

RESEARCH STUDY

EICTP VIENNA RESEARCH PAPERS ON TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM:

**KEY DETERMINANTS OF TRANSNATIONAL
TERRORISM IN THE ERA OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND.
TRAJECTORY, DISRUPTION AND THE WAY FORWARD.**

VOLUME II

March 2021



E·I·C·T·P

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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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Media owner, editor, producer: EICTP

Place of publication: Esslinggasse 17/5, 1010 Wien

Proof-reading and formal editing: EICTP

Graphic Design: Citypress GmbH

Print: Citypress GmbH

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FOREWORD

The still spreading pandemic has put our accelerated modern interdependent way of life to a screeching halt. Governments across the globe have implemented strict measures to fight the endemic spread of SARS COV-2. The unthinkable has become reality and civil liberties are still being limited under the title of tackling the virus.

It has been a relative shock to find how vulnerable our sophisticated society in fact is against such threats, and how difficult it is for both politics and administration to switch into a more efficient "operational modus". Who would have thought in 2019 that nationwide curfews, closings of bars, restaurants and shops, as well as massive interventions in our everyday lives would become the new order of the day throughout Europe? Against the backdrop of this global disruption that affects all areas of our lives, from business to security, almost everything that determined our existence seems to be subsumed under the paradigm of global health necessities. Other than the necessary focus on the fight against the pandemic and its consequences for both economy and society, it is also important not to lose concentration on the security policy-related aspects connected with it.

Taking into consideration what kind of implications the coronavirus has on security and transnational terrorism in particular seems to be the essential task of eminent scholarship in the field. For that reason, the instant volume is dedicated to a thorough investigation and courageous exploration of trends and key factors that will likely shape and determine the phenomenon of politically motivated extremist violence for the time to come. Some of the most distinguished international scholars dealing with terrorism provide an accurate analysis of what is currently going on and what has to be expected in the near future. Moreover, some of the expert contributions shed a light on actually new developments with regard to terrorism, that are introduced and discussed.

I am confident that this volume of edited expert contributions will enrich the ongoing academic and public debate and contribute to a better understanding of recent just as future developments of transnational terrorism. Have a pleasant reading!

Herbert Scheibner
President E.I.C.T.P.

INTRODUCTION

By Nicolas Stockhammer

This volume of collected analyses by some of the leading international experts in the field is dedicated to an examination and explorative in-depth assessment of the key-determinants of transnational terrorism in and beyond the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses not only on the disruptive impact the global health crisis has on the phenomenon of Salafi-jihadist terrorism in particular, but on politically motivated violence in general too. Also, it offers a reflection on possible root causes and future trends / developments of terrorism in its multiple phenomenology.

From a wider scope, based on a meta-theoretical contextual analysis of "crises", "security" and "resilience", *Herfried Münkler* stresses the necessity to sharpen these conceptual notions to reassure a common understanding in particular among policymakers and scholars. Münkler pledges for a constant (re-)examination, i.e. a consequent conceptual adjustment to guarantee notional sensibility and systemic flexibility towards a changing environment in the field of observation. Diffuse threats like the pandemic or indiscriminate terrorist attacks directly affect the unstable collective psyche of our Western post-heroic societies. According to Münkler the antagonism of "resilience" and "vulnerability" will set the scene for an academic discussion about security for the next years to come.

Daniel Byman elaborates in his contribution on the geopolitical game-changers that impact global terrorism. He identifies eight major security-political developments that will arguably (re-)shape international terrorism. The US, as the main key player, will hence certainly be able to influence the geopolitical scene by its foreign policy approach as well as potentially resulting terrorist manifestations. In particular, the Biden administration has all cards in hand, but also faces several security challenges. A constantly evolving threat, terrorism will be more and more significantly driven by technological developments in different spheres such as information, communication and biotech. Artificial intelligence could also become an important factor. For Daniel Byman counter-terrorism requires a sound proportion, both when it comes to operative but also structural measures.

In his reflections *Boaz Ganor* concentrates on COVID-19 and global terrorism as two pandemics. He observes structural similarities and parallels between the two phenomena, as both would "cause and foster indiscriminate fear" and are promoted by contagion. The pandemic infection equals the ideological inspiration to extremist violence. Both would "challenge and subvert the public's trust in its governments and decisionmakers, destabilize law and order" and cause severe economic harm. To tackle SARS-CoV2 and transnational terrorism alike, a functioning cross-border cooperation is crucially needed. Ganor claims the importance of enlisting the public to fight these crises adequately and provides further valuable suggestions for counter-terrorism.

According to *Brian Jenkins*, the trajectory of terrorism reflects political and technological developments. In his contribution Jenkins looks at some of the "already apparent direct

effects" of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorist thinking and cautiously draws upon a "range of possible effects, focusing on those that might contribute to or impact the nature of future political violence". It is naturally hard to tell whether some of the factors identified that will influence terrorism are rooted in pre-existing social and political conditions or whether they result from the grievances in a post-pandemic world. Brian Jenkins discusses many of these factors and conditions in detail.

In the light of the pandemic and the intention of Islamist terrorist groups to capitalize on the crisis, *Seth Jones* asks in his chapter two crucial questions: "How did Salafi-jihadists attempt to take advantage of the COVID-19 crisis? How successful were they in achieving their objectives?". His answer mostly relies on primary source documents including respective statements of Salafi-jihadists. Their attempt to profit from COVID-19 largely failed, as Jones suggests. In his account he analyzes the discrepancy between rhetoric, intentions and facts. Seth Jones gives reasons why the Salafi-jihadist apocalyptic predictions of a collapse of Western rules-based order has not materialized, considering the major challenges these extremist movements are currently facing.

In his account, *Sam Mullins* puts the efficiency and success of violent extremists of all kinds exploiting crisis induced instability by into question. Based on case-evidence, extremists' intentions "seize upon the opportunity, putting their own spin on events in an attempt to promote their respective causes and regain some of the attention lost to the virus" are examined in the light of actual terrorist activities and their foundation in a COVID-19 related insecurity paradigm. Dominant "narratives, which tend to (over-)emphasize the exacerbating effects of the virus on security" are deconstructed. Mullins consequently analyzes different areas like "recruitment, fundraising, health-related governance, conducting attacks, and the impact of the pandemic on CT".

Similarly, *Raffaello Pantucci* puts a light on a possible future "clear causal link (...) between the current events and the longer-term changes that might take place in terms of politically motivated violence and terrorism". In a post-COVID-19 era the state will become more powerful, first as crisis manager and after some time as the administrator. This may cause anti-governmental and anti-establishment movements that resort to violence. Pantucci moreover compares correspondent developments in the USA but also concerning China (mainly abroad) as emerging globally dominant players. Resentments against governments or nations may become a significant driver for politically motivated violence.

Taking a shift in observation, *Carolyn Görzig* focuses on the current Generation Z, the digital natives and post-millennials, a generation that uses cyber-space as a catalyst for reality. Accordingly, terrorism involving this generation will more and more focus on the Internet and the power this infinite platform exerts on politically motivated violence. Digitalization is expected to dramatically change the arena and actors of terrorism. It cultivates a narrative of

radicalization and inter-generational conflict. Görzig emphasizes that Rapoport's four wave model of modern terrorism has to be evaluated in the spot of specific generations and their preferences. The author also addresses the question of life-long learning, that of generations but also of (terrorist) organizations. Digitalization very likely manifests both: a challenge and a chance.

Stochastic terrorism is according to *Karolin Schwarz* the dominant form of single actor terrorism for the time to come. Based on recent case evidence particularly in the field of right-wing terrorism, "the concept suggests that terrorist acts that appear randomly are the effect of mass media radicalization". Old wine in new casks? Not at all! Given the outreach of social media, Manichean enemy constructions on digital platforms contribute immensely to lone actor radicalization. Moreover, in this specific virtual space, the dissemination of imagery of the attacks and propaganda material is secured. In her account Schwarz examines the implications this trend has on perpetrators, their environment and the phenomenon of lone actor terrorism itself.

In his latest works *Petter Nesser* has conclusively shed a light on foiled attacks as a matrix that can be used to assess new *modi operandi* as well as counter-terrorist ambitions and concrete measures. In his piece for this volume, he compares foiled vs. launched plots based on solid quantitative evidence. Far from being a standard approach, Nesser argues that analyses of foiled plots should become a good practice for terrorism research, although the existing documentary sources (databases) are not yet taking this fully into consideration. This holistic methodology could contribute to a balanced threat assessment and also a clear understanding of the efficiency of Western counter-terrorism. A research design based only on launched attacks would, according to Nesser, fail to describe the whole picture. What is hence needed is a comprehensive approach to both foiled and launched attacks.

Dirk Freudenberg's contribution is dedicated to hybridity as determining concept for conflict and politically motivated violence. Hybrid threats are becoming the most common specification, as the differentiation between war and peace is slowly eroding and binary conflicts seem to disappear. It is rather grey zone, asymmetric and unconventional warfare which emerges as the characteristic form of conflict. Terrorism can be considered as a sphere of violence, where anarchical organizational learning will consequently lead to hybrid *modi operandi*. "The hybrid possibilities in cyberspace in particular show that the strict separation of internal and external security is coming under further pressure". Terrorist actors use the full range of conventional and irregular means "in combat". This implies different methods in counter-terrorism.

In my assessment I focus on a multi-variant research design that is based on an algorithm-processed (Foresight Strategy Cockpit, FSC) trend- and key factor analysis of transnational terrorism. Based on the question which foresight-relevant key drivers will likely constitute a period of 5-10 years in the surrounding field ("Umfeldanalyse") of transnational terrorism

and the phenomenon itself, a cross-impact-analysis is conducted in order to reconstruct the interdependence of the identified key-factors and outline to which extent they influence and "drive" each other. Given its timeliness, COVID-19 is undoubtedly the main driver for the time to come. Most interestingly its implications on the other constituting factors of transnational terrorism indicate a paradigm change in security policy as a whole, with a major impact on the development of the phenomenon. This reciprocity will further determine politically motivated violence.

**CRISES AND CATASTROPHES, SECURITY AND
RESILIENCE. ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDING
DEFINITIONS FOR SECURITY POLICY.¹**

By Herfried Münkler

CRISES AND CATASTROPHES, SECURITY AND RESILIENCE. ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDING DEFINITIONS FOR SECURITY POLICY.

By Herfried Münkler

Preface: Science and politics

The definition of terms is one of the core tasks of science, especially for human sciences. Nevertheless, many non-scientists often disregard this kind of work as a somewhat redundant engagement and rather as an entertaining occupation with no political or social outcome. The general argument is that the current problem remains the same, regardless of its denomination and of any linguistic differentiations. But actually, problems and challenges alter depending on their terminological definitions and how these are made accessible for specific operative uses. In this regard, not only science works on understanding problems in her efforts to terminologically distinguish, differentiate and explore semantic areas and associative connections, but also the language of administration where the meaning of generic and narrower terms becomes practically accessible to anyone involved in administrative processes. We are all connected in our daily use of terms after all, and by using them we can create an "order of things" (M. Foucault) and bring structure in our surroundings. The difference between everyday language and academic language is the traditional and literally naïve use of the first one, whereas we consistently reflect on the direct and precise use of terms in the second case, thinking about whether the used words support the exact description of a fact and whether they enable and contribute to dealing with such facts. This means the scientific definition of terms is on a meta-level to the everyday language and to the use of terms in administration and politics. The definition of terms is therefore a reflection on the precision of their use, released from their operative use.

The abovementioned considerations are necessary also because terms like "security" or "insecurity" are so-called container terms where different things can be stored, which not only indicates various facts and circumstances but also requires forms of processing that vary from one another. Here a conflict between officialese and conceptualization in sciences can be observed, since the state and its administration use the term "security" differently than science does, free from any exigencies. Besides, this is also the case with terms such as "terror" and "terrorism". The immediate use of academic definition work consists in reviewing old and worn semantics of politics and administration, in yielding information on their enhancement and, in particular, in calling attention to the changes of facts below the terminological surface which have most likely remained unnoticed due to holding on to trusted conceptions. The more established a certain term is, the more insensitive the persons who work with them are towards changes. The following considerations can be understood in this sense.

Crises and catastrophes

Crises and catastrophes are oftentimes mentioned in on breath. This can lead to the impression that both terms deal with the same meaning, only separated alliteratively by two different names. However, this is far from being the case. Even in the administrative state order, crisis

prevention and civil protection are two separate areas, differentiated based on their respective length and the level of damage. A catastrophe has the character of an event, irrespective of it being a natural calamity or a huge accident caused by human beings. The description "event" means that the occurrence is of limited duration – very often only a few minutes – and regardless of whether it be an avalanche, a hurricane, an explosion, a major fire (which can of course last for several hours) or a multiple collision. Very often catastrophes cause deaths, whereas this is not necessarily the case with crises. The latter can indeed start with an event – such as the Great Depression in 1929 that began with the collapse of banks, or the global economic crisis in 2007 following the Lehman bankruptcy – but do not constitute events themselves but a long-lasting disturbance of the structural order. Unlike catastrophes which are usually over after a short period of time (albeit their impact remains longer), crises last for a long time. This means that we can start with a damage survey and cause analysis immediately after an event has ended. With crises, however, we never know when they are really over or whether they ever will be over at one point, and if returning to the previous circumstances will even be possible – and very often this is not the case. Crises change structures and courses of action. Catastrophes on the other hand are eruptive breaks where the destructed situation can be restored or renewed after a certain period of time. They leave scars which remind us of their doing, but they do not change the fundamental constellations – at least not in their short and sometimes repetitive occurrences and as long as they do not become what we call a crisis, which almost always have disruptive consequences. Crises not only last longer but they also require a change from within the structure of societies, states, economic systems, etc. until they can rank as hurdled. Catastrophes entail cleaning-up after they have passed; crises require much effort to be able to overcome them. We can insure ourselves against catastrophes but not against crises.

This is how the order of terms has organized the structure of danger and risk until very recently, and thanks to this ordered use of terms we have already had a feeling of security. The terminological differentiation is a contribution in the quest of controlling the uncontrollable. The semantic separation between crises and catastrophe is (and has been) one of the most basic order benefits of enlightened thinking in a world that no longer views every calamity and misery as judgement from above and as a punishment for human misbehavior.² The definition and understanding of a "catastrophe" underwent sort of a risk assessment and actuarially was stripped of its threatening nature. On the other side crises became challenges for politics and society and required social change and adaptation, as well as new political instruments in order to be able to concentrate on crisis prevention. It was important not to confuse crises with catastrophes.

This order of terms – attendant on the "order of things" is rather morbid today: by way of example, we don't know whether we are currently faced with a climate catastrophe or a climate crisis, and the use of language is accordingly order-less. Also, the scientific and technological development has enabled catastrophes that are uninsurable because their amount of loss clearly exceeds any possible benefit.³ One example is the Fukushima nuclear disaster. In

retrospect, the terminological differentiation between catastrophe and crisis had the function of narrowing down the contingency and to make the power of coincidence controllable.⁴ This differentiation has therefore anticipated a socio-political behavior characterized by its knowing of what needs to be done. Today, this is not the case anymore, or at least it has become a lot more difficult to solidly differentiate between catastrophe and crisis. This complicity is currently cutting-edge with the COVID-19 pandemic. Is the coronavirus a catastrophe or are we dealing with a crisis? In other words: Is the global spread of COVID-19 an event which lasts much longer than expected according to the conventional idea of catastrophes but will in a more or less foreseeable future find an end, which will enable us to return to our previous ways of life and behaviors? Or is it a crisis which forces extensive changes of our economic system and our lifestyles upon us, including the reduction of global trade chains, the end of intercontinental tourism, less sociality and more domesticity?

