphate. As last week's message from the group's founder and leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi promised:

The wheel of attrition is running smoothly, by the grace of Allah, and on a daily basis and on different fronts. After the protector of the Cross America and its apostate proxies in the region were stepped upon and their faces dragged over the land of Afghanistan and Iraq, the dog of the Romans, America... is drowning in the quagmire ...<sup>10</sup>

In this respect, it is perhaps worth recalling that the 2015 Paris attacks was the biggest terrorist attack on a Western city in over a decade. They occurred with no advance warning and in defiance of the prevailing analytical assumption that ISIS wasn't interested in mounting external attacks and moreover lacked the capability to do so. Moreover, just two weeks earlier, ISIS was able to perpetrate the single most significant attack against commercial aviation in more than a decade. Over two hundred persons perished when a bomb exploded shortly after take-off aboard a Russian charter jet. That this incident, like recent operations linked to ISIS, was undertaken by its comparatively less-technologically sophisticated Sinai Wilayat (province) perhaps in cooperation with its counterpart in North Africa and not by core ISIS, points to the longstanding capacity of the movement's branches to independently execute highly consequential terrorist attacks regardless of senior leadership guidance or direct orders. These incidents, like the recent Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka that similarly surprised everyone, should make us very circumspect that we have any better understanding of ISIS's post-caliphate capabilities and intentions today than we did when the group first emerged.

While ISIS has dominated the headlines and preoccupied our attention for the past five years, al-Qaeda has been quietly rebuilding. Al-Qaeda today is numerically larger and present in more countries than at any other time in its history. From north west Africa to southeast Asia, al-Qaeda has maintained a global movement of some two dozen local networks. It is entrenched in Libya, where groups such as Ansar al-Sharia and the Benghazi Defense Brigades as well as Shura Councils in Benghazi, Darnah, and Sirte, advance the parent movement's interests. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is meanwhile active in surrounding countries: targeting Western aid workers and tourists. AQAP, long the movement's most threatening and consequential franchise, as previously noted, controls ports and highways along Yemen's coastline ensuring itself a continuous source of revenue from smuggling that is used to coopt local communities through the provision of goods and services that the shattered central government cannot provide. Not surprisingly, AQAP's ranks have quadrupled in recent years. Al-Shaabab in Somalia has similarly expanded and regained lost momentum as it has beaten back attempts by ISIS to challenge al-Qaeda's dominant position in east Africa. Thanks to its Taliban allies in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda has expanded its operations in that country. The movement has made new inroads in

Bangladesh – in addition to its most recently announced franchise dedicated to the liberation of Kashmir. Among the multitude of Salafi-Jihadi factions present in Syria's Idlib province, al-Qaeda remains the most influential, and thus has the potential to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the Islamic State. In all, al-Qaeda now has tens of thousands of fighters – with potentially as many as 20,000 men-at-arms in Syria, 10,000 in North Africa, another 4,000 in Yemen, and 7,000 in Somalia.

Indeed, with a resilient senior command structure in place, al-Qaeda seeks to position itself to exploit ISIS's weakened military position and territorial losses and once again claim its pre-eminent position at the vanguard of the violent Salafi-Jihadi struggle. ISIS has long been stronger than its rival in three key aspects: name recognition and the power of its brand coupled with ISIS's presumed ability to mount spectacular terrorist strikes in Europe. But the latter, it should be noted, is a product of al-Zawahiri's strategic decision to prohibit external operations in the West so that al-Qaeda's rebuilding can continue apace. The handful of aberrations to this policy – such as the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris and the 2017 St Petersburg Metro bombing in Russia – are evidence that al-Qaeda's own external operations capabilities have not completely atrophied and can likely be reanimated when the timing is deemed propitious.

Moreover, AQAP's longstanding expertise in targeting commercial aviation<sup>11</sup> has now clearly spread to the movement's franchises. Even the comparatively technologically unsophisticated al-Shabaab nearly succeeded in downing a Dallo Air passenger jet departing Mogadishu in February 2016 with an improvised explosive device concealed in a laptop computer. The late AQAP master bombmaker Ibrahim al-Azziri's ordnance craftsmanship has thus migrated to other al-Qaeda partners, including groups that hitherto never targeted commercial aviation.

Al-Qaeda's success in resurrecting its global network is the result of three, key strategic decisions taken by al-Zawahiri. The first was strengthening the movement's decentralized, franchise approach that has ensured al-Qaeda's survival since the dark days following the commencement of the U.S.-led global war on terrorism. Over the years, the leaders and deputies of al-Qaeda's disparate franchises have been integrated into the movement's deliberative and consultative processes. Today, al-Qaeda is truly "glocal" – having effectively melded local concerns into an all-encompassing worldwide grand strategy that homogenizes global/local distinctions across the movement.

The second key decision, as previously noted, was the order given by al-Zawahiri in 2013 to avoid mass-casualty operations, especially those that might kill Muslim civilians and innocent women and children. At a time when ISIS was soon running rampant, with fresh atrocities succeeding one another, the new al-Qaeda leader's move prove an enormously prescient strategic gambit. Al-Qaeda, accordingly, has been able to present itself, paradoxically, as "moderate extremists" – an ostensibly more palatable rival to ISIS. The fact that al-Qaeda is just as ambitious but far more patient and calculating than ISIS is thus lost on many who not only actively support

and assist it, but seek to partner with what they perversely regard as a more acceptable and reasonable alternative.

This development reflects al-Zawahiri's third key strategic decision of letting ISIS take all the heat and absorb all the blows from the coalition arrayed against it while al-Qaeda unobtrusively re-builds its military strength and basks in its new-found cachet as moderates in contrast to the unconstrained ISIS. Anyone inclined to be taken in by this ruse would do well to heed the admonition of Theo Padnos (née Peter Theo Curtis), the American journalist who spent two years in Syria as a Nusra Front hostage. Padnos relates how the group's senior commanders "were inviting Westerners to the jihad in Syria not so much because they needed more foot soldiers – they didn't – but because they want to teach the Westerners to take the struggle into every neighborhood and subway back home."<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, with ISIS lamentably still active and al-Qaeda clearly resurgent, today we arguably face the most parlous security environment since 2001 – with serious threats emanating from not one but two terrorist movements who both have cultivated a myriad of branches and affiliates thereby enhancing their capabilities and ensuring their longevity.

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## SOURCES:

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- <sup>2</sup> See Niharika Mandhana, Rob Taylor and Saeed Shah, "Sri Lanka Bomber Trained in Syria With Islamic State," *Wall Street Journal*, 29, 2019, at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sri-lanka-attacks-show-isiss-reach-even-after-defeat-11556561912>.
- <sup>3</sup> Data made available courtesy of Dr. R. Kim Cragin, National Defense University, Washington, DC. The most recent United Nations monitoring team report also cites the number of surviving foreign fighters as 30,000. See Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, Twenty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities (New York: United Nations Security Council, July 15, 2019, p. 6 at: [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3813209?ln=zh\\_CN](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3813209?ln=zh_CN)
- <sup>4</sup> "Danish terror trial may have connections to UK attack: reports," *Ritzau/The Local dk*, February 19, 2018 <https://www.thelocal.dk/20180219/danish-terror-trial-may-have-connections-to-uk-attack>
- <sup>5</sup> Rukmini Callimachi, "How a Secretive Branch of ISIS Built a Global Network of Killers," *New York Times*, August 3, 2016
- <sup>6</sup> Vivian Yee, "Guns, Filth and ISIS: Syrian Camo Is 'Disaster in the Making,'" *New York Times*, September 3, 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> See Edwin Bakker and Seran de Leede, "European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic, ICCT Background Note (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2015), pp. 4-7; and, Mia Bloom, "How ISIS IS Using Marriage as a Trap," *Huffington Post*, March 2, 2015 at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/isis-marriage-rap\\_b\\_6773576?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM-6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAHr8Lw44\\_6N4hbMKEU5SglwUmp5tiHHGTHQue3KM2oAUBfzTY0eD\\_5JdO0RzxCcTKycU0HAK7qeIDXBUEKD2f82fVo8SICsWhoYYyVUTxSjC9pDEvGA9-lv0VW0xDLmU8FOF2\\_zPdxsPaQdUyiaKLXCcpz4ZT91kcwLaZVYOeq8](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/isis-marriage-rap_b_6773576?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM-6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAHr8Lw44_6N4hbMKEU5SglwUmp5tiHHGTHQue3KM2oAUBfzTY0eD_5JdO0RzxCcTKycU0HAK7qeIDXBUEKD2f82fVo8SICsWhoYYyVUTxSjC9pDEvGA9-lv0VW0xDLmU8FOF2_zPdxsPaQdUyiaKLXCcpz4ZT91kcwLaZVYOeq8); and, Suhartini Samsudin and Anitawati Mohd Lokman, Women and Emotion: The Themes and Narratives of the 'Diary of a Muhajirah' Tumblr Page," *Proceedings of the 7th International Zconference on Kansei Engineering and Emotion Research (2018)*, pp. 187-195. at: [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-8612-0\\_21](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-8612-0_21)
- <sup>8</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, translated and published in FBIS, "Al-Sharq Al-Awsat Publishes Extracts from Al-Jihad Leader al-Zawahiri's New Book," Document ID: GMP20020108000197, January 8, 2002, p. 86. See also the excerpt reprinted in Walter Laqueur, ed., *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings, and Manuals of Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Other Terrorists from Around the World and Throughout the Ages* (New York: Reed Press, 2004), pp. 431–32
- <sup>9</sup> See text of the statement in *ibid.*, pp. 95-96.
- <sup>10</sup> "Translated Text: IS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Orders Fighters Redouble Efforts at All Levels, Promotes Religious Activism," September 16, 2019.
- <sup>11</sup> Eric Schmitt and Saeed Al-Batati, "The U.S. Has Pummeled Al Qaeda in Yemen. But the Threat Is Barely Dented," *New York Times*, December 30, 2017 at Eric Schmitt and Saeed Al-Batati, "The U.S. Has Pummeled Al Qaeda in Yemen. But the Threat Is Barely Dented," *New York Times*, December 30, 2017 at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/30/world/middleeast/yemen-al-qaeda-us-terrorism.html>.
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**STRATEGIC TERRORISM**  
*by Herfried Münkler*





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## STRATEGIC TERRORISM

*by Herfried Münkler*

The many types of terrorism are usually differentiated according to their political goals. Two main approaches can be divided in general, that is social revolutionary terrorism which distinguishes itself from ethnic separatist terrorism. Social revolutionary terrorism aims at revolutionizing a state's interior affairs and at re-shaping the social order in doing so, or roughly speaking it aims at overthrowing the powerful and bringing power to the hitherto powerless. Anarchist groups in Western Europe as well as Russian Narodniks were the first movements of this type of terrorism during the last decades of the 19th century. A temporary end of this first social revolutionary terrorism came in the 1970s to 1980s, with representatives such as the Red Brigades in Italy, the Red Army Faction in Western Germany and the Weathermen in the United States. The beginnings of ethnic separatist terrorism lie in the 19th century as well, when attempts to push forward secessions from national minorities in the multinational great empires were made. This terrorism covered a broad range, at least in Europe, extending even to Basque separatists of ETA. This shows that the beginnings of both types of terrorism took place in Europe and are today, however, emerging all over, and since social marginalisation often goes hand in hand with national oppression, they have been interconnected over the years. For example, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) claimed the combination of social revolutionary motivations with ethnic-religious interests for itself and is therefore considered a hybrid composed of social revolutionary and nationalist terrorism.

However, in the light of the political aims that are both extensive and only to be achieved over a long period of time, terrorism has no strategic but rather tactical functions in the cases of social revolutionary and ethnic separatist terrorism. Terrorism should serve as a starter for a process at the end of which the formation of a new society, the establishment of a new state must be. Even if terrorism is not restricted to remain within the early stage of this political process, it only continues to play an accompanying role rather than a critical one in the overall strategy. No new society or state can grow from terrorist attacks.

Terrorism embedded in an overall strategy to fundamentally change a society and/or to establish a new state primarily aims at spreading a message of power and capability of reaching an end goal, and that the fight for said goal has now begun. According to this self-description, terrorist attacks should overcome apathy and resignation within a society and show that the governing regime is not as powerful and invincible as many believe. The violence of terrorist attacks should prevent anyone from missing this message or its dissemination by the state apparatus. The more spectacular the attack, the more sustainable the message. As soon as a political mass movement has emerged, or a guerrilla army has developed out of terrorist cells the phase of terrorist attacks should end and the decisive battle for political power begins. "Using" terrorist attacks then becomes only an option when the battle is at risk of being lost – or at least this is the intention of social revolutionary and ethnic separatist terrorist strategies.

As a tactical element, terrorism is not only a way of communication but also a kind of provocation. Terrorist attacks aim at forcing a state authority to perform certain actions that confirm the slogans of the attackers and at the same time the wrong social order the authority has

hitherto defended. For instance, this happens when state authorities apply reinforced control and repression measures on any third party in whose interest terrorist groups allegedly carry out attacks; or it happens whenever violent actors and potential supporters (sympathizers) are separated from one another which eventually leads to even more supporters sympathizing with violent actors. Terrorism can insofar be described as a particularly savvy tactic which seeks to provoke reactions of the state by carrying out attacks. Those reactions should ideally provide political legitimacy and increase the number of supporters – and it should be noted that the supporters also represent the logistic base of a group that commits acts of terrorism. In this way, terrorism reaches a strategic level that goes way beyond a mere opening tactic but it also remains a certain element of the political grand strategy. Terrorism as a tactic is used to provide legitimacy and logistics. A glance back at the history of the states funded since World War II shows how often state authorities under attack fell into the trap of terrorism.

The dual function of terrorism – on one hand, as a message to “supposedly interested third parties” and as “a provocation of the attacked state authority” on the other – means that the defenders of the existing order are well-advised to maintain a de-escalating role as long as possible, in order to prevent terrorists from achieving their wanted effects and to substantially marginalize terrorist actors in public. In doing so, the attacks committed by terrorists can be categorized as accidents and criminal acts in general, or the attackers might even be provoked to escalate their actions even further, to which their “interested third parties” eventually fall victim to. This might lead to the entire legitimacy of terrorist groups being called into question and a growing dissociation of their third party-supporters.

At this stage of growing conflict two different strategies collide, both striving for political legitimacy, loyalty and support: the principles of violent acts on one side, and the intention of preventing an escalation of violence of the attacked party on the other. This strategic struggle is highly complex, as terrorists are at risk of either not reaching strong, communicative or provocative messages if their attacks are too small, or of failing in total if their attacks are too far-reaching and hurt relatives of their “third party” supporting group. The state apparatus must deal with challenges arising from its de-escalation measures, which can be understood as weakness by some parts of the population. This can produce a lot of pressure increased by the media and also growing demands of an “iron fist policy approach”, which would in turn could play into the hands of an escalation the terrorists have been seeking in fact. This shows that a battle of legitimacy is being fought, where both violence and the renunciation of using violence are tactical means. For both of the two opposing sides a tendency of the violence becoming more and more independent must be expected, and tactical means becoming an end in itself.

For example, for a state this would be the demand for strong counter-measures against the real, potential or supposed supporters of terrorist groups, brought forward by parts of the media acting as the true (or alleged) voice of the people. A consequence thereof is a change of paradigm, meaning that counter-terrorism activities develop into combating crime and

eventually into fighting wars. This development is a rather semantic or rhetorical one at the beginning, but slowly turns into a strategy. For terrorism this would be the groups' tendency of increasing the dimension of attacks even further, which means the excessive character of violence is put on a level with the effectiveness of attacks and violence campaigns become their end in itself. In other words: If the military arm of the movement becomes independent from the political arm, terrorism stops being a subordinate tactic and evolves into a strategy. This means that the initially dominant tactics of political communication and provocation diminish steadily through effective attacks and their escalating dynamics. This is exactly the trap social revolutionary and ethnic separatist groups tend to fall into over and over again, and which eventually leads to their failures. They abandon their grand strategy and thus their policy of committing attacks for tactical reasons. The opposing side under terrorist attacks, on the other hand, obviously turns this into a strategy in order to be able to defeat terrorism on this level, should it not have been able to counter and marginalize terrorism during its early phase.

All this is very different when it comes to the so-called vigilante terrorism, a third type of terrorism next to the aforementioned social revolutionary and ethnic separatist forms. The most prominent example for this type of terrorism is the violence against black people committed by the Ku Klux Klan in the southern states of the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. Their violence aimed at preventing black people from making use of their civic rights and to retain them even stronger to their marginal social status. The term "vigilantism" derives from the Latin term *vigilia*, meaning "night watch". This terror-creating violence is applied to uphold an existing order, with the "night watchers" acting as its defenders. It is necessary to mention that terror as a means of creating fear and carrying out violent acts appears as a strategy and not as a tactical mean, because as soon as terror has managed to cause a certain behavior of endangered social groups, violence wins. Vigilante terror does not necessarily have a conservative function (as is the case with the Ku Klux Klan) but can serve as a mean of establishing new behavioral standards (as is the case with jihadist terrorism sometimes).

It can generally be noticed that jihadist terrorism, which has dominated our minds and debates throughout the past two decades, escapes this underlying threefold pattern. This is due to the fact that it does pursue both social revolutionary and ethnic separatist goals, but also adopts a vigilante character (depending on the respective political constellations) and, on top of everything, is used for altering the global order, either by driving away foreign influences of the Islamic world – mainly al-Qaeda's goal in their confrontation with the U.S. – or by establishing a caliphate/state that encompasses the entire Islamic community, as it was the declared goal of ISIS. With regard to the raised issue of the tactical and strategic dimension of terrorist action, Islamist terrorism holds a special position.

One peculiarity of vigilante terrorism is the fact of the communicative function being almost fully identical with the strategic dimension of its ultimate objective. Any aforementioned obstacles and traps do not play a significant role for this type of terrorism. The closer vigilante

terrorism comes to reaching its goals, the greater its horror appears, originating from its actions. This can inversely be applied for the opposition, the party under terrorist attack: there are not many options available or counterproductive effects. The opposing side must rather try to prevent attacks by implementing legal and police means. This is possible within the crime paradigm. Consequently, the opposition has no relevant reason for dividing between strategy and tactic. The special position of vigilante terrorism actually stems from its lacking necessity of having to win an "interested third party" over, as it primarily aims at intimidating certain groups of a society.

As social revolutionary and ethnic separatist terrorism have become less important in Europe throughout the past years, both jihadist and right-wing extremist terrorism are more and more stepping forward, mainly in their vigilante forms (in Europe at least). Following the reflections outlined in this paper, this means that local police and constitution protection authorities are dealing with terrorism as a strategy, and not with a complex mesh of tactics and strategy. This does not mean that such authorities are entitled to choose any available defense measures without safety concerns, as the defense of a liberal and pluralist order is at stake which must not be called into question due to the defense measures used. Temporary and sociospatial limits can deprive the enemies of freedom of certain civil liberties, but they must not question the basic nature of the democratic, social order. Such measures taken must remain limited and provide comprehensible justifications. This simplification of actions does not only concern counter-measures by the state but also includes terrorist attacks. It can be observed that there are increasing attacks carried out by individuals who do not belong to a clandestine, hierarchically structured organization, but who become radicalized through the Internet and, based on their Internet-based knowledge, who spring into action and commit attacks on their own. This applies for both jihadist and right-wing extremist terrorism. The wide range of terrorists has become, as a consequence of this, very complex and unpredictable. Therefore, when dealing with vigilante terrorism the state has to face very different challenges compared to social revolutionary and ethnic separatist terrorisms, as both act on diverse levels due to their far-reaching political goals which often contradict each other. This is almost never the case with vigilante terrorism.

In its immediate effect, vigilante terrorism as a strategy-based phenomenon is more solid and has higher subversive potential than social revolutionary and ethnic separatist terrorism forms, which are both more generally aiming at certain long-term goals. Among other things this is evident from the fact that both forms manage largely without accompanying commands and explanations that clarify certain goals and purposes. Their violent attacks stand for themselves as messages. This is even more accountable for far-right extremist terrorism than jihadist terrorism, which has recently turned into the greatest threat for the political order of Western democracies. This is also due to the fact that right-wing extremist terrorism shows the closest proximity between terrorist attacks and rampage killings, which increases the possibility of attacks and makes their execution less difficult.

The force of jihadist terrorist attacks results from the non-selectivity of its victims, since they do not require any complex or diligent selection. Considering the Paris attacks in November 2015, the 2016 truck attack in Nice at the promenade, or the 2016 Berlin truck attack at the Christmas market, it is obvious that the attackers' main goal was to achieve the largest number of casualties and severely injured persons. Carrying out attacks using trucks, bombs and automatic weapons is not too complex both in planning and logistics, which is why we must expect them at any time. Such attacks – if carried out very frequently – are ideal for putting societies in a state of fear from which they are unable to free themselves by using police-related support but rather through civic measures. In this regard, the Republican marches caused by the Charlie Hebdo shooting ("Je suis Charlie"-slogans) are a recent example. This shows that this type of terrorism can cause permanent stress for any social order, and counter-measures may not be possible to perform by specialized state institutions. Such type of terrorism distinguishes itself from social revolutionary and ethnic separatist terrorism by the simple fact that anyone feels threatened and that this feeling of undifferentiated danger is not without reason, whereas the other two forms aim at certain groups of people and professions.

Right-wing terrorism directed at certain groups of people, such as migrants from the global South or politicians of parties supportive of integration measures including their followers, must be clearly distinguished from this type of terrorism, even though its philosophy is based on vigilante principles. This terrorism directly targets the fundamental basis of democracy and liberal societies. Terrorist acts committed against migrants are tools for preventing their social integration, and terrorist acts against (local) politicians who try to push forward the integration of migrants can eventually lead to a slow death of democracies – because there is no one else willing to intervene and engage in.

Dealing with the different forms of the use of violence predominantly aimed at certain mental consequences rather than physical ones (which is how you can describe terrorism in general) shows how the name "terrorism" represents a collective rather than a precise description of specific strategies and tactics. Additionally, authoritarian regimes such as Russia, Turkey or China use the term "terrorism" as an instrument to denounce political opponents, who can subsequently be excluded from the legal opposition frames within the political system. Therefore, renewed efforts to clarify the typology of anything "terrorism"-related are necessary.

*NOTE: This article was translated from its original language (German) into English.*



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**TERRORISM AND HYBRID THREATS: ANALYZING  
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND CONSTRAINTS  
FOR COUNTER-MEASURES**

*by Giray Sadik*





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# TERRORISM AND HYBRID THREATS: ANALYZING COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND CONSTRAINTS FOR COUNTER-MEASURES

by Giray Sadik

## Introduction

Today's security atmosphere has been increasingly characterized as a hybrid environment. The lines between war and peace have been blurred more than ever before. Despite these circumstances, coined tellingly as gray-zone threats, terrorism and hybrid threats have mostly been studied in isolation. This chapter aims to bridge this gap by explaining their critical commonalities in terms of the similar characteristics and constraints they pose for political and military communities. Building on this ground of established commonalities, the paper section explores the venues for cross-breeding and strategic learning when developing effective countermeasures against terrorism and hybrid threats. Finally, the chapter highlights the implications of hybrid security environment for the worlds of policymaking, military, technology (i.e. AI/AR, CBRN/WMD, UAV, cyber security), and academia, which paves the way for an evolving roadmap for a research agenda that combines insight and experience from the related fields.

## Hybrid threat definitions and terrorism

As hybrid threats to international security have evolved, their analysis in scholarly and policy debates have become a source of on-going confusion. In addition to conceptual clarification, this section aims to put these terms into context. To this end, this commentary refers to NATO and EU definitions from official reports as primary sources, which reflect a consensus among respective member states about their understanding of these key terms. As NATO and the EU are the two core institutions organizing Euro-Atlantic cooperation against hybrid threats, their definitions present a meaningful starting point. In a 2011 report, NATO describes hybrid threats as follows:

*Hybrid threat* is an umbrella term, encompassing a wide variety of existing adverse circumstances and actions, such as terrorism, migration, piracy, corruption, ethnic conflict... What is new, however, is the possibility of NATO facing the adaptive and systematic use of such means singularly and in combination by adversaries in pursuit of long-term political objectives, as opposed to their more random occurrence, driven by coincidental factors. (Bachmann and Gunneriusson 2015)

This comprehensive definition of hybrid threats enables researchers to grasp the term's multi-faceted nature, while also presenting examples of hybrid threats such as terrorism and migration. The same report underlines that "hybrid threats are not exclusively a tool of asymmetric or non-state actors, but can be applied by state and non-state actors alike. Their principal attraction from the point of view of a state actor is that they can be largely non-attributable, and therefore applied in situations where more overt action is ruled out for any number of reasons". (quoted by Bachmann and Gunneriusson 2015)

### **Common characteristics of terrorism and hybrid threats**

As highlighted in the above definitions terrorism is listed under the "umbrella of hybrid threats". Therefore, there is at least an acknowledgement on paper that these two sets of threats are interrelated. However, so far, only a few experts observed that "despite the potential of terrorist violence as part of hybrid warfare, counter-terrorism as a response or preventive measure has an unexpectedly low profile in NATO's policy on hybrid threats" (Mumford 2016, Braun 2019). Still, their observation is relevant today, and for the most part for other international organizations as well, such as UN, EU, OSCE that can be critical partners in fostering international cooperation in countering terrorism and hybrid threats. For this reason, instead of dealing with extensive conceptual definitions and debates of these terms, which is another issue they have in common, this section focuses on the essential commonalities of these threats that require comprehensive consideration.