The "catastrophe scenario" depends on the availability of a reliable vaccine and the rebuilding of immunity sufficient to contain the infection. The "crisis scenario" becomes reality when this immunity cannot be achieved, or soon other viruses cause a new pandemic. We are currently at a crossroads shaped by the fact that our trusted, terminological differentiations no longer work. This in turn implicates an odd uncertainty upsetting many people to a point where some believe they can resolve this uncertainty by simply denying the existence of the pandemic without further ado. This pandemic is turning into a crisis for all the assurances and securities that hold society together. This is becoming apparent with the rise of conspiracy theories connected with COVID-19, as they can be considered the strongest expression of a security crisis. Conspiracy theories have undoubtedly arisen oftentimes before, as they are a complementary companion of enlightenment. In their complementary appearance they superseded the bifurcation of God and Satan. As long as the order of terms organized the order of things, conspiracy theories only played a marginal role within politics and society. People wearing tin foil hats and watchers of jet trails in the sky generally provided general entertainment to others. The erosion of the semantic order, however, has put them now into the center of society and politics, giving them a stage to proclaim and promise to reestablish the order in our current situation of disorder. The trusted securities and assurances are slowly crumbling away, and orientation vanishes. One example of this is the joint demonstrations of right-wing radicals and people who actually consider themselves positioned on the left-wing spectrum of political views, against the measures of democratically elected and rule-of-law controlled governments to contain the pandemic.

Terrorist attacks and terrorism

A terrorist attack is an event which usually takes place within a few seconds only. It may cause great or little damage and lead to many or little victims – as an attack it remains an event. This also accounts for the attacks of 9/11 in the United States. However, individuals planning terrorist attacks actually want to overcome this kind of event character and permanently

interfere with the mentality of a society and the politics of a country. This is their strategic motto according to which they implement tactics and plan their attacks. Carrying out several attacks at the same time or their sequencing – the connecting of several events and resulting impression of those affected that the event is neither spatially nor temporally limited – serves this motto, for instance. Another tool for overcoming this event character is the creation of images connected with the attack. Such images sink deep into the memory of people thanks to their enduring replication possibility, and therefore leap over the limitations of the terrorist event. On this level, the decisive conflict between terrorists and “counter-terrorists” takes place. As long as “counter-terrorists” are able to reduce terrorist attacks to occasional assaults – which do not reach a certain dimension of intensity – they interfere with the strategies of terrorists. Societies under attack are quite able to reduce the effects of attacks or to limit the effects to the immediate event itself, as they are themselves inclined to grow indifferent of terrorist assaults which are aimed at the “collective mind” of a society, rather than its material infrastructure. This changes only when attacks are repetitive and begin to spread fear among people for days, or maybe even weeks or months, and causing a society to drift into a state of emergency. In this case the hope of society returning to her normal state soon after the event has taken place fades, as well as the expectation that everything will soon be as it was before. Just like nightmares are less impactful the next day, event-like terrorist attacks also fade away slowly. However, if their effects remain, the idea of changing fundamentally in order to leave behind all the fear caused by the attack hardens more and more, which means that society is in the depths of a severe crisis.

Several relevant studies have repeatedly shown that strategically, terrorism does not aim at the physical consequences when committing attacks (such as blowing up a bridge, exploding vehicles, or achieving the highest possible number of casualties) but at the psychological effects these assaults cause, either with certain groups or within the entire population. This fact significantly distinguishes terrorism from assassinations or guerilla wars – even though there are certain similarities between these phenomena, too. Assassinations can be a tactical means of terrorist strategy used within the framework of a revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) project during the initial phase of a guerilla war, or the beginning of a civil war. Terrorism became a main ingredient of political disputes around the time of the end of the 19th century. As a strategy, terrorist acts belonged to the politically left, and political disputes belonged to the politically right spectrum. Both sides considered terrorist acts a remedy for getting into the next level of escalation, be it the revolutionary small-scale war where the military victory of the revolutionaries has been prepared, or the civil war aimed at installing the “leading man” or an authoritarian order. As long as terrorism has followed these strategic directors it is and always was an intermediate step within a larger project, with its options of planning attacks and the selection of targets being rather limited. There is every indication that far-right terrorism has always had more options than left-wing terrorism. This could help to explain why state-led terrorism defense measures were a lot more effective with politically left-wing terrorism than with fighting the far-right.

However, during the past two decades this has changed significantly. The more recent forms of terrorism are no longer a part of an overall strategy but have taken on a life of their own and are also aware of their aims and purposes.⁵ This means that potential targets of terrorist attacks⁶ have multiplied, because it is no longer necessary to consider certain social or ethnic groups during the selection process. Because of this, police protection of prospective targets has become much more difficult to provide, since not only symbolic locations within a city, areas with many people gathering there or just individual people who have been selected as targets and who are present at a specific location by chance can be targets. Terrorists no longer attack certain groups (i.e. social and political elite, civil servants or security personnel) in order to intimidate and to force a behavioral change upon them, but they want to create fear among whole societies. The different terrorism forms – who differentiated according to their diverse political goals – have drawn nearer and are today so alike as to be indistinguishable.

In conclusion, one can say that terrorism now aims at attacking the unstable collective mind of post-heroic societies⁷ – which means that anything that is vulnerable becomes a target. Under these circumstances, security in an objective sense like the security feeling of a society is more difficult to establish and to sustain than during the times of war threats or reciprocal nuclear hostage-takings in the East-West conflict being the main security policy-related challenges. Back then, the senses of security and threat of people developed depending on confrontation and relaxation. Today there is no political barometer anymore that compares with this dynamic. Attacks can happen at any time, across longer times or not; the whole situation is rather vague, and therefore the terms used to describe this situation are accordingly undifferentiated.

Security and resilience

"Resilience" as a term was initially used in the fields of psychology and engineering and has made a solid career during the past years. "Resilience" stands for the ability of individuals, systems and societies to deal with severe restrictions of areas of life or even their complete failure, and to survive unpredictable – unforeseen – restrictions of their capacities to act in a way that there is no complete breakdown on all levels. The antonym of resilience is "vulnerability",⁸ with regard to the vulnerability of individuals, systems and societies. This term must be differentiated from vulnerabilities that can be restricted and vulnerabilities that are impossible to restrict. The "costs" connected with the restriction of vulnerabilities play a decisive role, both regarding the immediate financial expenses as well as the restrictions of flexibility and spontaneous adaptability to changes, which is almost always connected with the creation of invulnerability. If this creation of invulnerability (in a twofold respect) becomes invaluable, a certain degree of vulnerability must be accepted. "Resilience" understood as resistance and persistence is a complementary element against the mere acceptance of vulnerability.

This clearly shows a fundamental paradigm change regarding security-related thinking: conventional central concepts such as "threat" or "determent" are more and more taking a

backseat and "vulnerability" and "resilience" the front. In fact, terrorists are difficult to scare off since they normally operate clandestinely and do not reclaim territories for themselves which could in turn become the targets of counterattacks. The Islamic State (IS) in Northern Iraq and parts of Syria has been an occasional, brief exception to this. By now this terrorist organization has returned to its model of a clandestine organization that operates from within the depth of social rooms. Adding cyber-attacks on control systems and communication networks of whole societies to this, where the origin of the attack usually is hard to find and to irrevocably verify, we can assume that aforementioned concepts of "threat" and "determent" are increasingly losing their significance today. It is generally known that hackers are mostly immune to threats of counterattacks, which means they pose a threat that cannot be nailed down and precisely defined but remains an abstract danger. Therefore, it makes sense to position them rather on the side of society's own vulnerability than on the side of potential threats. The minute they are accounted for as vulnerabilities, however, an effective response or even a deterrent effect would be to cultivate resilience which accepts vulnerability by making it bearable. A threatened society reacts to an asymmetric challenge with an asymmetric response: if the former security promise has let society become particularly vulnerable, resilience acknowledges these vulnerabilities, tries to constrain them and reduces their significance along this process.

In this regard we can learn a lot from coping with COVID-19 and consider it a forerunner for upcoming pandemics which are likely to occur more often in the future, especially also in view of the missing traditional war model which would serve as the intellectual framework of this challenge. One reliable indicator for this is the failed use of war narrative to semantically frame this type of challenge produced by the pandemic and by our way of reaction: this war semantics either disappeared again really fast or has led to catastrophic results in those cases where it remained, due to providing a wrong and definitely inept framework for the containment of the coronavirus pandemic.⁹ This semantics included the identification of vulnerability and its containment if possible, as well as the building of resilience – be it as a long-term strategy by developing immunity or in the short-term by targeting the population's behavior in order to contain the spread of the virus and to build up resilience by creating a certain mentality among people which would support maintaining the economic and social lifestyle, even though no reliable medication for the treatment of the virus and no vaccines against COVID-19 have been available so far. Today, several arguments indicate that a society which develops the most reliable resilience against the pandemic will most likely perform best in handling the coronavirus. The ones likely to perform the worst by international comparison will probably be those still speaking of their victory over the virus and who orient their government actions along this semantics. This is most obvious when we look at the different reactions by governments towards the fast-spreading pandemic and by conventionalizing these ways of reaction into three different, ideal-typical models – in this text simply put as the Chinese, the American and the German models. With regard to the question of the significance of terms used for security policy-related strategies, the issue of specific development stages of countries which show why a certain type of government action has formed concisely, is not the focus of consideration.

Instead, the models of action are to be examined together with their semantics and with view to how the order of terms is connected with the order of action.

The *Chinese model* is mostly based on a paternalistic semantics, according to which the state and the political parties – and in particular Xi Jinping, the current and paramount leader of China and president of the PRC – are concerned with the security and the well-being of the Chinese population. In the case of fighting the coronavirus pandemic, both the political bodies and the Chinese state make use of scientific and academic expertise. State and politics have both worked for a long time to make this expertise fundamentally available to them, and now they have it at their disposal. This fact accounts for the nature of China's academically founded political approach, where Marxism still plays an important role. The scientific nature must never be questioned or brought into discussion by the civil society. For this reason, any expertise that is used by the government to base its actions upon is treated like a discipline of the secret, only available to the government. This is about the population's unconditional trust in the government which is only guaranteed if the expertise – upon which all actions are based – is considered unconditionally right and "true". The consequent government action derived from this order of knowledge is of course dependent on a number of material requirements, which are not naturally available: first, the unlimited competences of the government which means that their measures are not questioned by independent courts or regional bodies equipped with certain authorities (as is the case in federal systems). Furthermore, this includes considerable resources available to the government and put into use at will, such as the use of staff and goods in order to provide the population of a big city under quarantine with the essential goods, or the building of hospitals practically overnight. And finally, the government action highly depends on a population traditionally characterized by its high social discipline and used to following their government's instructions instead of claiming voluntaristic ideas of freedom. The Chinese people trust that their government is doing the right and necessary thing. Resilience in a narrower sense is not necessary in this scenario, because the entire order including its semantics aims at coping with all challenges in an administrative way. The vulnerability of this type of government action consists in the population losing trust in their government, for instance if the expected or promised results never happen or massive doubts among the population arise (i.e. doubts that the official COVID-19 figures actually reflect the reality of the situation).

The *American Model* is concentrated on the heroic attitude of the U.S. President and the environment close to him. For this reason, this model is based on the semantics of war, hostile attacks and brave resistance. The Western narrative, where a single hero faces a superior number of enemies and eventually comes off victorious at the end of this fight, is central. The semantics of the heroic American model includes the possibility of the leader not being guided by scientific or academic expertise, since this could perhaps reduce or question his heroism. For that reason alone, his public performance is characterized by putting the scientists surrounding and providing him with their inputs and consultations in their place, and even to humiliate them.

This does not necessarily mean that he never heeds their counsel in general; however, under any circumstances he must avoid the impression that he is being directed by such experts, since this would contradict his heroic attitude. This heroic approach is in fact only an attitude for two reasons: one, because the presidential hero follows a script he must not deviate from, and secondly because neither the necessary powers nor the resources for fighting the pandemic alone are available to him. This way several Governors of US federal states as well as a number of courts have seriously and repeatedly counteracted President Donald Trump's actions. From an operative perspective a grave weakness, the following is certainly the great advantage of this model, also with view to its copiable nature by third parties: the American model does not depend on material requirements but only requires one man as its leader, who knows how to play his role in a convincing manner and follow the script of heroic resistance. We could almost declare this model an award for the acting abilities of the political staff selected for the leading role. Similar to the Chinese model, the American one does not generate social resilience because the leader takes on everything necessary and becomes – following the Western narrative – the savior of a desponded and scared population. The vulnerability of this model lies in the danger of parts of the population losing trust in the narrative and its semantics, simply by the people watching its government's actions and by comparing them with another government and then conclude that they have plainly been deceived. Academically speaking this means that the semantics of wars and fights is not enough to meet the challenges of the pandemic and to successfully restrain the spread of the coronavirus.

On the other side, the *German model* completely abandons any claim to omniscience as well as any heroic attitude, and both approaches would be very difficult to combine with the style of rule of the current Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel. Without exception all the measures taken to restrain the pandemic are under the caveat of their reversibility, which in turn is oriented towards the advancement of science related to the virus as well as the level of infections. And, more importantly, all of this is not happening covertly but in absolute transparency and public communication. The government draws on scientific/academic expertise from different scientific disciplines ranging from virology to economics and from psychology to pedagogics, considers every counsel prospectively and according to their use or collateral damage, and then makes decisions accordingly which imply certain measures. In order to legitimize these measures the government refers to scientific expertise, however it does not follow it without limitations or conditions – therefore there can be no talk of a "rule of expertocracy". For a real expertocracy to govern, the current German government is actually lacking both powers and resources. Any decision taken by the government can be reviewed by an independent court, and government actors might encounter resistance from within society, be it in the form of demonstrations to show resistance or diffuse denial of individuals. Therefore, it is at the core of all government actions to convince society of the adequacy of the measures taken and to create compliance in doing so. Both – acceptance of adequacy and social compliance – must be secured again and again through explanations and justifications, and only this way the trust of the people into government action can be upheld. We can consider these

efforts for social resilience and for flexible persistence, which become especially important as soon as it is recognized that the pandemic is not a temporary catastrophe anymore but a long-term crisis. This type of government action therefore counts on resilience and connects it with admitting a vulnerability which must repeatedly be reviewed and reconsidered. However, this model too inherits its own vulnerability, consisting in the willingness of the majority of the population to listen to the government's explanations and to follow their advice. Followers of conspiracy theories direct their doings exactly against this and try to counteract both. At the end of the day, it is a war of terms and their reasonableness, fought in an open arena.

The expectation of the observer of all three ideal types of government action in times of the coronavirus pandemic is the following: whoever handles the wrong terms will never be able to measure up to the challenges that approach him or her, because he/she does not understand them. Whoever bets on acting only will also fail. Only the fact that the acting model – which generally escapes any possibility of diligently dealing with terms – can easily be copied excludes this hope.