To begin with, in a strategic landscape, acts of terror function as components of hybrid threats. Therefore, by definition terrorism is among the key parts of hybrid strategy in a gray zone, where lines between state and non-state, domestic and international, civilian and military, physical and cyber domains are deliberately blurred. At times, terrorist attacks can be used to further complicate the relationship between these domains, so as to have a greater asymmetric impact against an adversary with superior conventional forces. Therefore, in this gray zone it is not practically feasible to isolate terrorism from hybrid threats. Braun highlights this end-means link on the role of terrorism in hybrid strategy as follows:

The main objective of terrorist activity in a hybrid environment is to spread fear and terror, to intimidate populations and degrade the will of an adversary. When multiple terrorist activities follow a central strategy, they can destabilize a state or a society to a considerable degree, even if an individual acting alone may cause relatively little harm. (Braun 2019)

In addition to the critical role of terrorism as a key component of hybrid threats, there is also a growing trend which can be coined as the 'hybridization of terrorism', which can be used to describe the rising threat of terrorist organizations acquiring hybrid capabilities. Ongoing clashes in Syria demonstrate how these hybrid strategies can be violently pushed to the limits and pave the way for a number of unintended consequences. For example, "all factions are benefiting from material support from external actors, besides the plundering of pre-existent Syrian army depots. As relations between the factions are fluid, weapons often do not end up in the hands of the users for which they were intended" (Angelovski et al. 2017). The growing hybrid-capacity of terrorist organizations such as AQ, IS, PKK and their regional variants can be illustrated as only the tip of an iceberg of this rising trend. Furthermore, "nation states may empower terrorists by making heavy weapons (e.g. anti-tank weapons or drones) available to them" (Braun 2019). These interrelated trends reduce the technological edge typically states have against terrorists, and thus, decrease the risk for terrorists when attacking. Therefore, in

theater these parallel trends of increasing use of terrorism in hybrid warfare and hybridization of terrorism can be viewed as ying-and-yang of each other, paving the way for protracted conflicts (e.g. Afghanistan, Libya, Syria etc.), increasing civilian casualties and resulting mass refugee outflows from wars with no end in sight. These common characteristics in the gray zone put forward a number of critical, shared constraints when dealing with terrorism and hybrid threats, which need to be analyzed together.

### **Shared constraints when dealing with terrorism and hybrid threats**

The similar "below-the-threshold-of-war"-nature of these threats compels governments with a number of common constraints when dealing with terrorism and hybrid threats. First of all, "since, in a hybrid scenario, violence may occur solely within the borders of a state, attribution of responsibility is a major challenge" (Tertais 2016). This would be especially true if a state actor waging hybrid warfare was to disguise its terrorist actions through disinformation (e.g. propaganda, mass manipulation, social media etc.) or if a terrorist campaign emerged exclusively within a country. Then, international organizations such as NATO are likely to have difficulty reaching consensus on whether an attack merits Article-5 Allied collective defense reaction. In turn, this can put organizations' credibility at stake for its members, and thus, it can further encourage adversaries to further exploit the blurred lines in the gray zone. At national level, "even if conceived of, instigated and controlled from abroad, terrorist and hybrid threats usually emerge within a state. In conventional military operations, the crossing of geographical borders clearly indicates the origin of such an attack. In contrast, in a hybrid environment, it is difficult to attribute responsibility for the use of force with equal clarity (Tenenbaum 2018). As a result, use of force against terrorism and hybrid threats raises concerns in light of attribution difficulties, and challenges to identify who is responsible for an attack.

Secondly, attribution difficulties at national and international levels, makes tailoring adequate countermeasures against terrorism and hybrid threats challenging. Coupled with the risk of spill-over from hybrid theatres to interveners' homelands makes further constrains for policymakers. Currently, "a hybrid approach to warfare is primarily associated with Russia, making NATO's eastern member states and their neighborhood seem particularly exposed. However, terrorism as part of a hybrid campaign could also spill over from the South or South East to the Euro-Atlantic region ... homegrown terrorism must be kept in mind too" (Santamato 2013). Recently, significant threats to European states' internal security have been growing as result of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) who have returned home from conflicts mostly in the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Most of these fighters are born and raised in Europe, carry their EU-passports when radicalized and joined various extremist groups in the region. When they decide to come back home to where they officially belong, this raises concerns in many European capitals, especially after shocking terrorist attacks in Brussels and Istanbul airports as well as knife and bus attacks against crowds in Paris, Berlin, London etc. took place.

These fighters often bring with them military training as well as a broad war-fighting experience, and they are used to extreme violence. For instance, ex-Jihadists trained in weapons, explosives and tactics could cause considerable damage, especially if operating in groups. Such activities – launched as a coordinated terror campaign – could have similar effects to a hybrid attack launched from outside Alliance territory. (Braun 2019)

Therefore, transnational spill-over effects from ongoing violent hybrid environments in Libya, Syria, Afghanistan etc. must be considered when developing counter-terrorism strategies domestically and internationally. Increase in these attacks will not only worsen the domestic security of European states, but also contribute to growing concerns about the use of force abroad, furthering the existing 'intervention fatigue' among many Europeans. Furthermore, growing numbers of refugees and sleeping cells can only add to these legitimate concerns of backfiring home from ongoing hybrid theatres.

#### **Effective countermeasures necessitate thinking and acting together against hybrid threats**

Above all, for effective countermeasures against terrorism and hybrid threats we need to think about them together and act against them collectively. Otherwise, if we keep adding new terms to an already exhaustive alphabet soup it is likely that this can only contribute to further complicating our limited understanding of these ongoing threats. In addition to conceptual limitations, "using different wording for identical content carries the risk of duplication and stove-piping" (Braun 2019). These are real risks that are likely to grow if not addressed timely, and to be exploited by adversaries seeking asymmetric advantages such as terrorists. In a report prepared for the NATO's Centre of Excellence for Defense Against Terrorism in August 2016, for instance, Andrew Mumford from the University of Nottingham concluded that "NATO counter-terrorism planning [...] needs to be fully integrated within the Alliance's overarching military planning as an acknowledgment of the centrality of terrorism to the waging of hybrid warfare". (Mumford 2016)

Although progress has been made in various areas since, Mumford's critical assessment still holds today. Moreover, this assessment needs to be considered by other international organizations such as EU and OSCE with important roles in European security, when complementing NATO's military role with political mechanisms to enhance physical (i.e. infrastructure, energy security) and informational (i.e. cyber, AI/AR, media) resilience against hybrid threats. As a starter, these organizations can begin by "formulating a better-integrated strategy covering both threats, including an all-embracing threat description, followed by a comprehensive response across the full range of different modes of warfare". (Braun 2019)

In light of this comprehensive strategy, we need to act together to this end, and not only among these organizations and their members, but also in tandem with the private sector and civil society, as their roles have become critical in sustaining resilience against hybrid threats in the long term. Recently, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stressed the importance of

unified efforts against hybrid threats and terrorism during the meeting with the Allied National Security Advisers (NSAs): "many of our countries have suffered from different types of hybrid attacks. In isolation we may not always see the pattern, but together we can connect the dots to see the full picture" (Jane's Intelligence Review, July 2019). Therefore, we all need to connect the dots for meaning, while we need to work together for this meaning to be translated into effective counter-measures.

### **In Search of Hybrid Implications for Policy and Research**

Threats in the gray-zone are designed to have asymmetrical political impact, therefore by definition any research on terrorism and hybrid threats is bound to address its policy implications. This exploratory study contribution puts forward two sets of interrelated implications: one for policymakers, and the other for researchers. Starting with the implications for policymakers, who have been under pressure to function in this gray-zone in recent years, the strategic landscape will only get more 'hybrid', where even the so-called 'domestic terrorism' will have a global footprint from its audience to recruits and logistics. Therefore, assuming that terrorists only come from the South and hybrid threats only from the East is a dangerous form of strategic blindness. From Breivik in Norway to Russia in Syria, there are various instances where our assumptions have been bloody wrong. In this strategic landscape of global terrorism and hybrid threats, challenging mindsets with fixed targets can be a good for policymakers determined to avoid false assumptions.

False assumptions lead to misjudgments and policies that do more harm than good. It is time for a sober assessment of recent interventions in terms of their 'contributions' to global terrorism and its increasingly hybrid character. From Afghanistan to Libya from Syria to Ukraine, risks of over-reaction versus under-reaction remain. Two lessons of relevance are that conflicts are likely to last even longer and potentially with ever more backfires to the homeland from returning FTFs to homegrown terrorist attacks by sleeping-cells, and cyber formations...

Above considerations are of more immediate concern for policymakers, who need adapt their decisions to the emerging strategic landscape. For scholars, the need for a comprehensive research agenda remains, and not only for policy-relevant research but also to keep up with the changing character of war, while engaging the key stakeholders from policy, military, private sectors and civil society. Therefore, we must practice what we preach when talking about the unity of efforts. Ultimately, it is this practice in academia and in policymaking that is going to make a meaningful difference toward more resilient societies against hybrid threats.

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**COUNTER-NARRATIVES**  
*by Behnam Said*





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## COUNTER-NARRATIVES

### by Behnam Said

*"Der Angriff auf die Demokratie beginnt mit einem Angriff auf die Sprache"*  
(Ute Schaeffer 2018, 289).

Terrorism is frequently described as communication strategy aimed at provoking a reaction by the opposing side (Waldmann 2005, 34 ff). Since terrorist groups tend to explicitly reflect upon their communication strategies and write about them, too, the significance of communication becomes obvious. The book published by ISIS in April 2016 titled "Media Operative. You are a Mujahid, too", which has been analysed thoroughly by Charlie Winter from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR) at King's College London (2017), serves as a good example here.

It is important to analyse any communication expressed directly by terrorist and extremist groups, such as letters of confession, flyers, essays or speeches, and to deal with them thoroughly, as each violent act in fact inheres communication, and even non-terrorist but also extremist groupings are making major efforts to disseminate their "world simplification formulae" (Schaeffer 2018, 204). Irrespective thereof, technical measures to limit terrorist and extremist propaganda have proven especially effective as has been shown regarding ISIS and their reduced amount of public releases.

Dealing with challenges in relation with terrorism – no matter of which ideology– is a difficult undertaking. This is definitely a lesson learnt after two decades of "war against terrorism" since September 11, 2001, and it should be applied to other phenomena and areas, in particular right-wing terrorism, as well. Counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies both include a set of diverse measures. Basically, distinctions can be drawn between the following categories:

Weakening of terrorist structures and increase of terrorists' planning efforts by

- police investigations and law enforcement,
- military interventions,
- intelligence work,
- technical safety measures at critical points, and
- technical measures for curbing propaganda.

Empowerment of society through

- sharing information about the aims, intentions and ways used by terrorist and extremist groups,
- collectively banning terrorist and extremist groups and their messages, and
- identification with a positive collective-body-concept.

The measures of "counter-narratives" (a more detailed explanation of the term will follow in the next section of this chapter) belongs to the second category, namely "empowerment of society" which describes the weakening of logic and argumentation by terrorist and extremist groups.

The intention is to enable their target groups to independently recognize terrorist and extremist narratives, to question them and to eventually not accept them. As regards the applicability and implementation as well as the effectiveness of counter-narratives, there are a number of important questions. The following paper will summarize the current discussion on counter-narratives and provide recommendations on how to properly use them.

### **Terminology**

In this paper, narratives are considered a series of explanatory, inter-relating stories that provide answers and recommendations to certain problems and also help to create and give meaning (cf. to the discussion of terminology Braddock & Horgan 2015, 2-3 and GTAZ 2017, 4). While ideology can be comprehended as a set of connecting ideas and explanations as well as solutions, a narrative is a vehicle of ideology, like a transmission belt (Braddock & Horgan 2015, 3). A narrative used by jihadists would be, for instance: Western states have installed "puppet regimes" in Muslim societies in order to pursue their interests and to weaken and control Islam and Muslims in general (status description). Muslims are not able to defend themselves because they have deviated from the right path of "true Islam" (explanation). No negotiations or reforms but only "Jihad in the way of God" are the solution to the misery (solution). With regard to right-wing terrorism, the status description would include the fact that political and media elites have deliberately planned a population exchange\* in order to weaken entire nations and to let people from other cultures enter the respective countries in large numbers. This "status" can only be solved by violent campaigns against all persons responsible and immigrants, since any free expression is subject to repression.

In context with the aforementioned narrative, we thus have to ask ourselves what "counter-narratives" in fact are. Brigg and Feve (2013, 2) defined them as "actions to directly deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messages." Two years later, Braddock and Horgan (2015, 1-2) defined the function of counter-narratives as a means "[...] to contradict the themes that fuel and sustain terrorist narratives, and by extension, discourage the support for terrorism they foster."

Both definitions highlight the reactive/defensive nature of the term "counter-narrative". In this regard, Ingram and Reed (2016, 6) mention the following: "it is important to recognise that counter-narratives are an inherently defensive type of messaging, i.e. it is messaging designed and deployed in response to an adversary's messaging." Although this conclusion should remain value-free at this point, it is relevant for distinguishing counter-narratives as an instrument from other "offensive" strategic communication forms. These forms include the "alternative narrative" in particular, which places special focus on its own strength instead of taking up the weakness of the opposing narrative. Strategic communication utilized by governments for reporting their goals and measures is another alternative narrative form (Brigg & Feve 2013, 2).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A critical reflection of the term according to German safety and security authorities is available in the report GTAZ-UAG titled "Counter-Narratives" (GTAZ 2017, 4-6).

The governments of the United States and the United Kingdom have both shown great commitment with respect to the creation and dissemination of counter-narratives and even established bodies specifically for this purpose (Brigg & Feve 2013, 8-9). Following the work of both the U.S. and the U.K. the respective authorities concerned with safety and security issues in Germany and later also other public bodies started dealing with this topic too (i.e. GTAZ 2007) and carried out specific projects. Examples worth mentioning are the information video series on "Terminologies of Islam" (Begriffswelten Islam) by the German Federal Agency for Political Education which were first published on October 12, 2015, or the video series titled "Jihadi Fool" by the North Rhine-Westphalian Office for Protection of the Constitution, which started in August 2019 as the first initiative by an official security body (Regional Government of North Rhine-Westphalia, August 22, 2019). Furthermore, a broad range of projects against extremism and hate speech were funded by governmental and non-governmental agencies in Germany and other European countries, such as Great Britain or France (cf. Winter & Fürst 2017).

### **Effect**

With regard to the intended or actual effect the question arises as to what makes a good narrative. The answer to this question explains what elements of a counter-narrative must be regarded. In this context, the communication strategy of the Islamic State (IS) deserves a more closer look, since IS is considered one of the most successful models of terrorist groups and like no other movement has managed to perfect and optimize its media use. In addition to the high number of daily, weekly and monthly reports, videos, pictures, hymns and anthems produced by IS (cf. Zelin 2015) as well as the fact that the whole terrorist group and its followers had countless online accounts on many different Social Media-platforms to spread the word, it has been the coherent and recognizable "brand image" of IS that explains its success. Part of this "brand" is a positive and optimistic basic message of the narrative which puts more emphasis on alternatives to the existing systems (cf. Winter 2017, 15-16). As a matter of fact it seems that this aspect highlighted by Winter sparked special attraction to sympathizers worldwide, accompanied by the initial war success of IS. In his essay "The true believer" (1951) by American philosopher Eric Hoffer, which presents explanations for the rise of nationalist, left-wing and religious mass movements, he concluded that the power of presenting convincing arguments of an alternative future is a very important pull-factor, as they give its sympathizers hope of becoming part of a swift and fundamental political change. Even though Hoffer's considerations were taken 60 years before the rise of IS, they may help understand what factors make up the "moment of success" and the attraction of (extremist) mass movements today. Furthermore, they provide indications on how possible counter-measures should be designed.

Based on Hoffer's description of the positive factors which inspire any mass movement, it seems plausible that elements focusing on the benefits of the society model at stake should be paramount when designing a counter-narrative. Also, considerations should be given to the broader historical framework, and opportunities for participation must be stressed more.

By now there are various concepts on counter-narratives of jihadist propaganda which have already been implemented. In its information video series project titled "Islam Terminology" the German Federal Agency for Political Education mainly focused on the discursive discussion on terms jihadists are claiming for their own. The free project "Datteltäter"<sup>11</sup> tries to satirically question radicalization, much like years later the Office of Constitution Protection tried to do. Another project called "Jamal al-Khatib" was invented in Vienna and focuses on the narrative, biographical work and on creating alternative narratives to jihadist propaganda through the application of dramaturgic and didactic methods.

So far, there are only few research findings on the effect of counter-narratives. In this regard the study research carried out by the German Federal Criminal Office presents a notable exception (Frischlich et al. 2017). This particular study examined the effectiveness of different counter-narrative videos and found that the level of acceptance of single videos depends on various factors. According to Rutkowski et al. (155-156) a high level of narrativity, hence a coherent narration, any entertaining narrative style as well as tales of drop-outs and of change, received especially high approval ratings, whereas humorous and satirical videos were regarded as critical by the study participants, as they feared such videos might cause emotional injuries or, in the worst case, further radicalization of the target audience (ibid.). Such risk of further radicalization is even higher in cases where the copyright of videos is not owned by publicly independent distributors but by official authorities, or even security and safety authorities (which is the case with North Rhine-Westphalia). Aforementioned GTAZ-paper "Guideline for Dealing with Counter-Narratives" particularly stresses this fact by mentioning that "under certain circumstances it can be profitable for State authorities to support civic actors with creating their own counter-narratives", and that Counter-Narrative projects developed by State authorities should be implemented only with restrictions (GTAZ 2017, 7). The wordings of such recommendations in the paper are as follows:

"For the conceptual development and dissemination, suitable partners must be identified. For example, such partners could be prominent personalities who would receive a high level of acceptance by young people. Cooperations with political foundations, whose fundamental tasks include the promotion of democracy and who can provide the necessary structures and know-how, would also be possible." (GTAZ 2017, 21)

This clearly demonstrates the sceptical attitude of the authors of the paper towards public bodies running counter-narrative projects, and how they clearly prefer subcontracting independent third parties as it can be presumed that in doing so, both higher acceptance and improved effects may be achieved.

The position expressed by the GTAZ task force is also apparent in the survey of existing measures by Brigg and Feve (2013, 17). Based on experiences in the U.S. and the U.K., the authors caution against government bodies playing a role too active in the creation of a dissemination

of counter-narratives. This is due to the limited credibility of the target audience and also to possible contra-productive effects (ibid.).

### **Realization – What are the key issues?**

Counter-narratives can be edited and presented in various ways. However, a few key points should always be noted in order to not accidentally harm oneself and to not become a subject of public mockery. This, for instance, was the case of the video game "Slippery Slope" by the FBI, which encountered mainly negative receptions (cf. McCormick 12.02.2016; cf. Kohring 14.02.2016).

First, the message needs to be studied carefully, and it is necessary to clearly grasp the presentation of the arguments and their translation into a narrative. Reservations against government and society both require detailed explorations. Furthermore, the target audience should be studied thoroughly regarding demographic factors (age, gender, domicile, education, etc.) and also regarding their specific media use behaviors; various studies including the JIM study<sup>\*\*\*</sup> provide valuable information in this context. Only then it will be possible to create the ideal design and to address and virtually meet the target audience in the media. Each single piece of this preparatory work will set a certain framework for the way of presentation, the narrative style and imagery, the argumentation and the dissemination channels. In this regard it is essential to prepare precisely – even though this might result in high costs, especially when agencies are hired to carry out film projects, for instance. Based on experience, this is likely to be very costly and involve several hundred thousand euros. Political decision-makers should be aware of this fact too whenever they demand the creation and implementation of a specific project by experts. In case of doubt this might require fundraising, which may considerably delay the entire planning and implementation process.

In the further evolution of the project the question as to who will be the messenger of the respective counter-narrative will arise. In the past, former violent extremists been "used" as authentic messengers (Brigg & Feve 2013, 17). However, in connection with IS it has become evident in Germany that drop-outs such as returnees from conflict zones are not ideal for this role, as their involvement in battle very often is not clear or requires further clarification. Also, in most cases such persons are subject of criminal investigations or even must serve prison sentences. This shows that authentic messengers do not necessarily need to have an extremist past, even though this might make sense in some cases. Other messengers acting as positive role models for their target audience might be prominent influencer, athletes and artists who allow their audience to identify themselves with them.

It must be pointed out that all reflections outlined here shall apply to new projects and that there are already sufficient projects dealing with right-wing extremism and Islamism, disposing of extensive experience in dealing with the respective narratives and still trying to provide and disseminate counter-arguments. In this sense, it is important to carry out a thorough

control of already evolving projects before re-issuing counter-narrative projects. Also, it should be assessed whether the support of civic actors might serve better for creating a more sustainable counter-public than the creation of stand-alone projects, since their lasting effect may be more limited.

### **Conclusion**

Narratives are like a glue holding together social movements, which also include extremist tendencies. This "social glue" not only fosters cohesion within an ideological framework, but also it supports an explanation for all world affairs and contributes to building a sense of identity. In this regard, the connection between the two levels of radicalization, namely cognitive radicalization and activist/social radicalization, emerge (see Neumann 2013 for more information on the academic discourse on the significance of these levels). In order to be able to build up a counter-balance to extremist narratives one should realize that no narrative only addresses the rational/cognitive level of any individual. Instead, it must always be considered within the larger context that empowers a narrative.

For this reason, counter-narratives are experiencing difficulties: on one hand, they ought to deconstruct and present the inner contradictions of extremist perspectives and argumentations and are thus in danger of remaining on a merely discursive level. On the other hand, however, they must appropriately and emotionally appeal to the target audience and take into account their world perceptions with all their contents and designs, should they become in fact effective. Therefore, the demands for successful counter-narratives are very high, and for effectively planning and implementing them all timely and appropriately, financial and human resources must be provided. Furthermore, the messages should not remain rhetorical but correspond with the real-life conditions. If jihadist narratives like "the war of the West against the Islamic world" are to be answered with religious freedom and participation opportunities for Muslims in Western societies, then they should in fact comply with the actual social practice and not be attacked with constant negative stigmatization discourses on Muslims, be it by politicians or media representatives. Another example is the Islamist narrative according to which society wants to systematically exclude Muslims. It is important to establish the necessary physical conditions in order to authentically counter such messages. Measures to compensate existing social disadvantages in economically underdeveloped regions, which are home to members of Muslim minorities in particular, may be instrumental.

Similarly, the situation concerning the right-wing extremist narrative can be dealt with as described above, however it is not completely congruent. In this case it is also important to connect messages to existing realities and to identify problems as such. Since, however, both government failure and hoaxes, false reports or half-truths are systematically put into circulation across the extreme right-wing spectrum very often (cf. Schaeffer 2018), it seems particularly important to demonstrate the governmental capacity to act in diverse policy areas and to openly explain the reasons for political decisions, including all previous considerations.

Ideally, counter-narratives are tailored towards local circumstances and seize on regional examples.

As the discourse utilized by right-wing extremists especially stresses a distribution of resources to the disadvantage of the local population and an advantage of the newly arrived, examples of action could be used from within those discourse areas and be prepared accordingly.

Both the message and reality should ideally be consistent with one another or, provided that this requirement has not yet been fulfilled, the ways towards participation in connection with the call for activity should be demonstrated clearly, in order to be able to integrate oneself peacefully and within the framework of applicable law into the socio-political life. It is always crucial to know the target audience well, and to integrate their language and life reality into the conceptual design.

Based on these assumptions it can be quite reasonable to oppose extremists with counter- or alternative narratives. Such narratives should not necessarily be set by state authorities, but rather it should be the goal of any public action to support civic actors who are already advocating against disinformation and agitation and developing counter-narratives in their daily lives themselves – although such narratives can hardly be designated as such – and who are acting in both real and virtual space.

*NOTE: This article was translated from its original language (German) into English.*

**Translator's notes:**

*\* Population Exchange: The German term *Bevölkerungsaustausch* refers to the so-called "replacement theory", a white nationalist far-right theory which states that the white European population is gradually being replaced with non-European peoples through mass migration, demographic growth and a European drop in the birth rate.*

*\*\* Datteltäter is a wordplay on the combined German words *Dattel* (date) and *Täter* (offender) or *Attentäter* (assassin).*

*\*\*\* The Jim study is a German baseline study researching the media use of 12-to19-year-olds. It has been carried out since 1995 by the German research cooperation project *Medienpädagogische Forschungsverbund Südwest* (mpfs).*

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**THE CRIME-TERROR-NEXUS IN EUROPE AND  
IMPLICATION FOR JIHADIST RADICALISATION**  
*by Peter R. Neumann*



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## THE CRIME-TERROR-NEXUS IN EUROPE AND IMPLICATION FOR JIHADIST RADICALISATION

by *Peter R. Neumann*

Our interest in terrorists with criminal backgrounds started in 2015, when it became obvious that a significant percentage of the approximately 5,000 young Muslims from Western Europe who had left their home countries in order to join Islamic State in Syria (so-called 'foreign fighters') had previously been involved in (non-terrorist) crime. Although impossible to quantify, it seemed like their number and prominence had increased when compared to earlier jihadist mobilisations. This was echoed in the more brutal, gangster-like way in which Islamic State presented itself. Alain Grignard, a commissioner in the Belgian Federal Police, described the group as "a kind of super-gang".<sup>1</sup>

The research we have subsequently conducted has focused on the ways in which prior involvement in crime affects radicalisation and terrorist behaviour. Drawing on a sample of 130 Western European jihadists, who became affiliated with jihadist groups between 2012 and 2018, our aim was not merely to describe a sub-segment of European jihadists, but to use the preponderance of criminal backgrounds among them in order to extract wider lessons about "ordinary" criminals who turn to terrorism. How do radicalisation processes differ? Where are they recruited? Do they have specific 'skills' and experiences that are useful in terrorism?

Our research shows that criminal backgrounds can have a profound impact on radicalisation and terrorist behaviour. Though not exclusive to former criminals, we found evidence that 'redemption' is an especially powerful narrative among former criminals, and that prisons offer conditions that are conducive to their radicalisation. We also demonstrate that former criminals have contributed to terrorism through their ability to access weapons, stay 'under the radar', and raise money through petty crime. One of the most significant findings is that (violent) criminals take less time to radicalise into terrorism than non-violent criminals.

### **The Data**

The dataset we started creating in 2015 contains entries for Western European jihadists, who became involved in terrorism during the 2012-2018 period, and for whom there is evidence that they had previously engaged in (non-terrorist) criminality. To determine criminality, we relied on official statements by the police or prosecuting authorities, indicating that a person had committed criminal offences before their radicalisation. To qualify as someone involved in (jihadist) terrorism, individuals had to have joined groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State as so-called 'foreign fighters' (evidenced, for example, by their own statements, official (who indictments, or credible reports), or been charged and convicted of terrorism-related offences in Europe.

For each entry, we sought information in 142 categories, from basic demographic data (for example, age, nationality, place of residence, marital status, education, profession, death) to their criminal histories (for instance, date/time of crime, type of crime, number of offences known, motive, prison stays), radicalisation and recruitment (date of initial involvement, circumstances of introduction, recruiter, place and context, activities, etc.), and involvement

in terrorism (group, length of involvement, roles played, state response, etc.). The information we relied on was gleaned from official documents, such as police reports and court judgments, the foreign fighter database at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), King's College London,<sup>2</sup> as well as media reports.