SOURCES:

- 1 Translation from its original in German into English.
- 2 See more detailed Mathias Lindenau/Herfried Münkler, „Vom Orakel zur Risikoanalyse: Figurationen von Sicherheit und Risiko“; in: Lindenau/Meier Kressig (Hgg.), *Zwischen Sicherheitserwartung und Risikoerfahrung*, Bielefeld 2012, p. 21-74.
- 3 Cf. the contributions in Hempel/Bartels/Markwart (Hgg.), *Aufbruch ins Unversicherbare. Zum Katastrophendiskurs der Gegenwart*, Bielefeld 2013.
- 4 See Becker/Scheller/Schneider (Hgg.), *Die Ungewissheit des Zukünftigen. Kontingenz in der Geschichte*, Frankfurt/New York 2016, sowie Böhme/Röcke/Stephan (Hgg.), *Contingentia. Transformationen des Zufalls*, Berlin/Boston 2016.
- 5 According to Clausewitz *Vom Kriege*, hg. Hahlweg, Bonn 1980, p. 214ff. the „aim answers the question of what is to be achieved in war, and the purpose answers the question of what we want to achieve by war“.
- 6 This term is not being used according to the sense as laid out by Clausewitz, but stands for the „aim“ of a certain group of people or a location.
- 7 For more details on the determination and concept of the postheroic society cf. Münkler, *Kriegssplitter Die Evolution der Gewalt im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2016, S. 169-187; zur Veränderung des Terrorismus ders., *Der Wandel des Krieges. Von der Symmetrie zur Asymmetrie*, Weilerswist 2006, p. 211-247.
- 8 See more detailed on this Münkler/Wassermann, „Von strategischer Vulnerabilität zu strategischer Resilienz: Die Herausforderung zukünftiger Sicherheitsforschung und Sicherheitspolitik“; in: Gerhold/Schiller (Hgg.), *Perspektiven der Sicherheitsforschung*, Frankfurt am Main u.a. 2012, p. 77-95.
- 9 See Herfried and Marina Münkler, „Der Einbruch des Unvorhersehbaren und wie wir uns zukünftig darauf vorbereiten sollten“; in: Kortmann/Schulze (Hgg.), *Jenseits von Corona. Unsere Welt nach der Pandemie*, p. 101-108.

GEOPOLITICAL GAME CHANGERS AND THEIR IMPACT ON GLOBAL TERRORISM

By Daniel Byman

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Terrorism changes as politics, society, and technology change. The anarchist exploitation of the invention of dynamite at the turn of the century, the rise of jihadist violence in the 1980s with the return of political Islam, the collapse of left-wing terrorism with the end of the Cold War, the changing nature of state-sponsored terrorism as highly ideological regimes became more pragmatic, and the reinvigoration of white supremacist violence all mirrored transformations occurring in the world at large. How might the global terrorism threat evolve in the years to come? This paper focuses on eight plausible geopolitical game changers that could reshape the terrorism and counterterrorism landscape. None of these are inevitable, or even necessarily likely, but they are plausible enough that counterterrorism analysts and government officials should consider their implications when designing programs for the future. The game changers include:

1. The collapse of another state in the Middle East and a resulting civil war;
2. A more substantial U.S. military withdrawal from the greater Middle East;
3. An increase in terrorism abroad driven by China's mistreatment of its Muslim population and its growing global role;
4. The reemergence of left-wing violence;
5. An increase in Russian sponsorship of terrorism;
6. A rise in Palestinian international terrorism;
7. A contested election in the United States where the leader plays on anti-government fears; and
8. A U.S. military campaign against Iran.

Middle East State Collapse

The collapse of another government in the greater Muslim world and any accompanying civil war would offer several opportunities for jihadist groups to grow stronger after several years of setbacks.¹⁰ Not all civil wars produce international terrorism, of course. However, in the last decades, civil wars in Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen have proved fertile ground for terrorist groups, and strife in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, and other countries also generated or worsened terrorism. Even more limited civil strife that produces ungoverned spaces in part of a country, as in the Sinai today, can worsen terrorism.

The civil wars have several dangerous effects. First, the collapse of the government offers an opportunity for small terrorist groups to operate and to expand their operations with little or no interference. Libya had largely defeated jihadist groups in the country before Qaddafi fell and civil war broke out in 2011, and Al Qaeda in Iraq was on the ropes before the 2011 civil war next door in Syria broke out. In these and other cases, small terrorist groups found a haven in which to operate as the government was too weak and too focused on more immediate threats emanating from the civil war to fight terrorism.¹¹ Second, the war itself can be an inspiration and a magnet. Communities involved in local disputes may see the terrorist group as an ally and

protector against the government, an occupying power, or a rival community, and even if they do not feel this way initially, the to and fro of attacks on the terrorist group and the community may drive them together.¹² Internationally, some wars become *causes célèbres*, attracting hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of volunteers to fight – Syria attracted 40,000 foreigners, and conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and other countries attracted thousands of foreign recruits. These foreign fighters become more skilled and more radical in the war zone and can prove a terrorism danger to their home countries upon return.¹³

The civil wars also make Western counterterrorism more complex. One of the most common, and most effective, ways to fight international terrorism is to work with allied intelligence services to disrupt the group at hand. Despite uneven relations in the best of times, the United States cooperated with Libya, Syria, and other countries on counterterrorism when their governments were intact and had close partnerships with a host of other countries in the region. When a civil war breaks out, the government often cannot act against the group in question, and the brutality of the war makes even limited cooperation morally repellent and politically difficult.¹⁴ This leaves the United States and its allies with the choice of allowing the terrorist group a high degree of operational freedom or intervening in a local war via drones or with their own forces. Limited intervention often has only limited impact and carries the risk that a nationalist backlash against the intervention will aid the terrorists.

A more substantial U.S. withdrawal from the greater Middle East and Africa

Since the 1990-1991 Gulf War, the United States has played a dominant military role in the Middle East. In addition to going to war with Iraq twice, the United States has intervened in Libya and Syria, confronted Iran with limited military strikes and broad sanctions, played a leading, if unsuccessful, role in negotiating peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and otherwise tried to shape the region. To this end, the United States maintains a network of military bases throughout the Middle East, deploys tens of thousands of troops there (60,000 as of January 2020, according to U.S. Central Command), and has regularly made the region's problems a foreign policy priority.¹⁵ Africa has traditionally been less important to U.S. interests, but as part of the struggle against terrorism, the United States has increased its role there, helping allies fight the affiliates of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Chad, Nigeria, Somalia, and other countries.

Under President Obama, and later under President Trump, the United States attempted to move away from the Middle East and Africa, shifting its focus to other regions (in the case of Obama) or calling for more retrenchment in general, but especially away from troubled regions like the Middle East (under Trump).¹⁶ The Trump administration began downgrading the U.S. role in Africa, with little protest from Democrats, and repeatedly considered withdrawing U.S. forces from Syria and Afghanistan. It is possible, indeed probable, that future administrations will continue to attempt to move the United States out of these troubled

regions. European states, beset by their own problems at home and within Europe, are not eager to fill the resulting void.

Such a shift has both risks and benefits for counterterrorism. On the positive side, the removal of troops reduces a longstanding jihadist grievance--that the United States (or France, or other Western countries) are occupying Muslim lands--and one that proved an effective rallying cry. However, the salience of this concern has declined as other issues, such as the sectarian war in Syria and the desire to live under an Islamic government, have risen to the fore as motivations.

A reduced U.S. presence would also come with less U.S. influence. U.S. security support and aid give the United States more pull with allies, and the allies recognize more counterterrorism cooperation is often the price of support. Because the United States plays an important role in training allied military forces to fight terrorism, the capacity of allied security forces may also suffer from a U.S. withdrawal even if their will is undiminished. In addition, in some conflicts, the United States has provided logistics, intelligence, and other forms of direct support to bolster the raw capacity of allies. Should this be lacking, allies will be less effective in fighting terrorism.

Perhaps most important, the lack of U.S. support for regional allies may lead to more strife. This could take several forms. First, a decline in U.S. support may make unrest more likely, as allied security forces are less able to protect the regime. Second, adversaries of U.S. allies might be more willing to meddle and supporting rebel and terrorist groups is a time-honored means of gaining influence.¹⁷ This may even occur among U.S. allies--the bitter rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the UAE with Qatar has often played out with each side backing rival factions, such as in Libya. In the absence of a U.S. presence, groups may find state patrons as well as more operational space as a result. Allies are also less likely to coordinate their activities with one another even when they are not in direct opposition.

A greater terrorism focus associated with China¹⁸

China currently faces a limited terrorism threat, but this danger could increase as China's global presence expands. Beijing is concerned about the domestic threat posed by the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Turkestan Islamic Party, and as China has become an international economic and political actor, its nationals and facilities overseas have become potential targets of a range of terrorist groups. Some of those targeting China have international links, but the most common dangers are from disgruntled members of Muslim minorities in China who have only loose ties to established terrorist organizations like the Islamic State.

Beijing considers terrorism a threat to the integrity and legitimacy of the Chinese state, not just a limited danger to individual citizens. The result has been a series of massive crackdowns,

with China now becoming the world's largest jailor of Muslims, particularly those of its Turkic ethnic minority.¹⁹ In addition, Beijing has implemented a comprehensive surveillance system, enabling it to track its citizens both to stop crime and any political violence before it spreads.²⁰ A longer-term approach, and one that also provokes considerable resentment, is the use of policies designed to encourage cultural assimilation and internal migration to areas where Turkic minorities predominate. Over time, Chinese leaders hope, Muslim cultures will simply be swallowed up and dissipate, and in the meantime, they must be carefully controlled.²¹

Counterterrorism, for now, is not an important shaper of China's foreign policy. China is not involved in wars against terrorist groups. In addition, Beijing has shown a willingness to work with an array of countries, such as Saudi Arabia, whose policies foster the spread of Salafi ideas that China opposes at home, as well as other countries like Iran that the United States considers a sponsor of terrorism. For now, neither the United States nor other countries have shown more than token concern for China's mass incarceration and surveillance programs. Indeed, China is even selling its surveillance methods to other countries.

Although China's current terrorism risk, both at home and internationally, is low, several factors may change this in future years. This change is particularly likely abroad as China becomes a global power and because China has less ability to repress dissent abroad than it does at home. The most likely risk is simply to Chinese nationals and commercial interests overseas. Many Chinese commercial initiatives are in countries like Nigeria and Pakistan that have a significant jihadist terrorist presence. Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and like-minded groups have a presence in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and Africa where China is active and governments are often weak or have limited reach. Chinese nationals may also prove victims of "collateral damage" from other attacks, targets of kidnapping for ransom, or other risks.

Because China is providing investment and may provide military support should its nationals be threatened, local partners may also try to exploit a terrorism problem to gain additional Chinese help. After 9/11, countries around the world realized they could play up any group with links to Al Qaeda to attract U.S. attention and support. Similarly, local actors may seek to play up the anti-Chinese nature of the violence, the level of the threat, or otherwise try to gain more from China.

The biggest question is whether China's gross mistreatment of its own Muslim community could become an issue among the world's Muslims. For now, important states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt have played down any criticism of China. In addition, the Gulf states increasingly look to China as the United States proves to be an erratic partner that openly discusses withdrawal from the Middle East. These governments usually exert considerable control over their domestic media environments and are otherwise able to shape or suppress discourse: part of the reason Syria became a jihadist *cause célèbre* was because Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other countries opposed the Assad regime and allowed preachers and propagandists

to whip up religious and sectarian hatred against it, even though this eventually benefited groups like the Islamic State. China historically has not been an important part of the Islamic world's discourse, but high-profile events there could change this, perhaps quite quickly. China is the world's largest jailor of Muslims, an atheistic and (nominally) communist regime, and an increasingly assertive international actor. Each of these characteristics could, in theory at least, put it in the crosshairs of a jihadist movement. Since its modern development following the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s, the movement has focused on supposed apostate regimes in the Muslim world, sectarian rivalries with Shiite Muslims and their Iranian champion, and non-Muslim powers like Russia, Israel, India, and the United States.²² China might be next.

The scale of China's mistreatment has begun to attract attention from jihadist groups. Some groups have dozens or more Uighur members, as well as many others from Central Asia or other areas where China is increasingly present and ascendant. Thus, through person-to-person contact, they have individuals who are likely to press an anti-Chinese agenda and otherwise publicize China's abuses. Regional regimes may also be more critical. Turkey's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, seeks more influence in Turkish-populated areas of Central Asia. His government blasted China's actions as "a great shame for humanity."²³ He may continue to try to keep this on the global agenda in order to expand his own influence. Other countries and leaders may follow suit, using Chinese abuses not only to gain more influence themselves but also to undercut rivals that might move close to China: Saudi Arabia, for example, is locked in a bitter rivalry with both Iran and Qatar, and it is easy to imagine any of these countries seizing on another's relationship with China to criticize their adversary.

Much depends on whether terrorists can successfully provoke China and whether China's response further grabs the attention of terrorists. Terrorism is often likened to theater, with hostage-taking, beheadings, and other dramatic forms of violence designed to grab media attention and thus help the terrorists further put themselves on the global agenda. In an age of social media, terrorists do not need coverage from outside media sources or even a sophisticated media capacity of their own; rather they can use existing commercial platforms to publicize issues related to their cause. Theatrical violence against China may create popular anger and force the government to respond strongly. China's response might create a cycle, where any violence or high-profile activity makes China more of an enemy and raises it on the terrorists' priorities list. In addition, the death of Chinese workers or others may lead China to increase cooperation with the regime in charge, deploy its own forces, or otherwise increase its global security role, and thus its risk of a terrorism reaction.

The reemergence of left-wing violence

During much of the Cold War, Marxist and other left-wing groups such as the Red Brigades and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine played an important, and often leading, role in international terrorism, fomenting unrest in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and other regions.

In addition, they often professed loyalty to Moscow or Beijing, adding to geopolitical tensions. When the Soviet Union collapsed and Beijing moved away from its revolutionary foreign policy, many of these leftist groups collapsed or withered. The withdrawal of foreign financial and logistical support and the discrediting of Marxist ideology seemed like a death blow.

A number of issues have emerged that could reinvigorate the violent left, although it is not likely to approach its strength during the Cold War. The growing inequality within countries such as the United States is one such issue, as are concerns about the environment and racial justice. Perhaps even more important, white supremacist and other right-wing violence is growing, and the reaction to that may trigger leftist violence. Movements like Antifa in the United States are not terrorist groups, but they do use violence in reaction to right-wing violence, and imagining further radicalization is not difficult.²⁴

The growth of and response to left-wing violence could further polarize politics. A cycle may develop as right-wing groups respond to the violence. If the state cracks down on left-wing violence without a similar crackdown on the right, it will be accused of bias and siding with conservative forces.

Russia increases its sponsorship of terrorism

Russia has killed dissidents in multiple countries, which is a form of international terrorism in that it involves violent activity outside Russia, a political motive, and a broader goal of intimidating other dissidents. In Syria, Russian military forces have worked closely with the Lebanese Hezbollah, which the United States has long described as one of the world's leading terrorist groups, to fight the enemies of the Assad regime.²⁵ In Ukraine, Russia has backed anti-regime separatist militias with money, training, weapons, and direct military support, and some of these groups have used violence against civilians – notably the downing in 2014 of a Malaysian commercial flight that killed all 298 people aboard.²⁶ The commander of U.S. forces said in 2019 that Russia is arming the Taliban in Afghanistan, and U.S. soldiers are dying as a result, and in 2020 U.S. officials reported that Russia had offered a bounty to Afghans for killing U.S. soldiers.²⁷ Russia also directly and indirectly aids or tries to inspire an array of white supremacist and other right-wing groups and individual terrorists in Europe and the United States. These efforts in the West serve Moscow's goal of dividing and discrediting Western governments and societies.²⁸

For the most part, such efforts have worked for Moscow, which might increase its support for and use of terrorism or at least continue to use it. Relative to its global aspirations, Moscow is weak militarily and economically, and ties to terrorist groups give it greater reach and influence than it would have otherwise. In addition, the Putin regime is obsessed with silencing dissidents, and it has instilled fear in many potential critics. So far, the United States and Europe have put at best fitful pressure on Moscow for its support for various extremists. In the future, Moscow

could provide an array of clandestine support to groups operating in the former Soviet states or Europe as a whole, greatly increasing their capacity.