Based on these criteria, we identified 130 individuals for whom we found sufficient information to paint a detailed picture of their criminal activities, radicalisation, and terrorist involvement. All of them were male, with an average age of 24 at the time of their mobilisation into terrorism. They vary from across western Europe: Belgium (18), Denmark (11), France (35), Germany (17), Italy (11), Netherlands (13), Sweden (1), and the United Kingdom (24). Sixty per cent (78) were 'foreign fighters' who had travelled to Syria, while forty per cent (52) had participated in planning, plotting, or promoting terrorist attacks in Europe.

In 2016, we also started creating a control group of jihadists with no criminal backgrounds. In addition to 48 jihadists, who we could be certain had no criminal backgrounds, we compared our findings to official statistical data from Western European countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands,<sup>3</sup> which had published comprehensive data on the nature and backgrounds of their jihadist populations during the 2012-18 period.

### **Radicalisation and Recruitment**

One of the most important questions in relation to the crime-terror nexus is how criminal pasts contribute to processes of radicalisation, that is, the personal circumstances, experiences, narratives, networks and other factors that explain an individual's involvement in extremism and their mobilisation into violence.<sup>4</sup> The cases in our database offer some tentative answers. They suggest that the jihadist narrative – as articulated by the Islamic State – is surprisingly well-aligned with the personal needs and desires of criminals, and that it can be used to condone as well as curtail continued involvement in crime. Among the individuals in our database are cases in which becoming a jihadist justified and legitimised continued criminal activity, but also the opposite, that is, for radicalisation to serve as a means of 'redeeming' past 'sins'. The most likely – and plausible – explanation for the high number of 'gangster' jihadists remains the merging of criminal and jihadist milieus: both criminals and jihadists are recruited from the same demographics – and often in the same places.

### **Redemption**

For up to twenty of the individuals in our database, we found evidence for what we labelled the 'redemption narrative'. These were criminals who had experienced what Quintan Wiktorowicz termed a 'cognitive opening', a shocking event or personal crisis that prompted them to re-assess their entire life and become open for a radical change of values and behaviour.<sup>5</sup> In our case, they realised how their criminal behaviour had been harmful, that they needed to break with their past, and make up for their 'sins'. This then provided the rationale for their turn to religion and justified the involvement with jihadist groups.

That they sought redemption in jihadism instead of other, more mainstream forms of religion or spirituality, may be explained with the strong alignment of needs and narratives. In other words: involvement in jihadism offered redemption from crime while satisfying the personal needs and desires that led them to become involved in it. Just like the criminal gangs of which many of them used to be members of, jihadist groups offered power, violence, adventure and adrenaline, a strong identity, and – not least – a sense of rebellion and being anti-establishment. For criminals with a guilty conscience, the jihadism of the Islamic State could seem like a perfect fit.

Among the most prominent examples is Abderrozak Benarabe, locally known as 'Big A', a long-time criminal from Copenhagen who decided to turn to jihadism after his brother was diagnosed with cancer. Benarabe's radicalisation was prompted by a cognitive opening after his brother's diagnosis with cancer. When explaining why he had decided to become a foreign fighter, he referred to his criminal past:

I really don't know what's gonna happen. Maybe I'm gonna die there...so what? Because, you know, some people have died of my hands. This is a big problem when I meet Allah... I've gotta try and make a difference. I think about Judgement Day...But at least I can say I went down there and did what I could...It's not good enough just praying with all the shit I've done.<sup>6</sup>

Others used very similar justifications. Ali Almanasfi, for example, a British-Syrian from West London, turned to jihadism after participating in the violent assault of an old man for which he received a long prison sentence. When telling a friend about his trip to Syria and his recruitment as a foreign fighter, he said: 'I want to do something good for once. I want to do something pure'.<sup>7</sup>

### **Legitimising Crime**

While the jihadist narrative can be a source of redemption, several of our cases suggest that it may also serve as a legitimiser of crime. This is not entirely new. Anwar al-Awlaki, the radical cleric who helped to create al-Qaeda's online magazine Inspire and incited young Western Muslims to become jihadist 'lone wolves' during the late 2000s, repeatedly told his followers that 'stealing from your enemies' is not only permitted but, in certain cases, obligatory.<sup>8</sup> Islamic State draws on the same logic,<sup>9</sup> except that the current wave of jihadist mobilisation has produced more supporters that are capable of turning al-Awlaki's prescription into reality. Our database contains over a dozen cases in which this type of justification has played a role.

The best-known example is the network around Khalid Zerkani. Born in Morocco in 1973, he moved to Belgium as an adult and made money as a small-time criminal. After becoming radicalised, he used his criminal 'skills' (and considerable charisma) to recruit young men, mostly with Moroccan backgrounds, as jihadist foreign fighters. In particular, he encouraged them to commit thefts and robberies,<sup>10</sup> which he justified on religious grounds.

As a witness in his trial testified, Zerkani told his recruits that 'to steal from the infidels is permitted by Allah'.<sup>11</sup> The proceeds were then redistributed amongst the group and used to fund their travel to Syria, leading to Zerkani's nickname of Papa Noël (Father Christmas).<sup>12</sup> Prior to his 2014 arrest, Zerkani had become a hugely influential figure within the jihadist scene in Brussels, and was responsible for the recruitment and mobilisation of up to 72 foreign fighters.<sup>13</sup> More than any other example, the structures that he created illustrate the near-perfect merging of criminal and terrorist milieus that took place in Belgium and help explain why this small country has produced nearly 500 jihadist foreign fighters in just four years.

### **Prisons**

That prisons are uniquely significant places for people with criminal pasts seems obvious. Over 50 per cent of our cases (69) had been incarcerated prior to their mobilisation, with sentences ranging from one month to over ten years, for various offences from petty to violent crime. More significantly, at least 26 per cent of those who spent time in prison radicalised there, although – in the majority of cases – the process continued and intensified after their release. Given the recent surge in terrorism-related arrests and convictions, and the rapidly expanding number of convicted terrorists in custody, prisons are likely to become more – rather than less – significant as centres of gravity for the jihadist movement. The cases in our database highlight two mechanisms. First, they are places of vulnerability in which extremists can find plenty of 'angry young men' with criminal pasts who may experience cognitive openings and are 'ripe' for extremist radicalisation and recruitment. And second, they bring together criminals and terrorists, and therefore create opportunities for collaboration and 'skills transfers'.

### **Vulnerability**

For many new inmates, the very fact of imprisonment is a personal crisis, which raises profound questions about their lives while providing ample time to search for meaning. They are cut off from their immediate family, friends, and wider society, while finding themselves in an environment which is often hostile, unfamiliar, and tribal in nature, with divisions along religious or ethnic lines. Simply put, prisons are places in which new inmates are mentally and physically vulnerable, and may be more likely than elsewhere to experience 'cognitive openings' – the willingness and desire to identify with new ideas, beliefs, and social groups.<sup>14</sup>

For the same reason, jihadist recruiters view prisons as places of opportunity. Not only are inmates vulnerable and experience cognitive openings, making them receptive to jihadist ideas, they also tend to be part of the demographic that jihadist groups are keen to attract: young men, often from Muslim backgrounds, who are unfamiliar with their own religion yet impulsive, confident, willing to take risks, and have been in conflict with the state and established authorities.<sup>15</sup> Far from being an obstacle, their criminal pasts have de-sensitised them to law-breaking and violence, and may in fact have provided them with skills that can be used in terrorism. In short, from the jihadists' perspective, prisons are the perfect 'breeding ground'.

A prominent example is Harry Sarfo from the northern German city of Bremen, who joined Islamic State in the spring of 2015.<sup>16</sup> His journey towards extremism began in prison, where he began serving a two year sentence for aggravated theft in 2011. It was during this time that he met René Marc Sepac, a well-known German jihadist who had been sentenced for terrorism-related offences. Sepac gave him Salafist books and sat down with him every day, working through the material and getting him excited about the 'new' faith he was discovering. 'The books explained everything', Sarfo later told his police interrogators, 'very precise and to the point... And I thought, wow, I didn't know any of this stuff'.<sup>17</sup> After his release, Sarfo became a regular at the Islamischer Kultur- und Familienverein (IKF), an extremist mosque on the outskirts of Bremen, and part of a group of 27 who eventually went to Syria.

### **Networking**

More so than anywhere outside, prisons are places where criminal and terrorist milieus converge, and have the potential to produce more terrorists that are also better skilled and equipped. Unless extremists are entirely separated from the rest of the prison population, which may not always be possible or advisable, prison environments have the potential to enable the flow of information, people, and skills.<sup>18</sup> This is of greater benefit to the extremists than the criminals: not only do they get access to potentially fruitful opportunities and targets for radicalisation, they can also take advantage of the criminals' skills and underground connections.

The most significant example is that of Chérif Kouachi, Amedy Coulibaly, and Djamel Beghal. Kouachi and Coulibaly first met inside Fleury-Mérogis prison near Paris in 2007, and formed a friendship after spending seven months on the same wing.<sup>19</sup> Coulibaly had a history of armed robberies, and was imprisoned for aggravated theft, receiving stolen goods, and using false number plates.<sup>20</sup> Kouachi, meanwhile, was on remand awaiting trial over a 2005 attempt to travel to Iraq to become a foreign fighter.<sup>21</sup> The pair – one an 'ordinary' criminal, the other an extremist – were then mentored and radicalised in prison by Djamel Beghal, an al-Qaeda recruiter.<sup>22</sup> In other words, prison allowed the initial network to be established, which culminated in Kouachi and Coulibaly coordinating the January 2015 Paris attacks, killing 17 people.

### **Criminal 'Skills'**

There are many 'skills' that terrorists with criminal backgrounds may have developed as a result of their previous involvement in crime. In our dataset, we have found concrete evidence for four: access to weapons; the ability to 'stay under the radar'; terrorist financing through 'petty crime'; and a lower threshold for becoming involved in violence among formerly violent criminals.

### **Access to Weapons**

Although Islamic State has frequently encouraged its supporters to use everyday objects, such as cars and knives,<sup>23</sup> guns and bombs continue to play a prominent role in jihadist operations. As early as 2013, Danish intelligence warned that the large numbers of criminals who were

joining jihadists groups would lead to the proliferation of firearms among would-be terrorists.<sup>24</sup> Two years later, the warning came true. In February 2015, Omar el-Hussein attacked a free speech event and, later that day, a synagogue in Copenhagen. Between the two attacks, he went to his neighbourhood of Mjølnerparken, where he disposed of an M95 rifle that he had stolen during a home robbery and used during the first attack.<sup>25</sup> He then visited an internet café to meet with former gang associates who helped dispose of the rifle. In short: without his criminal past, el-Hussein would have found it much harder – if not impossible – to acquire the means with which he carried out his attacks.

The same is true for Amedy Coulibaly. The arms dealer that sold him his weapons had no idea that Coulibaly was a terrorist. Upon seeing the media reports that followed the attacks in January 2015, he pre-emptively turned himself in to the police, and confessed to supplying Coulibaly with Škorpion submachine guns, a rocket propelled grenade launcher, and the two AK-47s that the Kouachi brothers used.<sup>26</sup> He calculated that the attacks would eventually have led the police to him anyway. Indeed, had he known Coulibaly's true intentions, he might have been more hesitant in supplying the weapons.

### **Staying 'Under the Radar'**

In addition to procuring firearms, terrorists may benefit from criminals' ability to 'stay under the radar', especially by gaining access to fake documents and access to safe houses. What matters in this regard are not specific abilities that former criminals may (or may not) possess themselves, but – rather – their access to (criminal) networks through which they can be mobilised. The production of forgeries, for instance, is difficult for terrorists to develop in-house. (Our database contains only three criminals who used identity theft prior to their radicalization.)<sup>27</sup> Instead, it is more likely that terrorist networks would 'out-source' this capability to people who are experts – and who can typically be found in criminal milieus.

In the case of the network that carried out the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016, this clearly succeeded. The organisers used fraudulent documents throughout their attack planning in order to wire money, travel between countries, rent cars, and – crucially – acquire safe houses.<sup>28</sup> Yet here, as in other cases, the skills transfer consisted not of manufacturing forgeries, but of having access to a criminal network that was in a position to acquire forgeries. This is how they came across Djamel Eddine Ouali, an Algerian who ran a forgery operation in the Brussels district of Saint-Gilles. There is no evidence that Ouali knew of his customers' true intentions, or was even interested in them. As the Belgian investigator in charge of Ouali's case has said: '[He] was a professional document falsifier whose main goal was to make as much money as possible'.<sup>29</sup>

### **Financing**

If we accept that criminal backgrounds facilitate access to weapons and help obtain fraudulent documents, it may be no surprise that they also enable terrorist financing. Rigorous empirical



examinations of this phenomenon are surprisingly rare, though two recent studies have started cataloguing the funding of jihadist activities in Europe.

A report by Magnus Normark and Magnus Ranstorp focuses on how European foreign fighters have funded their travel to Syria: in addition to loans, private donations, bank fraud, and business fraud, they consistently emphasise the role of petty crime.<sup>30</sup> Emilie Oftedal's study examined the financing of 40 jihadist plots between 1994 and 2013: though nearly three-quarters generated at least some of their income from legal sources,<sup>31</sup> she shows that criminality played a significant role, with nearly 40 per cent of the plots drawing on the proceeds of crime.<sup>32</sup>

The principal difficulty in detecting crime as a means of terrorist financing is that it does not involve a change of behaviour, but merely of purpose: individuals with criminal pasts often continue what they were doing in their previous lives, except that profits are used to finance terrorism. As a result, it can be difficult to separate funds that were raised for terrorism from money that is spent on other, often entirely mundane purposes. Saïd Kouachi, for example, sold counterfeit goods, received money from AQAP, engaged in bank fraud, and was involved in theft.<sup>33</sup> Not all of his money went into the funding of the Charlie Hebdo attack, but some of it did. The same logic applied to a British jihadist Choukri Ellekhlifi, who had convictions for several robberies, and financed his trip to Syria by doing more of them.<sup>34</sup> In all these cases, the common thread was not any particular source of funding, but biographical continuity.

### **Familiarity with Violence**

Such practical skills are supplemented by a more intangible 'skill' or – rather – experience: that of familiarity with violence. 65 per cent of the individuals in our database were involved in violent crime. Among the individuals that were involved in domestic plotting (as opposed to 'foreign fighting'), this figure rises to 80 per cent. What we are hypothesising is that, having engaged in violence repeatedly and routinely as a criminal can lower the (psychological) threshold for becoming involved in violence as a terrorist. In other words: for someone who is familiar with using violence and has become de-sensitised to its use, the 'jump' from cognitive to violent extremism will be smaller, and the process of mobilisation therefore quicker and less difficult. The argument is hard to substantiate based on individual trajectories alone, given all the other potential influences that may have caused a person to engage in terrorism. Nevertheless, our database shows that the period of mobilisation – that is, the time between joining a jihadist group and becoming involved in violence – among the individuals involved in domestic plotting was, in many cases, extraordinarily short, often less than four months or even just a few weeks. Furthermore, while there was no 'like-for-like' use of violence, the terrorist use of violence was always more violent than someone's criminal use of violence. These findings support the idea that familiarity with (criminal) violence produces terrorists that are not only more volatile but also more violent.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that there is a significant aspect of the crime-terror nexus which many of the existing debates have almost entirely ignored: the radicalisation and involvement in terrorism of individuals with criminal backgrounds. Our findings challenge many assumptions about radicalisation.

The individuals in our database often contradicted the notion that involvement in extremism correlates with religious behaviour. Some of them smoked cigarettes, drank alcohol, or took drugs. Others, in turn, observed religious rules but continued engaging in crime. Simply put: being pious is no guarantee that criminal behaviour has stopped, while acting like a 'gangster' does not preclude involvement in terrorism.

As a consequence, policymakers have to make to sure that relevant agencies become more effective at sharing relevant information across departments and 'disciplines'. Another priority are prisons. As this study has shown, prisons are like a microcosm of the crime-terror nexus where radicalisation, recruitment, networking and even terrorist plotting have taken place.

With increasing numbers of terrorism-related arrests and convictions, the significance of prisons in terrorist trajectories is unlikely to diminish.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, countering jihadists' criminal behaviour should enable law enforcement agencies to operate a so-called 'Al Capone approach' by bringing lesser charges against individuals in cases in which terrorism related offences are difficult to prove.<sup>36</sup> The mayor of the Brussels district of Molenbeek, where several of the terrorists that were involved in the Paris and Brussels attacks had lived, made precisely this point. She argued that 'radicalisation thrives on other forms of criminality', and that 'one way to tackle terrorism' was to begin by dealing with crime, and for states to engage with areas that, in many cases, they seem to have forgotten.<sup>37</sup>

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**TERRORISM AND DIGITALIZATION**  
*by Pierluigi Paganini*



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## TERRORISM AND DIGITALIZATION

### *by Pierluigi Paganini*

Technology is rapidly changing every aspect of our life, it is offering to the society amazing opportunities but it also dramatically enlarging our surface of attacks. Threat actors, including terrorists, could abuse technology to carry out a broad range of activities, from sabotage to the organization of complex operations involving people from different countries. Terrorists and extremist organizations could use technology for several purposes including:

- Propaganda
- Psychological warfare
- Recruitment and training
- Fundraising
- Data mining, information gathering
- Secure communications
- Cyber attacks
- Software distribution (e.g., mobile apps)
- Buying false documents
- Physical attacks

The conflicts in different areas of the planet, the political and diplomatic crisis between states and the diffusion of the hate culture in many states is advantaging the growth of terrorist organizations and the intensification of the activities of the most popular terrorist groups worldwide.

We are facing a global alert, intelligence and law enforcement agencies worldwide are warning about possible terrorist attacks in the major cities. In recent years, major cities worldwide have been the theatre of dramatic attacks with thousands of dead and injured people. Paris, Istanbul, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, London, and Jakarta are some of them.

Modern terrorism is looking with increasing interest to the technology, it is mainly considered as powerful amplifier of the magnitude of the attacks. Social media are contributing to the spectacularization of the attacks, amplifying the media effect with the result of instilling greater terror in the world community and favoring radicalization. The attacks are instantaneous and unpredictable, they can take place everywhere, in every moment and due to the media they could reach wide audience. The technology is bringing the terror into our homes, thanks to the mobile devices it can follow us everywhere. Our connected society is even more vulnerable to cyber-attacks.

The cyberspace is an environment without boundaries, it is easy for terrorists to find resources in both the clear and dark web, to conduct propaganda activities, to establish cover communication channels and gather information on potential targets. Every terrorist attack is like a dramatic representation, in which the Internet is the stage and we are the unaware audience.

"Terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press. Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is a theater", wrote Brian Jenkins, an international terrorism expert.

Unlike most people think, the Islamic State and al-Qaeda aren't the only organizations that leverage on the Internet and other technological means to carry out their activities. Many other groups include Hamas, the Hezbollah (Party of God), the Egyptian Al-Gama'a at Islamiyah, the Popular Democratic Liberation Front Party in Turkey (DHKP / C), the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), the Zapatista National Liberation Army (ELNZ), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) or the Mujahedin.

Let's start by analyzing online propaganda: Surfing the web, it is possible to find numerous websites used by terrorist organizations for sharing online propaganda. According to a study titled "Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation" conducted by Prof. Gabriel Weimann, the findings demonstrate a significant increase in the presence of terrorists on the Internet since 1998. The study reveals that in 1998 the number of websites containing terrorist material was only 2, in 2003 he counted 2,650 websites and in September 2015 the total number has reached 9,800. Since 2015 the online propaganda increased exponentially, primarily thanks to social media.

Terrorist and extremist groups use the web to recruit new members to join their organizations with various rules. The content is specifically crafted to share propaganda and influence public opinion in specific areas of the planet. Terrorist groups often use online propaganda to promote particular political cause and to threaten the enemies and faithless people. Today many terrorist groups and cells have their own websites and use social media like Twitter to establish a direct contact with their sympathizers. Another important advantage of using the Internet for propaganda and radicalization purposes is the anonymity that could be ensured under specific conditions. Terrorist organizations could operate online without being tracked with limited economic investments.

But probably the most important advantage of the online propaganda is that the web allows to make the communications among members and sympathizers interactive. This aspect represents the real innovation made possible by the technology. For the first time in history, groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are able to use the Internet and other technologies to interact with sympathizers and other members instantaneously. Each video and each post is carefully prepared, and its programming is meticulous and aims to reach the largest number of individuals.

Terrorists use the new social platforms like Facebook, Twitter and media services such as YouTube. Their language is direct, young, and allows reaching specific audiences by using images



with a high emotional impact. The online propaganda is multi-language, it uses a simple and direct language and reaches not only Arab people, in many cases it's specifically crafted to attract the attention of young people that are easy to radicalize.

The spatial and temporal distance from the place of the attack to the screen of our device is very short. Modern terrorists leverage widely available tools, such as smartphones, cameras and laptops, to spread the image of a massacre, for instance.

The dissemination of online propaganda is not casual, intelligence agencies confirmed that many terrorist organizations target their messages to specific audiences and geo-locations. Recently, intelligence and terrorism experts observed the narrow-casting of the online propaganda, which means that the information are targeted to a narrow audience. The narrow-casting targets specific segments of the public, contextualizing the practice to terrorism, which leads to the assumption that the propaganda content could be crafted to reach teenagers. Following online accounts used by terrorist organizations on different social media it is possible to find a lot of material designed for youngsters. Experts have discovered that several 'comic-style', high-impact videos and animations online, infographics and computer "games," especially First Person Shooter (or "FPS" games), are very popular among young people and effective as means of propaganda because they insert an individual or group of players directly into a combat scenario. The "first person" perspective makes this a favoured type of game in the worldwide gaming community, which itself is estimated to be composed of two billion players. Roughly 57% of those two billion play FPS games, most of them aged 35, and over 90% are male. This means that hundreds of million of technologically savvy young males could be reached by this specific form of propaganda.

Another important characteristic of games is that they allow a fully immersive experience that could be used to influence the minds of the players producing a sense of "transportation." Terrorist and extremist groups also use technology to share training material. They disseminate contents (i.e. video tutorials, manuals) that could teach members how to operate, how to avoid the detection of intelligence agencies and how to prepare an attack via the web. It is easy to find online manuals for the preparation of chemical weapons, bombs, instructions for kidnappings, manuals on techniques of torture, and further material to learn how to use social media without being tracked. Emergent technologies could be also abused to carry out physical attacks, let's think of drones for example.

In September 2017, then FBI director Christopher Wray warned of terrorists that were planning to use drones in attacks:

"We do know that terrorist organizations have an interest in using drones; we've seen that overseas already with some growing frequency and I think the expectation is it's coming here imminently," Wray testified before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

"I think they are relatively easy to acquire, relatively easy to operate, and I think quite difficult to disrupt and monitor."

It is easy for terrorist groups to buy drones and to operate them. The unmanned vehicles can be equipped with chemical weapons or explosives and subsequently be used to hit targets avoiding any security measure. In the past, other groups have used drones in terrorist attacks too, including the Hezbollah group who repeatedly used drones to probe Israel's air defenses, while al-Qaeda militants in Pakistan built small attack drones and conducted at least one successful test flight before 2013. Nicholas Rasmussen, US-Director of the National Counter-Terrorism Center, confirmed that counter-terrorism agencies have established teams of intelligence experts who are working full-time to prevent such kind of attacks. The experts are evaluating any possible attack scenario leveraging on drones as the attack vector.

"Two years ago this was not a problem. One year ago this was an emerging problem. Now it's a real problem, and so we are quickly trying to up our game," Rasmussen testified Wednesday.

Intelligence agencies worldwide fear possible terrorist attacks using drones for a long time. The U.S. Central Command had seen a significant increase in the use of weaponized and surveillance drones against Iraqi and American forces in Iraq and Syria since October 2016.

"U.S. Central Command told Fox News coalition troops have as many as 30 encounters a week with unmanned aerial vehicles. These drones are inexpensive ones modified to drop grenades or to surveil troop movements" reported FoxNews.

In January 2017, ISIS members announced the creation of an "Unmanned Aircraft of the Mujahideen" unit.

"The two men launched the slender machine and took videos from a second, smaller drone that shadowed its movements. The aircraft glided over the besieged city of Mosul, swooped close to an Iraqi army outpost and dropped its bomb, scattering Iraqi troops with a small blast that left one figure sprawled on the ground, apparently dead or wounded" reported The Washington Post.

"The incident was among dozens in recent weeks in a rapidly accelerating campaign of armed drone strikes by the Islamic State in northern Iraq. The terrorist group last month formally announced the establishment of a new "Unmanned Aircraft of the Mujahideen" unit, a fleet of modified drones equipped with bombs, and claimed that its drones had killed or wounded 39 Iraqi soldiers in a single week."

"A new source of horror for the apostates!" the group's official *al-Naba Newsletter* declared.

Fortunately, the drone attacks launched by ISIS on U.S. and Iraqi troops had no significant effect, but American officials believe terrorists have improved their ability to operate fleets of unmanned aircrafts. Officials fear the use of weaponized drones by lone individuals and small groups of extremists. Commercial off-the-shelf technology can be used to lethally target individuals, and to wreak havoc. Unfortunately, many states are using armed drones in combat (let's think of Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey), which increases the likelihood that also sophisticated unmanned aircrafts could get into the wrong hands. Terrorist organizations can purchase or steal a drone from a rogue state or corrupt military and then use them to carry out an attack. The last generation of drones could be remotely controlled or programmed to hit a target to deliver chemical or biological agents, a scaring scenario that urge the adoption of new defensive measures to mitigate the threat. The Internet could advantage terrorists in acquiring information necessary to build weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

In 2017, the UK security minister Ben Wallace declared "terrorist groups" as groups wanting to carry out mass casualty attacks in Britain by 'whatever means possible.' According to the minister, members of ISIS have "no moral barrier" to using chemical weapons against the helpless population. He confirmed that there were reports of ISIS using chemical weapons in the areas under control in Syria and Iraq. Moroccan authorities had apprehended a cell in February 2017. The report quotes Moroccan authorities had arrested a cell of terrorists in February which was in possession of substances that could be used to make a chemical weapon. Wallace also cited a recent report issued by the Europol that warned of such chemical threat.