The reaction to Russian-supported terrorism may generate additional challenges. A Democratic administration could likely be more confrontational with Moscow than the previous Trump administration, which has sought a close relationship despite Russia's provocations. A dissident assassination in an allied country or Russian support of a proxy might lead the United States to push sanctions, increase military aid to allies like Ukraine, or otherwise raise the stakes and increase tension.

A rise in Palestinian terrorism

The Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli disputes produced numerous international terrorist groups, such as Black September, Hamas, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Some of these groups are now defunct, while others have moved away from terrorism, especially international terrorism. Groups like Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad, which still use terrorism, largely do so in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel proper, keeping the violence localized.

Broader Palestinian terrorism that targets Israel internationally or the United States or other non-Israeli targets could resume for several reasons. Important Palestinian organizations like Fatah abandoned terrorism in favor of peace negotiations in the late 1980s, but if the peaceful path is no longer viable, the argument for violence becomes stronger. The Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have sputtered for over a decade and observers on both sides see them as dead.²⁹ Indeed, much of the Arab world seems to be ignoring the Palestinian problem, as evidenced by the August 2020 UAE-Israel peace agreement, which went forward despite the lack of progress on the Palestinian issue. Although any violence is likely to continue to focus on Israeli targets in the West Bank and perhaps Israel itself, attacking non-Israeli targets is a particularly high-profile way to grab the world's attention. In the past, groups like the PFLP argued that international attacks were necessary for the Palestinian issue to be on the world's agenda, even if it produced negative publicity in the short-term.

Disputes within the Palestinian nationalist community may also increase the incentives for international terrorist attacks. During the 1970s and 1980s, terrorist attacks on Israel were a way for Palestinian groups to outbid their rivals, attract recruits to their group, and otherwise compete. When the Second Intifada raged from 2000 to 2005, attacks on Israel proved the dedication of the groups to recruits and funders and helped them compete for supremacy in the Palestinian nationalist movement.³⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority and leader of the peace camp, cooperates with Israel on counterterrorism and has long been engaged in a bitter rivalry with Hamas. Born in 1935, Abbas' leadership may end soon, and there is no clear successor. New leaders may be reluctant to cooperate with Israel when the political track for peace and a Palestinian state does not appear viable. So, there may be rivalries within

Abbas' faction and between it and groups like Hamas, all exacerbated by the political weakness of the peace camp.

Regional political trends may also increase terrorism related to the Palestinian conflict. Iran has close ties to the Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestine Islamic Jihad and also relations with Hamas. Tehran is ideologically committed to Israel's destruction. In addition, because Iran's regional enemies like the UAE are allying with Israel, Iran may seek to foment unrest, highlighting Palestinian issues and, in so doing, discrediting its rivals. High-profile Israeli responses may increase the political impact of Palestinian terrorism in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

A contested election where the leader plays on anti-government fears

President Trump's possible response to a loss at the polls should give us pause when it comes to the impact on right-wing terrorism. After his party's drubbing in the 2018 midterm elections -- when the President himself was not directly on the ballot -- he gave a combative press conference, absurdly claimed he had high support among African-Americans, and criticized, "very hostile media coverage, to put it mildly."³¹ He regularly claims (falsely) that millions of people vote illegally, all against him, and his press secretary has openly stated that he may not accept the results of the election.³² To discredit the Mueller investigation, Trump has attacked the Department of Justice and the FBI, legitimating conspiracy theories that a "deep state" is targeting conservatives, and the QAnon conspiracy theory is growing in Republican circles.³³

After an election defeat, one could imagine President Trump claiming that "people say" voting machines were fixed, Democrats suppressed Republican ballots, or other absurd statements as a way to justify his defeat even if he does eventually surrender power without incident. Trump is also likely to try to discredit any successor. Hillary Clinton went from Trump companion to bitter foe, and Trump is vehement in his criticism of Democratic nominee Joe Biden and is trying to deny the citizenship of Vice-Presidential nominee Kamala Harris.³⁴ Even if President Trump is more gracious than his past behavior suggests, many of his supporters may see the new administration as illegitimate from the start. Add such discrediting of his successor to conspiracy theories about a stolen election and you have a powerful cocktail of righteous anger and potential violence.³⁵

In contrast to jihadists, right-wing terrorists draw on a significant number of Americans who share at least some of their views. Jihadists in the United States are not only few in number, but their ideas have little or no support among the broader American Muslim community. In contrast, issues Americans consider to be right-wing, such as skepticism of the federal government, gun rights, and so on, are often championed by legitimate, peaceful, organizations. Almost half of Republicans see immigrants as a burden on America, and half of Americans see Muslims as outside the mainstream of American society.³⁶ A 2017 poll found that 14 percent

of Americans hold anti-Semitic (though not necessarily violent) views, up from 10 percent in 2015.³⁷ Far more Americans are accepting of Jews, but this number means that almost 50 million Americans hold hateful views—hardly a fringe belief. Many Americans hold even more extreme racist views. A poll found 4 percent of Americans agree with the white supremacy movement, almost 15 million people.³⁸ With the encouragement of senior leaders like President Trump, these hateful views are more likely to produce violence.

Because of these ties to the mainstream, right-wing violence has far more political impact than does jihadist violence. Especially when combined with attempts to delegitimize the election, this can undermine faith in U.S. institutions. This will make domestic counterterrorism more difficult, as at least some communities will be less likely to work with the police and FBI to identify extremists in their midst. In addition, it would make efforts by technology and financial firms to repress violent voices more difficult politically, as they would be seen as taking sides in a political dispute rather than fighting violence.³⁹

A military campaign against Iran

Under President Trump, the United States has rejected the nuclear deal forged by President Obama, killed the leader of the Islamic Republican Guard Corps, Qasem Suleimani, and tried to increase economic pressure on Iran. In addition, close regional allies such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have pressed for American to take a tough stance on Iran. So far, this has not boiled over into outright war, although Iranian proxies continue to target U.S. forces in Iraq and threaten regional peace.

Should a confrontation occur over continued Iranian nuclear activity or another issue, Iran is likely to turn to terrorism to strike back at the United States, in part because it has few other options. Tehran's military is weak, and its economy is in freefall. The regime's legitimacy is battered by poor economic performance, corruption, a lack of fair elections, and a disastrous response to the COVID-19 epidemic. On the other hand, Iran has a vast network of proxies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen as well as ties to militants in other countries.⁴⁰

Because Iran's network is regional, its most likely responses will be regional. This might involve attacking U.S. forces in Afghanistan and especially Iraq, where Iran's proxies are strongest. It also might mean using terrorism against foes like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Striking Israel is a constant possibility as Iran may try to use such attacks to highlight its resistance credentials to Muslims while casting its enemies as the allies of the unpopular Jewish state. Terrorism against the U.S. homeland or against European targets is likely to be held in reserve as a deterrent, but it could occur if a limited military conflict starts to threaten the regime's hold on power.

In addition to any deaths from terrorism itself, the potential back and forth between terrorist acts and U.S. and allied military responses could fuel a broader war. Depending on the political

circumstances in Iran and in the target countries, leaders may feel unable to back down, with dangerous escalation as a result.

Conclusions

The terrorism threat is constantly evolving, and the contingencies noted above are only a few possible ways in which the danger might change. One of the biggest unknowns is technological: new forms of communication, advances in synthetic biology and artificial intelligence, or the spread of accessible weapons technologies all could increase the terrorist threat in numerous ways. Some technological changes might also help counterterrorism: China, for example, has used improvements in biometrics and artificial intelligence to strengthen its police state and, in so doing, reduce any danger from Muslim militancy (while also crushing legitimate resistance of all sorts).

The picture is further complicated by the poor relations among the great powers and the uncertainty regarding U.S. foreign policy in particular. Growing rivalries, or fluctuations in U.S. policy, could change the conditions for both terrorist groups and their supporters.

Effective counterterrorism will be vital for keeping the danger limited. Policing, intelligence liaison, and other instruments are necessary to disrupt terrorist networks and limit their overall capacity. So too is gaining the support of technology and financial companies as well as civil society to ensure that terrorists cannot easily recruit, communicate, raise money, or gain broader support. Too harsh a response, in contrast, can polarize society, alienate minority groups, and otherwise create fertile ground for the terrorists. The last decade saw both impressive success and dramatic failures, and it is likely that the record in the years to come will also prove mixed.

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COVID-19 AND GLOBAL TERRORISM PANDEMICS

By Boaz Ganor

COVID-19 AND GLOBAL TERRORISM PANDEMICS

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2020 will be written down in history as a turning point year. It is hard to predict where the global pivot will be, however, one thing is clear – what used to be will be no more. The healthcare and economic challenges will change, tourism, work and daily routines will change, international, bilateral and multilateral relationships will change and similarly the security and counter-terrorism challenge will be shaped accordingly. The COVID-19 pandemic has been wielding great influence on the above as well as many other global processes.

On the face of it many parallels may be drawn between these two pandemics, COVID-19 and global terrorism. In both cases these are lethal phenomena that endanger many people's lives, may cause significant bodily injury, negatively affect life routine and the collective as well as personal sense of safety. Yet, beyond the common aspects of the threat these two phenomena pose to the nations of the world, they both present a random challenge. No one on earth is immune to either terrorism or COVID-19. Both can strike anywhere at any time without an advance alert and hurt any person regardless of religion, creed, race or gender or location. An innocent civilian strolling in the mall or down a crowded street may be hurt by a random terror attack perpetrated in the area. Similarly, another person can contract the virus through an accidental chance exposure to a COVID-19 carrier. The random nature of both phenomena and the life threatening risks they pose to ordinary civilians evoke a great sense of fear and anxiety. By its nature, terrorism strives to terrorize various target audiences. This modus operandi intends to promote and achieve ideological, political, social and other targets by spreading fear among the target community. In the case of COVID-19, the fear and anxiety are the product of the scope of the risk coupled with the sense of insecurity and inability to defend one from this danger.

The fear factor that accompanies both pandemics is not just an outcome of their random nature but also a product of the media coverage of the damage they cause, especially the personal stories of the victims and their families. The latter, in and of themselves intensify anxiety and create a sense that "by sheer chance it wasn't me or someone close to me that was hurt. Next time I may not be so lucky."

One of the prominent common denominators of both pandemics is connected to their infection characteristic. Both phenomena are contagious and spread rapidly and exponentially. If COVID-19 virus spreads through human contact and exposure to a sick person, terrorism virus infects through the web and social media. The exposure of people to incitement and radicalization content via the web may cause a widespread infection of wide circles of people who may adopt radical points of view that encourage and lead to terror attacks. In this sense a person may transfer incitement to terrorism messages, using his own laptop where is present in one country and uses websites, social media networks and other online platforms located in another country and incite followers to perpetrate devastating attacks in their homelands around the globe. This phenomenon is especially evident in "lone wolf" attacks that are in many cases inspiration for terror attacks – the perpetrator becomes a role model to others and

inspires them to follow his lead. This kind of **Propaganda of the Deed** was typical for the activity of anarchists during the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and is based on exponential infection. And this leads to another common denominator – both phenomena are cross-border. Neither COVID-19 virus can be stopped by borders, nor can terrorist incitement, inspiration and activities.

Considering the wider ramifications of the phenomena, one can observe many similarities here again: Both COVID-19 and terrorism cause severe economic harm. COVID-19 measures that require social distancing and quarantine have caused a significant decrease of the GDP of many countries as well as an unprecedented peak of unemployment rates. Air traffic tourism and leisure time industry were among the most severely affected. Similarly, following notorious terror atrocities such as 9/11 in the US as well as other terrorism waves in different countries, these measures have caused severe damage to these and other industries and economies. Moreover, both phenomena challenge and subvert the public's trust in its governments and decision-makers and destabilize law and order. This lack of trust may be manifested via harsh criticism in the way COVID-19 is being contended the way these governments manage the crisis, and their decisions especially in connection with social distancing and quarantine policies. Or, in the case of counter-terrorism, the public trust in their governments might be reduced when the public starts to question the government's determination or capability to protect them at all costs by taking all the necessary steps which are needed to prevent any terrorist's attacks.

One of the most difficult dilemmas regarding counter-terrorism is the "Democratic Dilemma", meaning the natural tension between the use of effective counter-terrorism measures and the need to preserve liberal-democratic values. This tension intensifies in light of the fact that counter-terrorism measures are intended, at their core, to protect a basic human right – the right to live, hence these counter-terrorism measures are taken in order to save lives. However, employing some of the most effective counter-terrorism measures infringes to varying degrees on multiple other human and civil rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of movement and assembly, the right to privacy, and many others. This basic dilemma that marks the tension between the need to prevent the loss of lives and the infringement of democratic-liberal values is manifested in the way countries contend with COVID-19 as well. Is it the state's right, in the name of public health, to infringe on people's privacy by questioning patients about the way they live their lives and the people they meet with? Can it impose a widespread quarantine? Compel people to move wearing face masks? Isolate certain communities that have a high infection ratio or are considered high-risk groups (e.g. the elderly or certain ethnic minorities)? Can it prohibit demonstrations or group prayers? The above gets even more sensitive when the preventive measures include the deployment of technology such as advanced triangulation systems, applications that monitor the movements of cell phone owners, AI-based technologies and more. Such technologies serve as sources to locate sick people and to sever the infection chain (in the case of COVID-19) as soon as possible, or to locate the terrorists, their accomplices and supporters to prevent terror attacks.

The Democratic Dilemma—challenges in contending with terrorism or with COVID-19 require a regulatory regime that will govern the use of various measures, especially the use of advanced technology to prevent both phenomena. In both cases there is a paramount need to develop a system of checks and balances based on the separation of powers which will include an effective monitoring system to verify that neither branch of government exceeds their power. These essential checks and balances must be measured and sophisticated enough so as to leave enough room for an effective response for various enforcement agencies to be able to prevent either the spread of COVID-19 or a wave of terror attacks. The states must strike the required balance between the urgent need to effectively deal with the problem and their duty to examine, monitor and review these measures and prevent their abuse.

Moreover, effectively contending with both phenomena calls for tight cooperation, local as well as global. To effectively contend with COVID-19 requires ongoing cooperation among multiple government ministries (Finance, Health, HLS, Education and more), healthcare systems (Ministry of Health, hospitals, HMOs), private and public sector (importers and manufactures of healthcare equipment, technology and life sciences companies that develop vaccines and medicines), municipal and national governments, academia and government (consulting on healthcare, epidemiology, economy, crisis management and more), law enforcement agencies, and healthcare authorities (share of information and executing heightened enforcement) and many more. Similarly, to effectively contend with terrorism requires an inter-ministry, inter-agency and inter-sectorial cooperation.

With both phenomena it is important to reach an understanding and collaboration between the government and decision-makers and the public at large and particular sectors of the public (high-risk communities) to achieve cooperation, compliance and assistance to the joint effort to thwart terrorism and the spread of the virus. However, due to the fact that both pandemics are infectious and cross-border in nature the need for cooperation is global on top of the local aspect. For example, if a certain country successfully manages, to reduce the infection ratio within its territory and arrive at an effective control of the spread of the virus through enforcement of social distancing and quarantine, the moment it will open its borders to neighboring countries and resume marine and aerial international transportation, without cooperation with its neighbors and other countries on prevention regulation of the spread of the virus, the movement of people (tourists, businessmen, expats and relatives) will soon cause an increase of the infection ratio and worsen its position. The same is true with regards to terrorism. A country that takes effective counter-terrorism measures but leaves its borders open and has no close cooperation with its neighbors is risking terrorist infiltrating in its territory and perpetrating attacks. This global regulatory cooperation has even greater importance whenever terrorists use online platforms in different countries and these countries do not work together to eradicate the phenomenon. An effective struggle against both phenomena requires, therefore, a cross-border, uniform use of counter-measures, mutual thresholds and common regulation, coordination and joint operations

among the various enforcements agencies, as well as learning from the experience of other states.