In December 2015, a European Parliament report has confirmed that ISIS had already smuggled CBRN material into the EU and warned of WMD attacks. The report confirmed that ISIS was recruiting foreign fighters with specific competencies in physics, chemistry, and computer science. Wallace told the Sunday Times that ISIS was planning to conduct "definitely mass casualty attacks" to harm as many people as possible. Also, in this case, technology plays a crucial role, as terrorists could establish covert channels to communicate with other groups that provide them with CBRN material and use the Internet to gather and share information on how to prepare a weapon to use in their attacks.

Online resources could be used by terrorists to gather information about potential targets to conduct passive reconnaissance through open sources. Experts pointed out that many web services could be used to obtain information related to specific locations to target. Google Maps is able to give attackers aerial photos of the location where terrorists plan to conduct the attack. These images are a mine of information about the presence of supervisory staff, check points, fence, entry points, and much more.

Other information on a place of interest can be gathered by analyzing social media, in particular images shared by people, and personnel working in these locations could include precious information such as details of the interior of targeted buildings.

A crucial aspect for every terrorist operation is that communications and technologies are rapidly changing the way of information exchange among members of the organizations. Initially, terrorists were exchanging information using custom-made applications; today, however, encrypted instant messaging applications represent a privileged mean for communications. In May 2014, the web intelligence firm Recorded Future published an interesting research on the use of encryption made by al-Qaeda after the "Snowden leaks". The study reported that members of al-Qaeda were developing a series of new encryption software in response to NSA surveillance.

Since 2007, al-Qaeda groups have developed the encryption software Mujahideen Secrets used to protect online and cellular communications, but according to the report of intelligence the militants were using different new encryption tools and communication channels (news channels like mobile phones, instant messaging).

The following tools were designed starting from the Mujahideen Secrets tool used by terrorists of al-Qaeda:

1. **Tashfeer al-Jawwal**, a mobile encryption platform developed by the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) and released in September 2013.
2. **Asrar al-Ghurabaa**, another alternative encryption program developed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham and released in November 2013, around the same time the group broke away from the main al-Qaeda, following a power struggle.
3. **Amn al-Mujahid**, an encryption software program developed by Al-Fajr Technical Committee, which is a mainstraim al-Qaeda organization and was released in December 2013.

In a second report published by Recorded Future in collaboration with experts at ReversingLabs it is explained that groups belonging to al-Qaeda's media arms were showing a growing interest in mobile technology, and that Android is the preferred platform for these groups due to the large availability and affordability of Android phones in their countries.

Since the first report by the Recorded Future firm, the group Al-Fajr released a new Android encryption app in June 2014, while GIMF also released a new version of their Android app. In January 2016, experts from the Ghost Security Group discovered a new Andoid app for encrypted communication which integrates other mobile applications specifically developed to share propaganda content and recruiting material.

As social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook crack down on extremist propaganda, ISIS and other terrorist groups are exploiting encrypted instant messaging apps such as Telegram and Signal. However, intelligence analysts are observing a new trend, groups like ISIS are seemingly exploiting lesser-known messaging apps such as RocketChat. The ISIS-linked "Afaaq Electronic Foundation" published a technical manual that provides instructions on how to install and anonymously use RocketChat. As of January 8, 2019, analysts estimated that there were over 700 users on the server that houses ISIS's channels. It is quite easy for members to join the platform, as it only requires a private invitation link to be shared by sympathizers, and an email address.

Another cross-platform instant messenger app used by terrorist groups is Viber. In 2019, ISIS announced a Nashir News Agency account on Viber that was later removed, but ISIS-linked media groups and supporters have long used this platform. The above applications demonstrate the increasing interest of terrorist groups in technology, especially the Internet. Another opportunity offered by the web is represented by the possibility to acquire counterfeit documents that could be used by terrorists to assume fake identities and bypass control of law enforcement agencies. Online, and in particular in the cyber criminal underground, there are many black markets where it is possible to buy fake documents.

Terrorist groups are also increasing their hacking capabilities. Some experts believe that in the next years members of these organizations will be able to launch cyber attacks against critical infrastructure of Western states. Online members of extremist groups could gather information of equipment used in critical infrastructure and acquire tools and exploit for them in the criminal underground. Back in 2015, the popular cyber security expert Mikko Hyppönen declared that the Islamic State has the offensive capabilities to hit its adversaries: "The Islamic State is the first extremist group that has a credible offensive cyber capability," said F-Secure Chief Research Officer Hyppönen, speaking at the Wall Street Journal's WSJD Live conference in Laguna Beach, California. "Clearly, this situation isn't getting better. It's getting worse".

Terrorists could attack a critical infrastructure to sabotage, or computer systems to steal sensitive data to use in other attacks. Another risk connected to the use of technology is the recruitment of groups of cyber mercenaries that could be paid by terrorist organizations to train their members or to help them in carrying out cyber attacks.

ISIS is trying to recruit hackers and experts to involve them in its hacking campaigns. In the past, intelligence experts discovered that members of ISIS were willing to pay hackers in the Indian hacking community to hack into government websites and gain access to sensitive documents. At the time, the terrorists promised up to \$10,000 for every successful cyber attack.

The facts described in this paper demonstrate the increasing importance of technology for terrorist and extremist organizations. Technology gives terrorism a global connotation and amplifies the effects of their operations.

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**THE CURRENT AND FUTURE THREAT POSED BY ISLAMIST  
AND RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST TERRORISM IN EUROPE**  
*by Stefan Goertz*





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## THE CURRENT AND FUTURE THREAT POSED BY ISLAMIST AND RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST TERRORISM IN EUROPE

*by Stefan Goertz*

Both the current right-wing extremist terrorist attacks in Germany – including the assassination of Walter Lübcke on 2 June, 2019, a German politician, member of the CDU party and president of the governmental district of Kassel, as well as the attempted attack on the synagogue in Halle on 9 October 2019 which caused two casualties close to the synagogue – and the increasing number of Islamist terrorist attacks that have either been committed or prevented by safety authorities since 2004 clearly illustrate the historic threat which is posed by right-wing extremist and Islamist terrorism in Europe at present and in the future. Since 2004, the year of the Islamist terrorist attack in Madrid, over 80 Islamist acts have been carried out or prevented by safety authorities in Europe. In those cases where attacks were successful, about 780 people were killed and nearly 3725 injured.<sup>1</sup> The attacks were registered mainly in Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Great Britain.

According to EUROPOL, seven Islamist attacks were committed in Europe in 2018; all attacks were organized by individuals, killing 13 people in total. 16 Islamist attacks were prevented by safety authorities or failed,<sup>2</sup> the latter including attacks with biological weapons that were thwarted by authorities (Paris, Cologne and Sardinia). This shows that not only omnipresent weapons such as knives, axes and vehicles are used for terrorist attacks, but also nuclear, biological and chemical weapons (CBRN warfare) that are harder to come by. Furthermore, the numbers provided by EUROPOL state that 511 individuals suspected of Islamist terrorism were arrested by security authorities in 2018; in the years before 705 individuals (2017) and even 718 individuals (2016) were arrested.<sup>3</sup>

According to EUROPOL's information, the number of individuals suspected of right-wing extremist terrorism that were arrested by police authorities amounts to 34 (2014), 11 (2015), 12 (2016), 20 (2017) and 44 (2018).<sup>4</sup> In 2015, nine right-wing extremist motivated attacks were committed in Europe, one attack in 2016, five attacks in 2017 and one attack in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

### **Islamist and right-wing extremist individuals – lone wolves**

Analyzing Islamist attacks in Europe since 2004 leads to the conclusion that all attacks can be divided into two categories: one, there are major events or multiple tactical scenarios organized by so-called "hit teams", and two, there is low level-terrorism committed by Islamist individuals or small cells. As regards the operative and tactical independence/autarky or the organizational/logistical control of Islamist individuals and/or terrorist cells, it can be noted that the difference between independently operating Islamist individuals/cells and loose members or supporters of jihadist organizations (jihadist movements) is rather blurred.<sup>6</sup>

An evaluation of the dozens of attacks committed by Islamist individuals since 2004 emphasizes this grey area between independently operating Islamist individual attackers and their links to the Islamist/Salafist scene or even to international jihadist organizations, such as the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda. EUROPOL currently stated in this regard the following: "Lone actors,

however, seldom act in total isolation. They often maintain relations in loose networks or small unstructured groups, and may receive material and/or moral support from like-minded individuals."<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the organization and logistics of terrorist attacks, politically motivated terrorist individuals usually operate independently from any organization, network or group. They are, however, inspired by the ideology or ideas of a terrorist organization, and therefore act in line with their strategy after all. According to the most recent state of investigations, the right-wing extremist attack in Halle, Germany on 9th October 2019 – the day of the latest Yom Kippur holiday – was committed by right-wing extremist and terrorist individual attacker (lone wolf) Stephan Balliet. This attack resulted in two deaths and left two severely injured. The 27-year-old far-right extremist terrorist had planned to commit mass murder in the synagogue of Halle but failed due to the barricaded entrance door. He then shot a costumer of a kebab shop. The German safety authorities had no knowledge or information of any kind regarding previous far-right activities by Balliet. The suspect filmed the attack online with video and streamed it to the gaming website Twitch. The entire video stream can be compared to the far-right extremist Christchurch mosque shootings in New Zealand that killed 51 Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult for safety authorities to prevent terrorist attacks unless individuals communicate – virtually or in reality – their attacks before they carry them out. For this reason, constitution protection authorities must monitor both virtual networks of far-right extremists and terrorists and real-life groups. Of course, this creates various problems for safety authorities.<sup>9</sup> Far-right extremist terrorism by so-called lone wolves stems from the neo-Nazi idea of a leaderless resistance which became popular in the 1990s and originated from American Ku Klux Klan-leader Louis Beam, who strongly promoted the tactics of small cells and individual attackers, with no organizational or hierarchical structures. Experiences with far-right terrorist organizations in the United States teach us that the bigger and more centrally led a potentially violent neo-Nazi group appeared to be, the faster and easier it was for U.S.-safety authorities to detect and fight them.<sup>10</sup>

### **Anti-Semitism in Islamism and right-wing extremism**

Anti-Semitism is one of the core ideological elements for both Islamism/Islamist terrorism and right-wing extremism. The enemy image of Judaism forms a central pillar upon which the lines of arguments and agitation of Islamist and far-right groups are based on<sup>11</sup>. The term "anti-Semitism" describes the politically, socially, racially or religiously motivated hostility towards Jews, according to German constitution protection authorities.<sup>12</sup> Expressions and behaviours aimed at one or several Jewish people (or entire Jewish communities) are considered anti-Semitic, and it is insignificant whether this person or community is united within the State of Israel or beyond. One characteristic element of all Islamist organizations is the so-called "Islamist anti-Semitism" developed by Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb.

As a result, the key idea that "Jews secretly are seeking for global supremacy" or are already exerting such power and therefore in control of the world's politics and economy is a dominant element of Islamist ideology.<sup>13</sup>

Anti-Semitism continues to play an important role for European far-right extremists, as it poses a steady agitation potential and is a characteristic feature for this sort of ideology, even though all anti-Semitic agitation within the right-wing spectrum has been subject to the ups and downs of day-to-day political events for years. As of right now, the far-right propaganda is dominated by other enemy images and topics, and far-right agitators are currently expecting more connections to public discourse. "Foreigners", especially asylum seekers and Muslims, as well as political decision-makers are part of such enemy images. According to evaluations by German constitution protection authorities, topics including "foreign infiltration" and a supposed threat of losing the national identity are the main focus of concern.<sup>14</sup>

On Social Media channels, blogs and online comments a significant increase of anti-Semitic statements has been registered. Very often, anti-Semitic stereotypes are being used and the hatred towards Jews is put into criticism by the State of Israel. The anonymity the Internet provides also enduces anti-Semites to openly express their hatred towards Jews. Hatred-filled language goes beyond virtual spaces when offenders believe they are acting and speaking for the people and in accordance with parts of society.<sup>15</sup>

#### **The transition from far-right extremism to far-right terrorism in Germany: Current cases**

On 7 March, 2018, and following a year-long trial, the Dresden Criminal Division of the fourth regional court of appeals (Saxony) sentenced eight Germans, aged between 20 and 40, to between four and ten years in prison for forming the far-right terrorist Freital Group in connection with attempted murder, producing explosive devices, causing grievous bodily harm and criminal property damage.<sup>16</sup> The Federal Prosecutor had initiated a second preliminary investigation proceeding against nine alleged supporters of the Freital Group in 2016 but had to hand this case over to the Public Prosecutor's Office in 2017. Only on 28 March 2018, executive measures against the ten alleged supporters of the far right terrorist Freital Group took place when the police carried out searches in Bavaria, Lower Saxony and Saxony and seized data storage devices, weapons and National Socialist devotionalia. All defendants had met during protests against a new accommodation centre for asylum seekers in 2015 in Freital, Saxony, and within a very short time had formed the Freital Group in order to commit (terrorist) violent and criminal acts together.<sup>17</sup>

On 5 July 2018, the District Court Neuruppin (Brandenburg) sentenced an accused far-right extremist to four years and six months in prison for attempted arson, and an accomplice to suspended time of two years. The principal defendant had caused a fire by throwing two self-made incendiary devices at a housing centre for asylum seekers in Kremmen (Brandenburg). The fire was extinguished by an employee of the guard service at the housing centre, without causing any damages to the accommodation.<sup>18</sup>

The District Court Dresden sentenced a 31-year-old far-right extremist to nine years and eight months prison for attempted murder and arson and for producing an explosive device on 31 August, 2018. The defendant had detonated a pipe bomb at the Turkish Fatih Camii Mosque and in the outer zone of the International Congress Center in the eastern German city of Dresden on 26 September, 2016. At the time of the crime, the imam and his family were inside the Fatih Mosque. According to the German court's ruling, the sentence was carried out due to the defendant's xenophobic and racist, inhuman attitude. This specific case is a good example for radicalization processes of individuals within a cloudy, xenophobic spectrum, at the end of which the engagement in a serious (violent) offence is very likely.<sup>19</sup>

The investigation proceeding of the Federal Public Prosecutor pursuant to Art. 192a StGB (German Criminal Code) against an alleged far-right extremist-terrorist group called Nordadler (Northern Eagle), that has so far mainly been communicating virtually, proves the possibility of easy transitions from right-wing extremism to right-wing terrorism. The members of this group supposedly exchanged information online on how to procure military equipment and arms and how to manufacture explosive devices. Additionally, the accused group members are suspected of creating lists of political opponents in order to hold those persons accountable for the event of a possible state collapse.<sup>20</sup>

On 12 September 2018, the police searched the homes and workplaces of six accused who have been connected with the violent, far-right extremist, neo-Nazi group *Kameradschaft Aryans* (Camaraderie Aryans) which was founded back in December of 2016 in Bavaria, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt, with about 15 founding members. The camaraderie was established with the aim of engaging in an armed struggle against the destruction of the German people, as imposed upon by German politics according to the group's view. The searches took place within the framework of an investigation process initiated by the Federal Public Prosecutor and grounded on suspicion of forming a terrorist organization pursuant to Art. 129a of the German Criminal Code.<sup>21</sup>

The National Socialist Underground (*Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund, NSU*) was a far-right extremist terrorist group responsible for nine counts of murder of small business owners with migration backgrounds, the murder of a police officer, two bomb attacks, 15 robberies and at least 43 attempted murders. On 11 July, 2018, the Munich Higher Regional Court sentenced Beate Zschäpe to life imprisonment for her complicity in the offences, for her membership in a terror organization and arson. Ralf Wohlleben, Carsten Schultze, Holger Gerlach and André Eminger were convicted of aiding and abetting and received between two and a half to ten years in prison. All of the accused appealed; the Federal Prosecutor appealed only in the case of André Eminger.<sup>22</sup> The Higher Regional Court determined a particular severity of guilt in the case of main accused Beate Zschäpe. This made imprisonment with ordinary parole after 15 years legally possible but almost impossible in practice. Although the Public Prosecutor demanded it, the court did not order a preventive detention following Zschäpe's imprisonment.<sup>23</sup>

In March 2017, the Munich Higher Regional Court sentenced four members of the far-right extremist terrorist Oldschool Society (OSS) group to prison between three to five years for the forming of a terrorist organization pursuant to Art. 129a StGB. The court had come to the conclusion that this very group had aimed at expelling people of non-German origin out of Germany by the use of violence. In pursuit of this aim, bomb attacks on asylum centres had been planned and the far-right organization would have accepted the deaths and potential victims their plans would have caused. Therefore, the judgment is final.<sup>24</sup>

On 27 April, 2017 the Federal Prosecutor charged two more alleged members of the Oldschool Society terrorist right-wing terrorist-extremist group before the state security senate of the Dresden Higher Regional Court. Both were accused of forming a terrorist organization and also for the membership in a terrorist organization pursuant to Art. 192a StGB, as well as for the preparation acts to causing an explosion according to Art. 310 StGB. Together with members of the Oldschool Society, they had allegedly planned to prepare a bomb attack on a refugee accommodation centre in Borna, Saxony in May 2015. For this reason, on 6 May 2015 a police operation took place against this group which stopped them from carrying out their terrorist action plan.<sup>25</sup>

On 24 August 2018, the Dresden Regional Court sentenced two members of the far-right extremist group *Freie Kameradschaft Dresden* (Free Camaraderie Dresden, FKD) for membership in a criminal organization, aggravated battery and for causing an explosion to prison between eight months to three years. Both accused were found guilty of having been active members within the Camaraderie and for having participated in violent acts against asylum seekers and political opponents in this regard. All offences had been planned precisely and well in advance. The *Freie Kameradschaft Dresden* itself has now been dissolved.<sup>26</sup>

Aforementioned far-right extremist neo-Nazi group *Kameradschaft Aryans* (Camaraderie Aryans) is also another example of formations where violence can clearly be seen. For maintaining a uniform appearance in public and during meetings, Aryans' members usually wear clothes including a logo of the group, represented as imperial eagle with black, white and red wings and the letters "Aryans" surrounded by a laurel wreath. The group operates on a supra-regional level and can be associated with the German neo-Nazi spectrum.<sup>27</sup> Already in the 2016 Annual Report on the Protection of the German Constitution, the domestic intelligence service (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV*) had warned against the continuous virulent danger of far-right terrorist potentials, which are especially apparent within the anti-asylum-agitation context.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, on 16 March 2016, the German Federal Minister of the Interior banned the right-wing extremist organization *Weisse Wölfe Terrorcrew* (White Wolves Terror Crew) in accordance with the Associations Act. The WWT-group's purpose and activities did both not comply with German Criminal Law and were contrary to the constitutional order of the Republic of Germany. The group first made an appearance in 2008 and became active nationwide later. Its members attracted negative attention with their neo-Nazi propaganda

and violent crimes. At the peak of their spread, the group was represented in ten federal states and counted between 70 and 100 members, all characterized by a considerable propensity for violence and aggression towards people with migration backgrounds, (alleged) members of the extreme left and the police, their actions very often taking place in everyday situations.<sup>29</sup>

### **The current threat of Islamist terrorism in Europe**

According to the Austrian Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counter-terrorism, the biggest current threat is posed by Islamist terrorism in Austria.<sup>30</sup> Although there have been less Foreign Terrorist Fighters returning to Austria than expected so far, this group of jihadist returnees poses a considerable risk which is highly difficult to predict for the internal security of the Austrian state. So-called lone wolves (individual attackers) and very small jihadist groups are substantial risks too, as they often carry out attacks by using cutting or stabbing weapons, firearms or motor vehicles.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of 2018, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counter-terrorism was informed of the identity of 320 Austrians who had actively participated or are still participating in the wars in Syria and Iraq. It is presumed that about 58 Austrians lost their lives in Syria/Iraq and 93 persons have returned to Austria; another 62 persons of Austrian origin could be prevented from exiting the country and are still residing in Austria. It is estimated that 107 Austrian jihadists are currently remaining in Syria/Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

There are two main threat scenarios posed by jihadist organizations and actors right now and in the future: one, the big attacks and multiple tactical scenarios planned and carried out by international jihadist organizations such as IS and al-Qaeda, and two, there are low level-attacks committed by Islamist lone wolves. Greater attacks and multiple scenarios are usually planned and carried out according to a hierarchical, top-down-principle by global jihadist associations, and they can also be referred to as "Mumbai/Paris/Brussels-style attacks". Such acts are committed by hit-teams (with or without (para-)military training and/or combat experience) and present a significant challenge for safety authorities and rescue services of Western states, due to their simultaneousness and the time-displaced modus of the attacks.<sup>33</sup>

The death of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, the longtime calif of IS who committed suicide with explosives during an operation by U.S. special forces in the northwestern town Barisha near the Turkish border, was considered an important milestone in international security policy events, especially from the U.S.' point of view ("milestone in the war against the Islamic State – and, more generally, in the struggle against terrorism")<sup>34</sup>. However, the assumption that Al Baghdadi's death also be the end of the Islamic State as a terrorist organization with global reach must surely be questioned.

Islamist terrorism (jihadism) is the sustainable fight for jihadist goals that must be reached by committing attacks on life, limb and property and therefore a strategic choice of a rational,

sensibly acting agent. Within jihadism, terrorist violence is a tool in the form of a communication act, used for achieving religious/political goals. The current global jihadism is characterized by a decentralized network structure on sub-state level, with multiple private sources of money and logistics, a multi-national character of its members and – unlike the ethnic-national terrorism (ETA, IRA) – very internationally oriented due to its global reach and religious/ideological focus.

Jihadism of the 21st century benefits from the developments of globalization, open borders, weak or no controls of borders and new and modern communication tools. Arising groups and agents use both weak and failed states of the so-called second and third world (developing countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia) and European states with strict codes of banking secrecy, such as Switzerland or Luxemburg. International jihadist organizations dispose of organizational structures like cells and sleepers in Western, democratic states, and by networking within the Islamist milieu they also have access in African and Caucasian regions, as well as the Near and Middle East. Their jihadist ideology serves as a Trojan horse by which they infiltrate conflicts which have originally grown from regional, political, economic and ethnic conflicts. In addition to al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (IS) is at present and in the future one of the two jihadist major organizations operating worldwide. IS has a broad supporter basis in both the Islamic and the Western world. These two Islamist-jihadist movements are historically very closely connected – because of the many possibilities the Internet provides for both, among other things – and share the same ideology.<sup>35</sup>

#### **Conclusion: Possible correlation**

Both the Islamist and the far-right terrorism forms reject Western democracies and their constitutional systems. Instead, they both strive for a system change and share anti-Semitism and anti-pluralism als key ideological elements. The far-right attack on Muslims during the Christchurch mosque shootings (New Zealand) on 15 March, 2019 which killed 51 people and injured dozens clearly shows that far-right terrorists consider Muslims their enemies and potential attack targets on a ideological and tactical-operative level. This could lead to a future spiral of violence of politically motivated violence. Also, as over a million Muslims has fled to different European states in the past years, especially to Germany, dealing with refugees is an issue which has been used and still is being used by far-right extremists and terrorists ideologically and propagandistically. In relation to the refugee issue, there is a strong connection with Islamophobia among far-right extremists worldwide. Islamophobic agitation and violence committed by far-right extremism pose a potential correlation with the growing number of Salafism supporters who are growing more and more violent throughout the past years in Europe.

Assemblages and demonstrations are potential targets for both Islamist and far-right extremist terrorists. The existence of thousands of websites originating from Islamist and far-right extremists is particularly worth mentioning, as they facilitate virtual radicalization processes. Even within the so-called gaming scene, Islamists/Islamist terrorists as well as far-right extremists/far-right terrorists have become active.

Finally, it should be noted that both Islamism and Islamist terrorism as well as far-right extremism and far-right extremist terrorism are currently and in the future posing threats for the public security of European states.

*NOTE: This article was translated from its original language (German) into English.*



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## SOURCES:

- <sup>1</sup> These numbers are based on the following document: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2019): Übersicht ausgewählter islamistisch-terroristischer Anschläge; <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af-islamismus-und-islamistischer-terrorismus/zahlen-und-fakten-islamismus/zuf-is-uebersicht-ausgewaehlter-islamistisch-terroristischer-anschlaege> (30.11.2019). Committed attacks or prevented attacks of Islamist acts since 18 March 2019 were collected by the author.
- <sup>2</sup> EUROPOL (2019): European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019, p. 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 29.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 61.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Goertz, S. (2018): Terrorismusabwehr. Zur aktuellen Bedrohung durch den islamistischen Terrorismus in Deutschland und Europa. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, p. 23-24.
- <sup>7</sup> EUROPOL 2019, p. 32.
- <sup>8</sup> Vgl. Goertz, S. (2019): Rechtsextremismus und Rechtsterrorismus in Deutschland. In: Sicherheits-Berater 21/2019, S. 408.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2019): Antisemitismus im Islamismus, S. 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af-rechtsextremismus/was-ist-rechtsextremismus> (30.11.2019).
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Bundesministerium des Innern/Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2019): Verfassungsschutzbericht 2018, S. 58-60.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 59.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 60.
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/nsu-urteile-lebenslange-haft-fuer-beate-zschaepe-15685433.html> (30.11.2019); <https://www.veko-online.de/titel/rechtsextremismus-und-rechtsextremistischer-terrorismus-in-deutschland.html> (30.11.2019).
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Bundesministerium des Innern/Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2018): Verfassungsschutzbericht 2017, S. 55; <https://www.veko-online.de/titel/rechtsextremismus-und-rechtsextremistischer-terrorismus-in-deutschland.html> (30.11.2019).
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 55-56.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 58.
- <sup>28</sup> Bundesministerium des Innern/Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2017): Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016, S. 43; <https://www.veko-online.de/titel/rechtsextremismus-und-rechtsextremistischer-terrorismus-in-deutschland.html> (30.11.2019).
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>30</sup> <https://www.bvt.gv.at/401/files/Verfassungsschutzbericht2018.pdf>, S. 11 (30.11.2019).
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 19-20.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/10/29/al-baghdadis-death-and-that-presidential-speech/> (30.11.2019).

<sup>35</sup> Goertz, S. (2017): Der neue Jihadismus und seine Basis. In: Die Polizei 10/2017, p. 297; Goertz, S. (2018): Der "Islamische Staat". Sein Aufstieg, sein Niedergang, seine Zukunft. In: ÖMZ 2/2018, p. 205.



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