That said, the learning process in and of itself is not enough. At the core of the effective struggle with both phenomena there is the fundamental stage of gathering intelligence, analyzing and processing it and arriving at actionable conclusions. The need for reliable and current intelligence when fighting terrorism is obvious. Without intelligence one cannot thwart a specific attack and cannot actively engage in an offensive or operative action against terror organizations, against their operatives and accomplices, or even establish effective policies and practices. Intelligence is also fundamental to an effective campaign against COVID-19. Policy makers and heads of the healthcare systems need to know as soon as possible who was infected by the virus in order to cut any infection chain. They need to know how other healthcare systems in different countries operate and learn from their experience, and they need to learn the developing dynamics of the pandemic behavior, etc.

Moreover, with both pandemics there is a great importance for enlisting the public to fight each phenomenon and encourage the people to comply with the health regulations. Thus, counter-terrorism agencies in various countries understood long ago the importance of recruiting the public for the intelligence warnings and acted to heighten their awareness, inter alia through campaigns such as "If You See Something Say Something". Similarly, various countries act to recruit the public to report an increase of COVID-19 symptoms through various means such as designated cellular apps to enable them an early detection of infection clusters.

Based on the gathered intelligence one can compile the reference scenarios that will serve as the basis for the decision-makers' status review and assessment of possible ways to contend with the phenomenon. When dealing with terrorism, possible attack types and locations will be presented so that counter-terrorism agencies will know how to prepare for and deploy counter-measures to thwart them, whereas when dealing with a healthcare crisis possible scenarios are needed in order to identify and address the thresholds beyond which the healthcare system will collapse (e.g. number of patients, number of severe patients, number of ventilated patients). Based on the intelligence assessment and the reference scenarios the required equipment to effectively battle the disease will be prepared and supplies procured, treatment protocols compiled, staff will be trained etc. The intelligence picture also forms a basis for setting the required regulatory regime, most importantly including what laws and ordinances need to be enacted to define the authority of the various government agencies as well as the public's level of compulsory compliance.

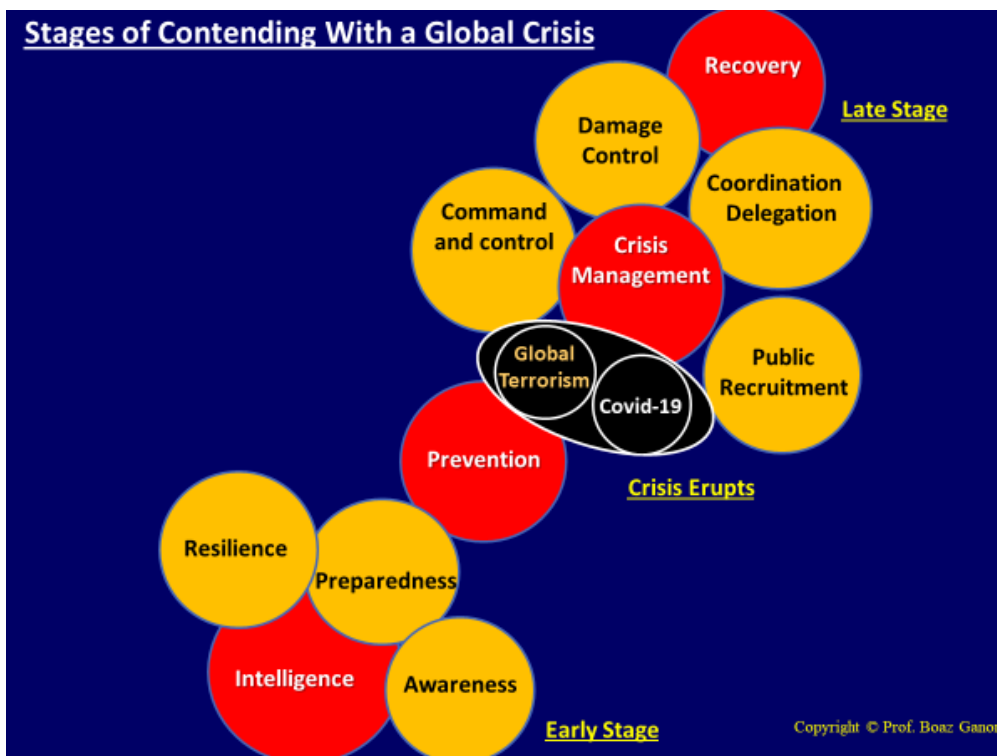
As mentioned above, enlisting the public to contend with both pandemics is paramount, however the way to recruit the public doesn't have to be via reinforcement and legal sanctions but rather through incorporation, convincing, education and, above all, transparency. Only when the public will be convinced that the steps taken by the government are indeed needed

to keep it healthy and safe it will comply. To achieve that there is a need to develop an effective and professional interaction with the public, explaining the policy and the steps taken by the government is necessary. This interaction needs to gain the public's trust by disseminating current and reliable information coupled with clear and impartial instructions that do not favor or discriminate any sector of the public.

All of the above point to the fact that contending with COVID-19 as well as terrorism require a professional, efficient and consistent decision-making process. The leaders must ensure the existence of a clear, hierarchal chain of command and a definite division of authority and responsibilities between all the relevant ministries and agencies and in synergetic fashion, refrain from unnecessary disputes, devoid of any rivalries, politics and ego clashes (either personal or institutional).

In summary, the processes to contend with either the coronavirus pandemic terrorism are very similar as both conform to the modus operandi required to contend with global crises and disasters (see diagram below). In the early stage (i.e. pre-crisis) one must gather as much intelligence as possible to understand the scope of the phenomenon, its nature, ramification, its vulnerabilities and more. On that basis, one must strive to prevent the crisis from happening by increasing the government agencies' preparedness and readiness for either routine of emergency activities, increasing public resiliency and heightening public awareness to the possibility of such disaster happening.

Should the preventive measures fail and the crisis (i.e. waves of pandemic or global terrorism) erupts, the government should then switch gears and focus on the next stage, which is managing the crisis. The purpose of the latter is to minimize and mitigate the damage from the crisis, limit the number of casualties (dead, injured or sick) by delegating authority and dividing roles and responsibilities among the various relevant emergency apparatuses, coordinating, controlling and commanding them and enlisting the public to assist the above and comply with the regulations. Once the crisis has been contained then the last stage starts – recovery and resumption of pre-crisis normalcy. Here one must restore, as fast as possible, all the individual, community, municipality and national normal day to day activities.



As explained above, both pandemics, COVID-19 and global terrorism, as well as the challenges that arise when fighting them both have multiple similarities. That said, it is important to acknowledge some fundamental differences between them. First, assuming the COVID-19 eruption was not manmade, both pandemics represent two different types of calamities – terrorism is a manmade calamity, executed by design in an attempt to achieve concrete ideological, political, social and other goals. COVID-19 is an unintended natural disaster⁴¹. The malice in terrorism is manifested, inter alia, in all the early stages of the attacks – initiation, planning, preparation as well as in the attack itself. All of the above are meant to maximize the terror attack's impact in a way that will promote the aforementioned goals and interests of the perpetrators. That is not the case with COVID-19. Here, not only are there no plans or preparations to launch the pandemic, but it wasn't meant to promote anybody's interests. Moreover, unlike terror attacks which are designed to target a special class of people, ethnic minority, ideological or political rivals, COVID-19 cannot be focused on any specific target population and avoid infecting other people at the same time. Therefore, it is very difficult to maliciously use the virus in the service of a state actor, terror organization or any other group for a pinpoint attack or a specific attack on an enemy or a specific rival⁴².

Another fundamental difference is associated with the way one combats each phenomenon. Whereas counter-terrorism effort is based on the "terrorism formula" whose variables are motivation and operational capability, i.e. a terror attack only happens when the perpetrator has both the motivation to execute the attack and the capability to carry it out, an effective counter-terrorism effort requires either neutralizing the motivation (by CVE measures – Countering Violent Extremism) or neutralizing the operational capabilities of the terrorists (CT). Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the counter-measure efforts are totally focused on neutralizing the virus' ability to inflict massive harm.

Finally, it should be noted that like any other crisis, contending with either the coronavirus pandemic or terrorism entails many opportunities. For example, even though both phenomena have different life-threatening attributes they both create an immediate and acute need to develop special *modi operandi* and technologies for handling them. The latter may even be one and the same as we have seen with cell phone triangulation. Since need is the mother of all invention one can hope that countering both phenomena will accelerate Research and Development (R&D) processes that not only assist the curbing and preventing of the phenomena in the future, but also may have other dual use advantages and provide a technological and conceptual springboard in many aspects of life.

Another opportunity involves the suffering caused to many innocent people around the world because of these phenomena. This global human suffering creates a sense of shared destiny which may be directed (with the proper steering by the leadership in different countries) to mend fences, overcome differences and mute conflicts. This sense of shared destiny may even promote effective global cooperation that will help defeat terrorism and COVID-19. Same as to effectively contend with terrorism one must form a global coalition to include all global relevant actors battling terrorism (decision-makers, governments, security and intelligence agencies, first responders, international organizations, civil organizations, academia and the public at large). The same holds true when fighting COVID-19. Here too, we must form a global coalition and include all relevant actors to study and understand the disease better, identify the challenges it poses and develop effective ways and means to prevent and handle it, all the while learning from each other's experience, forming joint doctrines and global regulations for cross-border containment and the elimination of the virus. In fighting the new global phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must learn the lessons of countering global terrorism and acknowledge that "it takes a network to defeat a network".

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- 41 That of course discounts various theories blaming the Chinese government for the eruption of the pandemic, either negligently or by design.
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**A LEGACY OF DISORDER, DESPERATION, AND DEFIANCE:
THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
ON THE FUTURE COURSE OF TERRORISM**

By Brian Michael Jenkins

A LEGACY OF DISORDER, DESPERATION, AND DEFIANCE: THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON THE FUTURE COURSE OF TERRORISM

By Brian Michael Jenkins

What effect will the coronavirus pandemic have on the future course of terrorism? Will the pandemic presage new waves of bio-terrorist attacks? Will the massive death tolls caused by the pandemic inure the public to the comparatively minuscule violence of today's terrorism?

Do the death threats to health officials and political leaders in reaction to the control measures mandated to slow the spread of the virus foreshadow new terrorist campaigns? Will the pandemic doom already fragile governments? Will it shatter the social order, plunging the world into violent anarchy? Or will it strengthen the hand of oppression?

For understandable reasons, the connection between the pandemic and political violence in an already turbulent world has become a subject of intense interest. The linkage has deep roots in faith and history. Pestilence, slaughter, famine, and death ride together in apocalyptic visions. Historically, war, disease, and famine often accompanied one another, causing widespread suffering and death. It is understandable that we should connect the pandemic and the particular mode of political violence that commands contemporary headlines and has contributed so much to recent alarms.

However, it may be difficult to discern direct cause and effect links between the pandemic and terrorism. The pandemic is a global event with broad economic, social, and political consequences. These will vary greatly from country to country. Some of the pandemic's effects may only become apparent years from now in as yet unpredictable ways. Although it is also a global phenomenon, terrorism is an artificially and narrowly defined mode of political expression and armed conflict. Its trajectory reflects political and technological developments. In many cases, terrorist tactics are part of a broader ideological struggle or political contest.

The pandemic theoretically may have some direct effects. For example, some terrorists are already speculating on how to weaponize the virus. The pandemic could encourage more extremists to think about biological weapons. They fill the Internet with their rants and scenarios. Some plots may emerge. It may be informative to also look at the pandemic's possible effects more broadly. How might the pandemic affect political stability? Will it create conditions that lead to political unrest? Could it increase international tensions?

Any inquiry will be necessarily speculative. As this is being written the pandemic is still underway, and in many parts of the world, it appears to be surging. It will not suddenly be over, but will continue well into 2021, and could become endemic. And this pandemic differs from previous pandemics in history. Some similarities of behavior are observable over time, but much has changed since the Spanish Flu that afflicted the world in 1918 and 1919, and certainly since the great plague of the Middle Ages. Examining the effects of these earlier pandemics will offer clues, perhaps some hypotheses, but not provide a reliable template.

And finally, the coronavirus pandemic is only one of many factors influencing the course of political events, and by extension, political violence.

The distinguished medieval historian, Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., warns us that "Pinning long-term effects on single events is hazardous in any case and more so with such factors as levels of violence, difficult to quantify or judge qualitatively over a landscape as vast as Western Europe." Nonetheless, the Black Death and its recurrences cannot be shown to have ushered in unequivocally a more 'violent tenor of life' that supposedly ensued over the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Instead, stability, not violence, followed in some places...or with the growth of diplomacy and the balance of power between city-states in northern and central Italy during most of the fifteenth century,..."⁴³ His admonition carries even more weight as the effort here is to examine the consequences not just on one continent, but globally.

With these caveats in mind, the following chapter first looks at some of the already apparent direct effects of the pandemic on terrorist thinking. Then, looking at previous pandemics as a point of departure, the chapter will look at a range of possible effects, focusing on those that might contribute to or impact the nature of future political violence.

A brief history of modern bioterrorism

The current pandemic does not offer terrorists or extremists new capabilities or point them to a path they hadn't already thought about before. The use of biological weapons in warfare has a long history. Actors outside of governments only on a few occasions have entered the realm of bioterrorism with little success.

In 1972, two college students in Chicago invented a terrorist group called R.I.S.E. and plotted to contaminate the city's water supply with *Salmonella typhi*, which causes typhoid fever. Their objective was to wipe out the human race "except for a select group of people [who would be inoculated in advance, and] who would live in harmony with nature".⁴⁴ The plot was defeated by the FBI before any attempt was made.

In 1984, members of a religious cult in Oregon contaminated the salad bars of a town with *salmonellosis* in order to incapacitate them during a local election where they were trying to take control. More than 700 people were infected, but none died.

In 1990, the Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan, which later carried out the nerve gas attack on Tokyo's subway system, attempted to disseminate *botulinum* toxin in the form of a mist sprayed from a moving vehicle at two U.S. military bases, Narita Airport, the Japanese Diet, and the Imperial Palace. The effort failed to produce any results.

The group carried out six more biological attacks in 1993. In June, Aum Shinrikyo operatives dispersed *botulinum* toxin in an attempt to infect guests at a royal wedding, again without

results. The group then switched to *anthrax bacillus* for a second series of attacks in July. The first of these involved the dispersal of anthrax from a rooftop in Tokyo. The dispersal caused a foul odor but no documented cases of illness.⁴⁵ There were several more attempts to disperse anthrax in 1993.

For a final attempt in 1995, the group planned to disperse botulinum toxin from spray devices concealed inside briefcases, however, the individual in charge had second thoughts and replaced the toxic solution with water.⁴⁶

These attempts were part of a broader effort to develop and use biological, chemical, and possibly even nuclear weapons. As in the 1972 Chicago case, the cult's leader had visions of provoking a nuclear war that would wipe out the world's population. Only he and selected followers would survive to create a new race that would then repopulate the planet.

The theme of chosen survivors who rebuild humanity in a post-apocalyptic world dates back to Noah's Ark in the Hebrew Bible and the Hindu Dharmasastra and recurs in contemporary science fiction and some terrorist plots involving weapons of mass destruction.

Al Qaeda, which dedicated itself to the field of mass murder, also attempted to weaponize biological agents, including anthrax, *botulinum* toxin, and ricin, although there are also reports that it sought or acquired *Yersinia pestis* (plague), Ebola virus, and salmonella bacteria.⁴⁷ The effort failed, although there were a number of foiled terrorist plots and allegations of plots involving ricin in Europe, most recently in Germany in 2018. Al Qaeda's leaders were not thinking about rebuilding humanity but felt entitled to kill millions of infidels in retaliation for their perceived aggression against Islam.

In 2001, a series of letters containing anthrax spores were mailed to news media outlets and Democratic senators, killing five people and infecting 17 others as well as contaminating facilities including a Senate office building. The attack, beginning a week after the 9/11 attacks raised alarms that the United States now also faced terrorists armed with biological weapons and launched one the FBI largest investigations. A suspect was ultimately identified, but he killed himself before arrest.⁴⁸

These plots materialized in the closed universes of cults and mental disorder – both the leader of the 1972 plot in Chicago and the suspected author of the 2001 anthrax letters had suffered mental problems. Apart from the very utilitarian aim of swinging a local election, their motives and ultimate objectives were unclear, grandiose, or bizarre. There is no proximity to or evidence of inspiration provided by previous pandemics.

Apart from the 2001 anthrax letters, most of the plots failed owing to the difficulty of weaponizing biological agents and the technical limitations of the perpetrators involved. Even groups with manifest intentions, significant funding, and access to scientists like Aum

Shinrikyo, were unable to successfully carry out a large-scale biological attack. But technical limitations may not entirely explain the paucity of terrorist use of biological weapons. There also may be self-imposed constraints.

Jihadis may see the current pandemic as an ally, even though it has wreaked a toll on Muslim nations. The virus is an ally in that it has weakened or distracted security forces – jihadi attacks have intensified in a number of countries during the pandemic and terrorist jihadi-inspired terrorist attacks have occurred in Europe. But biological weapons, which kill the elderly, the infirm, and in some cases, young children, do not support the jihadis' image of themselves as warriors. Some terrorists may share the general revulsion that biological attacks provoke. Another factor is that contagious diseases spread quickly and are indiscriminate in who they kill. A group found responsible for a biological attack that spreads disease would quickly find itself reviled as an enemy of all humanity.

Notions of murdering millions appear to be more often associated with apocalyptic cults or religion-based and far right ideologies. Bio-terrorism scenarios in particular resonate with the genocidal fantasies of white supremacist and anti-Semitic extremists. A poster circulated on the Internet advised followers, "What to Do if You Get Corona 19: Visit your local mosque, visit your local synagogue, spend the day on public transport, spend time in your local diverse neighborhood." This is more an expression of attitude than a terrorist plot. However, there were several cases in the 1990s in which rightwing extremists in America were convicted of possessing plague, ricin or *botulinum* toxin. The intended targets were not always clear, but appear to have been government officials.⁴⁹

Although most plots involving biological weapons were uncovered and the attacks that resulted from the plots missed by the authorities resulted in deaths or illness on only two occasions (the 1984 Oregon incident and the 2001 anthrax letters), the fact that the current pandemic may be inspiring thousands more people to even think about biological weapons is a not positive development. On the other hand, that the coronavirus pandemic may be prompting authorities to dust off forgotten plans for dealing with biological incidents is a good thing. Large-scale biological attacks remain difficult to pull off. Alarming hoaxes and low-level attacks are far more likely and, given the anxieties already caused by the pandemic, may cause greater alarm.

Right-wing extremists appear to be devoting more attention to conspiracy theories involving the origins and *purposes* of the pandemic. They see the coronavirus pandemic as a vast plot to impose government tyranny. Most of the online communications among right-wing extremists focus instead on the spread of the virus including quarantines are not only intended to frighten the public into accepting greater control, but are the forerunners of internment camps where vast numbers of people who defy the government will be held. Efforts to trace contacts during the pandemic are a cover for the introduction of social surveillance technology. Vaccines will offer opportunities to insert tiny electronic devices that track people. This is the kind of

paranoia that festers on the far right. The pandemic has given these conspiracy theories a much larger audience.

Resistance to public health measures to slow the spread of the virus – restrictions on assemblies, mandates to wear masks, temporary shutdowns, or new rules imposed on certain categories of business – has already led to denunciations of state tyranny, angry confrontations, and, more seriously, to death threats against public health officials and political leaders. A plot to kidnap and hold or kill the governor of the U.S. state of Michigan (connected with discussions to also kidnap the governor of the state of Virginia) indicate that extremists may be willing to initiate a violent campaign.

As contemporary terrorist enterprises have switched from traditional recruiting into small clandestine organizations, which required the careful vetting of volunteers to weed out infiltrators and unreliable operators, to “leaderless resistance” and remote recruiting by exhortation, many of today’s terrorists are self-selecting and organizationally untethered. They may be inspired as much by visions of violence as by commitment to any specific ideology, which may act as a conveyor for their individual discontents. Many come with troubled personal histories of aggression, substance abuse, and mental problems. No bright shining line divides the political fanatics from the mentally disturbed.

The pandemic has increased their numbers. Deprived of their daily routines and personal relationships, many people are disoriented and disillusioned, creating a receptive audience for fringe ideas. These are the conditions that psychologists believe can accelerate radicalization. The end of the pandemic will not de-radicalize them. They add another layer of potential terrorist actors emerging from the pandemic.

The greater danger comes from state-backed projects. Conspiracy theories immediately linked the coronavirus to Chinese government laboratories. There is no concrete evidence supporting the theory, but the possibility that, under pressure of sanctions or during war, states or rogue elements within a state apparatus might consider a clandestine launching of a biological attack disguised as a natural outbreak.

The threat of a biological attack by a state is not new.⁵⁰ Both the United States and the United Kingdom considered this possibility during World War II and the Cold War and prepared to respond in kind as a deterrent. The British program ended in the 1950s, the U.S. program in 1969. Iraq under Saddam Hussein began developing biological weapons in the early 1980s. Coalition forces sent to liberate Kuwait after its takeover by Saddam Hussein in 1990 were prepared for a biological attack, which never came. The full extent of Iraq’s program became known after the First Gulf War and was considered to be largely dismantled by the late 1990s. However, allegations that Iraq was covertly continuing the effort were offered as one of the justifications for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Post-invasion inspections showed that the biological weapons program had indeed been suspended.

The current pandemic theoretically could inspire some countries to consider the utility of biological warfare. If the coronavirus becomes endemic, it theoretically could also provide some cover for a covert operation. At the same time, however, the pandemic would also point to the risks that the virus might get out of control and harm the country that initiated the attack. In a post-pandemic environment, with hundreds of thousands already dead, the risks of retaliation would be extremely high, and affected nations might not wait for proof of culpability, but respond on suspicion. Here, the 2003 invasion of Iraq is instructive.

As this brief review shows, the coronavirus pandemic does not necessarily increase the likelihood of terrorists using biological weapons, although it may increase their appearance in hoaxes, extortionate threats, and possibly low-level incidents. Ascending to the greater danger posed by state-sponsored attacks, the calculations remain the same in a post-pandemic world. Biological weapons are not reliable. They are indiscriminate. Contagious diseases as opposed to toxins derived from plants or microorganisms are difficult to control. And they entail high risks of massive retaliation and regime change.

This brings us to a different formulation of the question: Will the pandemic affect the world in ways that make armed conflict and other forms of political violence, including terrorism, more likely? This is a broader inquiry. What do previous pandemics tell us?

The coronavirus compared to previous pandemics

It makes a difference whether a pandemic kills three percent or half of a population, and whether it subsides in a couple of years or becomes a recurring event over decades or centuries. The coronavirus pandemic thus far appears to be killing fewer people than the great pandemics of history. If this pattern continues its effects will come more from economic and social disruption than total deaths.

As of October 2020, the coronavirus has affected more than 40 million people worldwide, 1.2 million have died. Clearly, it is a major global event that has already had far-reaching consequences, especially its damage to the global economy. However, the pandemic's long-term effects on society may depend on whether it surges well beyond its current totals before vaccines contain its spread and numbers overwhelm medical capacity and the ability to administer treatment regimens that have already greatly reduced mortality. The COVID19 pandemic has a long way to go to match the death and devastation caused by some of history's worst pandemics.

The Plague of Justinian (541-542) eventually killed an estimated 30-50 million people, and even after it subsided in Byzantium, it continued to reappear in Europe, Africa, and Asia for several years, causing widespread devastation.

The Black Death (1347-1351) killed an estimated 200 million people – one-half of Europe's population at the time. The plague continued to reappear for several centuries in more localized outbreaks. The successive waves of the plague saw a change in popular attitudes. The first and worst outbreak provoked mass hysteria. People interpreted it as a sign of God's wrath from which there was no escape, medicine was useless. Chroniclers described events in apocalyptic terms, coloring their accounts of the plague's origins with venomous fumes, black smoke, thunder and lightning bolts. Processions of flagellants, whipping themselves with metal-tipped leather straps moved from city to city. Jews were blamed and persecuted.

Accounts of the successive waves of the plague discarded the supernatural and reflect growing confidence in preventive measures and cures. Although knowledge of how the plague spread was still primitive by today's standards, people were beginning to understand consequences of overcrowded cities, unhygienic conditions, even epidemiology.

The so-called "Third Plague" (beginning in western China in 1855, spreading to Hong Kong in 1894, and emerging in India at the end of the 19th century) killed an estimated 12 million people, mainly in India.⁵¹ It reached, but hardly affected Europe. The Spanish Flu (1918-1919), the largest pandemic in modern times, killed an estimated 40-50 million people – between two and three percent of the world's population at that time.

The current death toll of the coronavirus pandemic compares with the Asian Flu (1957-1958) which killed an estimated 1.1 million, and the Hong Kong Flu (1968-1970), which killed a million people. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is still in its first year. With daily death tolls averaging 5-6,000 worldwide, it could easily ascend above 2 million deaths. It could also presage an endemic problem with periodic recurrences. Still, to match the proportion of the population killed by the 1918 Spanish Flu in today's world, the coronavirus would have to kill something on the order 200 million people. That seems unlikely.

Smallpox, an endemic disease since ancient times, periodically exploded in large-scale outbreaks. Europeans brought it to the Americas and Australia where it killed vast numbers of indigenous populations who had no natural immunity. Even in the 20th century, smallpox still killed between 300 and 500 million people worldwide before it was finally wiped out through vaccination.

Smallpox killed its victims quickly – about a third of those who were infected died within one or two weeks. In contrast, the HIV/AIDS virus took years to weaken its victims. Before effective treatments were developed, victims were doomed. Since 1981, it has killed 39 million. Smaller scale epidemics with fewer deaths also have caused local social and political upheavals.

Beyond pandemics, there are natural disasters – earthquakes, floods, volcanos, typhoons – that in the worse cases may kill millions. And tens of millions have died in the twentieth century's two world wars. What effects did they have?

These events may offer some clues about the kinds of social and political effects we might envision from the COVID-19 pandemic. We group these into **four broad categories**: effects on society, economic effects, political repercussions, and psychological effects. Our focus in each category is on those aspects that relate to political violence.

Effects on society

The immediate response to the threat of infectious disease is to seek safety. Some can do this by fleeing centers of danger, usually cities, to remote, unaffected areas. It is a solution available to today's mobile elite who can retreat to ranches in Wyoming or villas in the south of France, less so to those with regular jobs and families to take care of. A second course of action is to separate those not yet afflicted from contact with those who might carry the disease – quarantine and self-isolation. In the 14th century, walled cities closed their gates. The coronavirus pandemic has seen countries close their borders and restrict travel in other ways.

Outsiders become sources of suspicion. Nationalist tendencies intensify, encouraged by the tendency of politicians to deflect blame for their own helplessness or incompetence or further advance populist goals. Pandemics can be blamed on other countries or exploited to encourage nativism, xenophobia, hostility to minorities and immigrants.

Looking at wars between 1946 and 2004, researchers have found that "countries with high intensity of infectious disease stress, cultures are characterized by ethnocentric and xenophobic values," and that "countries characterized by high ethnocentrism and xenophobia experience greater intrastate armed conflict and civil war."⁵² These findings would suggest that pandemics theoretically contribute to tendencies that correlate with internal armed conflict.

Public health authorities have sought to slow the spread of the coronavirus by encouraging people to self-isolate by working from home if possible. This works so long as there is a much larger support infrastructure of individuals who accept greater risks by going to workplaces and delivering essential goods to those isolating themselves. For some, this offers an opportunity to increase their income, but it essentially divides society, shifting risks to those lower on the economic scale.

Those lower on the economic scale, which in many cases, means ethnic minorities, are already at greater risk. They may live in more crowded conditions. In some countries, they may not have the same access to quality health care and, consequently, may already be unequally afflicted by pre-existing health conditions that make them especially vulnerable if they contract the virus. In the United States, minorities are disproportionately represented among the pandemic's victims.

With self-isolation comes hoarding, which is both prudent, but also encourages an “every person for themselves”-attitude. We have seen numerous examples of bad behavior, altercations, and confrontations, but well below widespread looting, food riots or civil unrest.

In other words, the pandemic underscores and may accelerate the growth of economic inequality, which has already been cited as a concern. The pandemic may also sharpen the racial and ethnic inequality that is a persistent problem in a number of societies. At the same time, the pandemic rekindles old prejudices and promotes new ones. The pandemic in sum may produce a more divided society. Protests against racism and for economic justice have preceded, accompanied, and may be intensified by the pandemic.

The massive death tolls of Medieval pandemics cheapened life, which was already cheap. Some suggest that this led to increases in homicides, although other historians challenge this thesis.⁵³ Following the plague (another round of the Black Death), which struck Italy particularly hard in 1630, the erosion of social norms and hierarchy led to an outbreak of homicidal violence. Reportedly, the Spanish Flu prompted an increase in murder-suicides resulting from depression. “Newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic carried stories of men and women who attempted to slay their families.”⁵⁴

In Europe and the United States, crime, including violent crime, has declined overall around the world during the coronavirus pandemic,⁵⁵ but there has been an increase in shootings and killings in the United States, which historically has a comparatively high homicide rate.⁵⁶ The higher number of homicides may reflect the psychological problems caused by the lockdown and isolation. A more prosaic possibility is that spending more time in close quarters is promoting a higher volume of domestic violence, which is the explanation for most murders. It is, however, too early to see whether this is an anomaly or a trend.

Organized crime has always been quick to exploit scarcities and dislocations in the economy. Economic desperation may increase social tolerance of criminal activities. If the conclusion is that the pandemic has exposed the inherent unfairness of the political and economic systems, people will have less respect for the law.

Widespread unemployment may increase the number of recruits willing to join criminal enterprises. Loan sharking, counterfeit products, including hard-to-get medicines for treatment of the virus, thefts of vaccines and the distribution of counterfeit vaccines, as well as human trafficking are likely features of the pandemic and post-pandemic criminal landscape.

Cybercrime, which has been increasing over the years, is up.⁵⁷ How much of this is tied to the pandemic is uncertain. Cybercrime is opportunistic. Isolation has resulted in more people spending more time on the Internet and there have been reports of ransomware attacks on hospitals.

Economic effects

The pandemic has had a disastrous impact on the global economy, causing widespread unemployment and suffering. The global cost associated with the economic impact could be \$3.4 trillion a year. For the European Union, it may be about 5.6 percent in annual GDP, or approximately \$983 billion. The United Kingdom has incurred a loss of about 4.3 percent of its annual GDP or an annual loss of about \$145 billion at a time when the economic consequences of Brexit remain unclear. The United States has lost about 2.2 percent in annual GDP, or about \$480 billion.⁵⁸ The global economic situation will continue to deteriorate.

It is not clear how quickly countries may recover, and some countries will recover quicker than others. Some assert that once the restrictions are lifted and an effective vaccine is widely administered, the economy and employment will recover quickly. But countries – especially developing economies – heavily dependent on exporting basic commodities or tourism may face far slower recoveries. Energy exporting countries have been hard. The increased hostility toward globalization, which existed before the pandemic, but has been intensified by the pandemic may further impede economic recovery.

The pandemic has pushed millions of people back below the poverty line. Past research has not been able to find direct causal effects between poverty and terrorism, one facet of political violence. Ted Robert Gurr, however, argued 50 years ago that poverty itself is not a root cause of political violence. His theory of relative deprivation instead argues that riots, rebellions, coups, or insurgencies are caused by the frustration that arises from the discrepancy between what people have and what they think they deserve.⁵⁹ In that case, being thrust back into poverty may be more frustrating than remaining poor. As in all hypotheses presented here, there are, of course other factors which influence behavior, including leadership, organization, the ability of the government to address grievances, and perceptions of government strength and probity.

The current pandemic has also put many governments in difficult economic straits as they have attempted to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic and shutdowns on the population. Tax revenues have declined with the contraction in economic activity. Government deficits have grown. Great power competition, economic sanctions, and escalating tariff wars – trends that pre-dated the current pandemic – complicate the situation. Distributing vaccines, improving public health, and subsidizing companies and industries at risk and the unemployed will take priority. Foreign assistance budgets will be especially vulnerable to cuts. Developing countries dependent on exports and foreign assistance will be hard hit.

The tendency of governments to follow their own interests in response to pandemics instead of pursuing a more globally coordinated approach could further impede economic recovery. Recent research by the RAND Corporation has found that “vaccine nationalism,” – “a situation

in which countries push to get first access to a supply of vaccines, potentially hoarding key components for vaccine production – could cost the global economy \$1.2 trillion a year in GDP terms.⁶⁰ Underscoring the difficulty of a unified approach, even the European Union is having problems developing effective policies.

Uneven economic recovery and the re-impoverishment of some countries may accelerate migration of the desperate at a time when many economically advanced countries are determined to reduce their intake of migrants and refugees and take care of their own citizens.

Political repercussions

The pandemic could provoke political instability in a variety of ways. Historical experience suggests that poorly handled disasters erode faith in government leadership and institutions. In ancient China, calamities were seen as signs that the ruler had lost the mandate of heaven to rule and needed replacement. Rebels took up arms. Dynasties fell.

A devastating cyclone hit East Pakistan in 1970, killing a half million people. Angered by the government's failure to heed warnings and its bungled relief efforts, civil war broke out leading to the permanent division of Pakistan into two countries – Pakistan and Bangladesh – a year later.

The 1972 earthquake in Nicaragua, which killed thousands, underscored the incompetence and corruption of the Somoza regime, which had ruled the country for decades. Outrage turned to armed opposition, contributing to a long civil war that ultimately brought down the government. The AIDS epidemic, which destroyed tourism in Haiti in the early 1980s, probably contributed to the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier.⁶¹

The Black Death of the Middle Ages and subsequent outbreaks had different effects across Europe. In some cases, the Black Death was followed by social agitation, strikes, riots, even armed rebellions, but historians point out that these also featured in the years prior to the pandemic.

Some of the unrest, however, appears to be connected to the outbreaks. Disease significantly reduced the population. Smaller populations meant less economic production and fewer people to tax. Rulers tried to compensate for the loss revenue by expanding the tax base and raising rates. Ordinary workers who, in a tight labor market were earning more but who had previously been exempt from taxes were expected to pay their share. Poll taxes were imposed on everyone. Local lords increased their rents. These measures provoked popular resistance. The deaths of many of the rulers and government officials also contributed to instability.

Subduing the urban gangs that fought for various political factions and the brigands that

roamed the countryside posed a major challenge to governments. Those who were able to successfully pacify the towns and the rural areas survived. Others were hounded out of office.

Many people opposed the restrictions on travel during the Black Death in the Middle Ages. Officials who enforced the measures were threatened. Another major plague pandemic that spread across Asia in the late 19th century heightened tensions between British rulers and Indian subjects who resisted the severe control measures imposed by the government. Local resistance ultimately led to the assassination of one of the senior British officials and his military aide.

The inability of governments to control pandemics or impose control measures on resistant populations creates a perception of weakness. Government authorities are not to be believed, are ineffectual, or worse, are evil and corrupt. Anecdotal accounts identify this as an issue in some of the past pandemics. It is clearly an issue in the current coronavirus pandemic.

Control measures intended to slow the spread of the current coronavirus pandemic have already resulted in death threats to public health officials and political leaders in the United States, and authorities recently uncovered a plot to kidnap the governor of Michigan and discussions to target the governor of Virginia. The very legitimacy of political authority has been challenged in a manner last seen in America in the 1960s.

Conspiracy theories that the pandemic is a political plot aimed at undermining the president, intern the government's opponents, or impose a tyranny by inserting microscopic electronic tracking chips in any vaccine, have flourished in the fevered political atmosphere in the United States, but also have appeared in Canada and elsewhere.

While epidemics may weaken armies enough to change the outcome of battles, we have few examples where pandemics so weakened affected countries that it invited foreign invasion. One clear example would be the spread of smallpox brought by the Europeans to America decimated native empires, making them easy prey for Spanish conquest.⁶² Another possible (but partial) exception is the Manchurian plague that hit China in 1910 and 1911. Foreign powers already intent on carving China into zones of influence exploited the difficulties caused by the plague to advance their ambitions.⁶³

Psychological effects

Pandemics also inspire apocalyptic thinking and may contribute to nihilism and reckless behavior. This could, in turn, foster an erosion of ethics and a decline in respect for the law. As Thucydides noted in his horrific account of the epidemic that killed up to a third of Athens' population in 431-430 BC and its immediate aftermath, the sudden wave of deaths left disorder in its wake. "Athens owed to the plague the beginnings of a state of unprecedented

lawlessness. Seeing how quick and abrupt were the changes of fortune which came to the rich who suddenly died and to those who had previously been penniless but now inherited their wealth, people now began openly to venture on acts of self-indulgence...As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing whether one worshipped them or not, when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately. As for offenses against human law, no one expected to live long enough to be brought to trial and punished"⁶⁴ However, the psychological effects of past pandemics is an area where we have little empirical evidence, so any suggestions must remain in the realm of hypotheses.

In the current pandemic, more people are staying at home, spending more time in isolation, which psychologists believe can accelerate individual radicalization.⁶⁵ Deprived of their daily routines and personal relationships, people are disoriented and disillusioned, creating a receptive audience for fringe ideas. Although magical thinking is usually consigned to a pre-scientific age, it is noteworthy that conspiracy theories about the current pandemic have flourished.

One of the questions asked at the beginning of this chapter was whether the death tolls of the coronavirus pandemic would inure the public to the comparatively minuscule violence of today's terrorism. This requires a more detailed analysis.

As of November 2020, the coronavirus has killed approximately 1.2 million people worldwide, although this statistic may undercount the total volume of excess deaths resulting from the pandemic. The pandemic is ongoing, and, at the moment (this is being written in the autumn of 2020), cases and deaths are surging. Some mathematical models indicate that by the spring of 2021, the coronavirus will have killed 2 million people worldwide. Thus far, in the United States, the pandemic has killed approximately 230,000 people. This is equivalent to the death toll of more than 76 9/11 attacks.

Immediately after 9/11, terrorism analysts and public health officials feared that terrorists would continue to escalate their violence, employing weapons of mass destruction, in particular, nuclear or biological agents to kill tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people. Smallpox was most frequently mentioned, but anthrax and plague were also included as Category A agents that theoretically could be used in a terrorist attack.⁶⁶

Various scenarios were developed to examine the risks of various vaccination approaches in the United States. The most dangerous of the scenarios imagined a hostile government activating 40 sleeper agents who are given variola virus and equipped with nebulizers to disseminate it at the ten largest commercial airports across the country. Able to infect a hundred thousand persons, the estimated death toll was approximately 55,000 people.⁶⁷ The coronavirus probably will kill at least five to eight times that many in the United States,⁶⁸ although deaths from a terrorist attack have greater psychological impact.

As it turned out, the 2,977 lives lost on September 11, 2001 turned out to be a statistical outlier rather than an indicator of worse to come. Terrorist attacks continued after 9/11, but at pre-9/11 totals, with the worst cases involving around 200 fatalities. As pressure on al-Qaeda and its affiliates and spinoffs continued, there were fewer attacks of this scale outside of war zones (although this trend could easily reverse). But can terrorists hope to achieve the same psychological effect with attacks of this scale in a post-pandemic environment?

The terrorist stabbing attacks that occurred in France during the autumn of 2020 – incidents involving four fatalities – and the November 2 shooting in Vienna, which left five dead – suggest that the pandemic has not diminished the emotional impact of terrorist attacks with even a small number of fatalities. An event with a single fatality can still provoke alarm, anger, and have significant political effects. Where the attack takes place, the identity of the victim, the nature of the attack, and other factors outweigh the body count. The beheading of a French schoolteacher in October 2020 prompted a national response that will have far-reaching societal consequences.

The high anxiety already generated by the coronavirus also may make society emotionally even more vulnerable to low-level plots involving biological agents. The pandemic provides the amplifier.

Conclusions

From the Black Death of the 14th century to the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, we find that pandemics have been accompanied and followed by civil disobedience, social unrest, protests, riots, increases in violent crime, rebellions, and war. Governments often fell. Pandemics and wars revolve around each other like binary stars. It is tempting to look for and deceptively easy to see causality.

But caution is in order before we argue that the pandemics produced the turmoil. Armed rebellions, civil wars, and conflicts between nations are an almost constant feature of history. Global pandemics, with millions of deaths, occur more rarely, but local epidemics, some resulting in mass deaths, remain common. Theoretically, one could randomly scatter pandemics over the 700 years between the Black Death of the mid-14th century and the 1918 Spanish Flu and never be far from political unrest or armed conflict.

Effects of past plagues are complex, they may be immediate or become apparent years later. Some effects may appear to be direct consequences of the upheaval caused by the pandemic, others may appear over a longer term. They may be propelled by the pandemic or by its decline. Many other factors come into play. It is difficult to generalize.

Nevertheless, some issues seem to repeatedly emerge. One is popular resistance to the social controls and health requirements imposed by the authorities. Hoarding and battles over scarce resources is another recurring feature. Brief increases in violent crime seem to be common. More organized criminal activity may reflect economic dislocation or new opportunities. Pandemics may expose or reinforce existing problems – poor governance, societal divisions, prejudices, inequality, corruption. Existing social and political cleavages intensify. “Outsiders” are blamed and may become the targets of popular wrath, reflecting existing prejudices as well as the efforts of leadership to deflect blame. Displays of government incompetence, corruption, or simply indifference provoke outrage. Political violence in various forms may increase. Governments are brought down or fall. Political relationships realign.

But we cannot easily isolate the societal effects of pandemics from other factors that influence their course. Some of the recurring features mentioned above appear to be direct consequences of the pandemic. Other consequences appear to be one element of comorbidity involving the pre-existing social and political conditions of a society. A historical and cross-national analysis of pandemics and serious epidemics would produce endless variations.

What we can say is that pandemics, causing massive loss of lives, social and economic disruption, leave behind a legacy of disorder, desperation, and defiance. The pandemic and post-pandemic environment can lead to violence, a portion of which, in today’s terminology, could be classified as terrorism.

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**THE FALSE PROMISE OF SALAFI-JIHADISTS:
RHETORIC AND THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

By Seth G. Jones

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As COVID-19 spread around the globe, the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other Salafi-jihadists attempted to take advantage of the crisis. They argued that the pandemic was a punishment against infidel regimes. As one al-Qaeda document summarized: "The truth remains, whether we like it or not, that this pandemic is a punishment for the Lord of the Worlds for the injustice and oppression committed against Muslims specifically and mankind generally by governments you elect."⁶⁹ Islamic State and al-Qaeda propaganda predicted that the pandemic would cripple Western economies, militaries, and societies, and it would allow them to revitalize attacks, recruitment, and fundraising across the globe.⁷⁰ In addition, some analysts agreed that COVID-19 might provide a boost to Salafi-jihadists.⁷¹ As one article concluded, "COVID-19 will handicap domestic security efforts and international counter-ISIS cooperation, allowing the jihadists to better prepare spectacular terror attacks and escalate campaigns of insurgent warfare on battlefields worldwide."⁷²

In light of these forecasts, this paper asks two main questions. How did Salafi-jihadists attempt to take advantage of the COVID-19 crisis? How successful were they in achieving their objectives? To answer these questions, this paper mostly relies on primary source documents – including statements – by Salafi-jihadists. It also examines quantitative data on al-Qaeda and Islamic State attacks to assess possible changes in the number and type of attacks.

This analysis has two primary findings. First, Salafi-Jihadist groups and individuals hoped that COVID-19 would allow them to conduct several types of actions: increase terrorist attacks around the globe (including in the West), wage biological warfare, provide better governance than local regimes, recruit more supporters, and broadly weaken the West. Second, Salafi-jihadists generally *failed* to achieve most of their objectives – at least in the short-term. Their statements were largely rhetorical. These groups did not increase attacks (including in the West), they failed to outperform local regimes in responding to COVID-19, and their apocalyptic predictions about the collapse of the West did not materialize. Based on the unavailability of data in some areas – such as recruits – it is difficult to assess whether Salafi-jihadists were able to increase supporters. Still, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State did not appear to significantly benefit from COVID-19, despite their expectations and rhetoric.

The rest of this paper is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the organizational structure of Salafi-jihadists. The second section outlines the major objectives of Salafi-Jihadist groups and individuals in response to COVID-19, from conducting attacks to recruiting new members. The third offers a brief conclusion and highlights the main challenges faced by Salafi-jihadists.

A Decentralized Landscape

The Salafi-jihadist global landscape is decentralized and can be divided into at least four categories: the Islamic State and affiliated provinces (or *wilayats*), al-Qaeda and affiliated

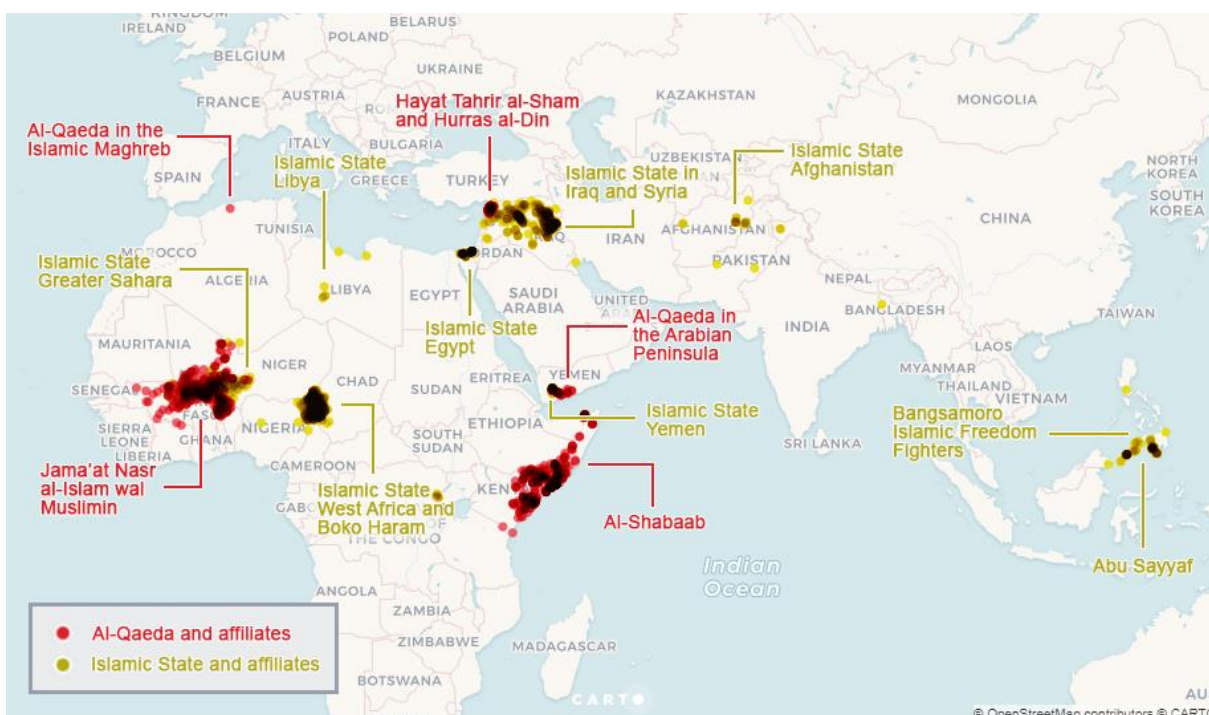
groups, other Salafi-jihadist groups, and inspired individuals and networks. This diffuse structure ensured that there was a plethora of comments and predictions on COVID-19 by a diverse set of Salafi-jihadists across the globe.

First, the Islamic State's core remains in Iraq and Syria, though it lost virtually all the territory it once controlled in those countries. Led by Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla, the Islamic State has approximately 10,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria and has utilized a desert, or *sahraa*, strategy to retake territory.⁷³ Its immediate objective is to restore the group's territorial control and administration, or *tamkin*, and conduct guerrilla attacks against Syrian and Iraqi government forces and their partners.⁷⁴ As one Islamic State document summarized, the organization is committed to "guerrilla warfare ... against the disbelievers and apostates, preparing the way for lasting control of the land."⁷⁵ The Islamic State has increasingly delegated authority from its core in Iraq and Syria to remote provinces in such countries and regions as Afghanistan, the Philippines, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Central Africa, and West Africa.⁷⁶

Second, al-Qaeda's leadership structure remains primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah (also known as Abu Muhammad al-Masri).⁷⁷ Some other senior al-Qaeda figures, such as Saif al-Adel, are likely located in Iran.⁷⁸ Al-Qaeda core is largely in survival mode, and many of its leaders have been killed by U.S. and partner strikes. Yet al-Qaeda still retains affiliated groups across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Examples include al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (based in Yemen), Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin (based in Somalia), Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (based in Mali and neighboring countries in the Sahel), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (based in Algeria and neighboring countries), al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (based in Afghanistan and Pakistan), and Hurras al-Din (based in Syria). In addition, al-Qaeda retains close relations with other groups, such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria, which boasts an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 fighters.⁷⁹ Much like the Islamic State, al-Qaeda's affiliates operate largely autonomously from core leaders in their operations, tactics, recruitment, and fundraising.

Figure 1 provides an overview of Islamic State and al-Qaeda attacks between January and October 2020, based on data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). It shows significant amounts of activity in countries like Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Mali.

Figure 1: Al-Qaeda, Islamic State, and Affiliated Attacks, 2020⁸⁰



Third, there are a number of allied groups that have relationships with either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. They have not become formal members and their leaders have not pledged *bay'at* (or loyalty) to either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. The arrangement allows these groups to remain sovereign, but to work with the Islamic State or al-Qaeda when their interests converge. In addition, there are a substantial number of allied Salafi-jihadist groups across Africa (such as Ansar al-Sharia Derna and Ansar al-Sharia Benghazi), South Asia (such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement), East Asia (such as Jemaah Islamiya).

Some groups do not have a Salafi-jihadist ideology but still cooperate with either the Islamic State or al-Qaeda. The Taliban's ideology, for example, is heavily influenced by the Hanafi Deobandi religious tradition.⁸¹ While the Taliban's ideology has been changing since the 1990s, Taliban leaders generally support the creation of a government by an extreme interpretation of sharia (Islamic law) and the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan.⁸² Relations between the Taliban and al-Qaeda have persisted for nearly two and a half decades.⁸³ As a 2020 U.S. Department of Defense report noted, "Despite recent progress in the peace process, [al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent] maintains close ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan, likely for protection and training."⁸⁴ Relations between al-Qaeda and Taliban-linked groups include long-standing personal connections, intermarriage, and a common history of struggle and jihad.⁸⁵

Fourth, there are inspired individuals and networks that do not have direct contact with al-Qaeda or Islamic State members, but who are inspired by their ideology and incensed by the perceived oppression of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Palestinian territory, and other countries. They are frequently motivated by a hatred of the West and local regimes. Without direct support, many of these individuals and networks are amateurs.⁸⁶

Overall, the Salafi-jihadist movement has become increasingly diffuse. Relations between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are competitive and sometimes violent, though they vary based on countries and specific localities. As the next section highlights, this decentralized landscape translated into a variety of projections from Salafi-jihadists across the globe about COVID-19.

Salafi-Jihadist Objectives

This section outlines the objectives of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other Salafi-jihadists following the COVID-19 outbreak. Collectively, Salafi-jihadists focused on **five main types of activities**: increase terrorist attacks around the globe, conduct biological warfare, expand recruitment and other support, outperform local regimes, and weaken the West.

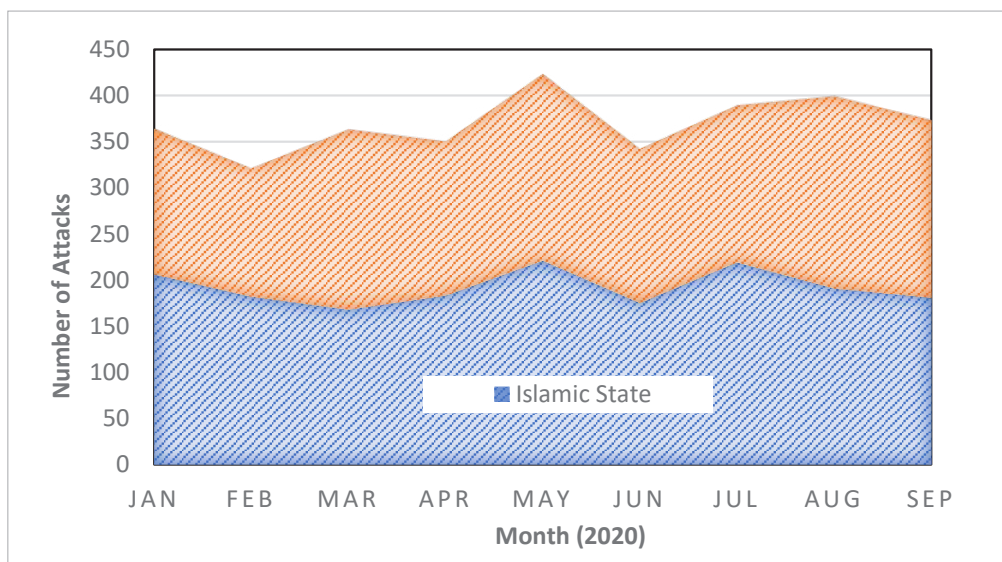
Increase the Number of Attacks

Salafi-jihadists boasted that they would use the outbreak of COVID-19 to ramp up terrorist attacks across the globe, including in the West after suffering setbacks. The Islamic State lost virtually all of the territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria, and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was killed by U.S. forces in October 2019. Al-Qaeda also experienced significant senior leadership losses and struggled to conduct or inspire major attacks in the West. In October 2020, Afghan special operations forces killed a senior al-Qaeda official, Hossam Abdul Al-Raouf (who used the nom de guerre Abu Muhsin al-Masri). In October 2020, U.S. special operations forces also killed several al-Qaeda operatives in Idlib Province of Syria, including Abu Mohammed al-Sudani.⁸⁷

Because of these setbacks, Islamic State and al-Qaeda leaders hoped that an escalation in attacks could help revitalize their campaigns. In March 2020, for example, al-Qaeda's leadership announced that COVID-19 provided an unparalleled opportunity to conduct attacks overseas. "Now is the time to spread the correct Aqeedah [creed], call people to Jihad in the Way of Allah and revolt against oppression and oppressors," it noted.⁸⁸ Similarly, the Islamic State urged supporters across the globe to conduct attacks. In its publication *al-Naba*, the Islamic State noted that COVID-19 raised "the possibility of increasing the impact of attacks on people and property and spreading chaos and confusion."⁸⁹ The article continued that these attacks could mirror previous ones in Paris, London, and Brussels. The group explained that it would be among the "worst nightmares of the Crusaders" if an attack occurred in the West, just as these countries faced bleak economies and overcrowded hospitals.⁹⁰ In Indonesia, Islamic State supporters called for attacks against "apostates in big cities" during the COVID-19 crisis while

their enemies were distracted.⁹¹ Islamic State supporters on Facebook encouraged supporters to attack and loot “kuffar” (disbelievers) in Indonesia during the pandemic.⁹² In South Asia, a pro-Islamic State media outfit encouraged supporters in India to capitalize on their enemies’ preoccupation with COVID-19 to conduct more attacks.⁹³ Islamic State supporters in the Philippines – including those that associated with the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters – urged sympathizers to wage jihad to reopen mosques closed by COVID-19 restrictions.⁹⁴ Indeed, numerous Salafi-jihadists commented on digital platforms that they should conduct attacks against governments that closed mosques and implemented broader lockdown measures.⁹⁵ As Figure 2 highlights, however, the data show that both the Islamic State and al-Qaeda failed to increase the number of attacks in 2020, at least through September. There were virtually the same number of attacks across the globe in January 2020 (364 attacks) as there were in September 2020 (373 attacks). Indeed, the Islamic State and al-Qaeda attack tempo largely *flatlined* in 2020.

Figure 2: Number of Islamic State and Al-Qaeda Attacks, 2020⁹⁶



There were some exceptions. In May 2020, the Islamic State exploited gaps in Iraqi security forces caused by COVID-19 lockdowns to conduct attacks in Iraq.⁹⁷ But these numbers quickly dropped back down. There were also a handful of inspired attacks in Europe. On September 25, 2020, for example, a Salafi-jihadist conducted a knife attack at the former headquarters of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. On October 16, Abdoullakh Anzorov beheaded a teacher in Paris after the victim showed controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad to his students, and Brahim Aouissaoui killed three individuals in Nice nearly two weeks later.⁹⁸ On November 2, an Islamic State sympathizer killed four people in Vienna, Austria. In Germany,

security agencies arrested a cell of suspected Islamic State members, who were Tajik nationals, for plotting attacks against U.S. forces in Germany.⁹⁹

Yet the number of Salafi-jihadist attacks in Europe – and the West more broadly – did not significantly increase in 2020. In addition, COVID-19 had little or nothing to do with any of the attacks. In France, for instance, the terrorist attacks in September and October 2020 were tied to *Charlie Hebdo* and cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, not COVID-19.

Conduct Biological Warfare

Salafi-jihadists also encouraged individuals to wage biological warfare against enemy governments. For example, an Islamic State online magazine encouraged sympathizers to weaponize COVID-19, noting that “every brother and sister, even children, can contribute to Allah’s cause by becoming the carriers of this disease and striking the colonies of the disbelievers, wherever they find them.” The article urged jihadist sympathizers to “strike the disbelievers with this disease which is a weapon.” It also made a fallacious claim that “true” Muslims would not be infected since “no disease can harm even a hair of a believer who only lives to praise Allah and His benevolence.”¹⁰⁰

There has been a significant and justifiable concern that terrorists – including Salafi-jihadists – might conduct an attack using biological, chemical, radiological, or even nuclear weapons.¹⁰¹ Even a rudimentary or failed attack could incite substantial fear.¹⁰² In addition, COVID-19 showed that countries and their populations can be vulnerable to novel types of viruses and raised the prospect that a Salafi-jihadist or other terrorist group might use a pathogen or other biological agent to conduct an attack.¹⁰³ White supremacist and other violent far-right groups, for example, discussed the possibility of weaponizing COVID-19 and using biological agents to perpetrate attacks in light of COVID-19.¹⁰⁴

With the possible exception of a Salafi-jihadist plot foiled by Tunisian security forces in April 2020 to use COVID-19 as a weapon, it does not appear that Salafi-jihadists systematically attempted to conduct deliberate biological attacks by spreading COVID-19.¹⁰⁵ There is also little evidence thus far that Salafi-jihadists attempted to jumpstart biological, chemical, radiological, or nuclear programs in response to COVID-19. As one United Nations counterterrorism report concluded, “While ISIL propaganda characterizes COVID-19 as a divine weapon, there have been no indications that ISIL is systematically attempted to weaponize the virus.”¹⁰⁶ Instead, the Islamic State and al-Qaeda generally preferred to plan and inspire traditional attacks using explosives, firearms, knives, and vehicles – in part since these weapons and material were easier to acquire and use.¹⁰⁷

Increase Recruitment and Supporters

Salafi-jihadists hoped to increase recruitment by taking advantage of COVID-19 quarantines, a rise in the number of individuals working and going to school from home, and a surge in online

activity. Their goal was not just to radicalize Muslims, but to *convert* individuals to Islam. As one al-Qaeda document argued, "we would like to remind non-Muslims to utilize their time in quarantine for finding out more about Islam from authentic sources, reading, and reflecting on the merits that make Islam stand out from all other religions, isms and systems."¹⁰⁸ The rise in the number of individuals online – including young people – provided an opportunity for exposure to propaganda and extremist ideas. The Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and others had a potentially captive audience.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, the Islamic State utilized hashtags related to COVID-19 in an attempt to divert internet users to its propaganda.¹¹⁰

Some Salafi-jihadists tried to be creative, however disillusioned their attempts were. Their recruitment pitch was salvation from the pandemic. For example, a leader of a splinter group of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters urged individuals to join the group to save themselves from infection.¹¹¹ Yet there is little evidence that the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, or other Salafi-jihadists increase recruitment because of – or even during – COVID-19.

Outperform Local Regimes

Some Salafi-jihadists argued that they were better prepared to respond to the COVID-19 crisis than local regimes. In areas where the local government's presence was limited, non-existent, or incompetent, Salafi-jihadists and other allied groups promised to provide more effective essential services and health care.¹¹²

One example was the Afghan Taliban. In response to COVID-19, the Taliban asserted that the government of Ashraf Ghani failed to curb the spread of the coronavirus and accused it of embezzling foreign assistance. Taliban leaders claimed they had helped safeguard Afghans from the virus and urged foreign health agencies and non-governmental organizations to provide assistance, promising that they would ensure the safety of all international aid workers.¹¹³ In addition, the Taliban portrayed the COVID-19 pandemic as an "unprecedented opportunity" for wealthy Muslims to donate to the needy – especially during Ramadan. The group promoted the work of its Department for the Affairs of Needy, Orphans and Disabled.¹¹⁴

Yet there was little evidence that the Taliban or other groups were better able to provide services in response to COVID-19 than local regimes, though some countries used the COVID-19 outbreak to repress their populations.¹¹⁵ Over the long term, these state actions could increase local grievances. After all, numerous countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia remain vulnerable to Salafi-jihadists and other insurgents because of local grievances and poor governance – though for reasons other than their response to COVID-19. Such countries as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia – which are all dealing with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State – are at or near the bottom 10 percent of countries worldwide in terms of government effectiveness, according to the World Bank.¹¹⁶ Based on such indicators, the conditions for terrorism and insurgency persist, regardless of COVID-19.

Weaken the West

Finally, Salafi-jihadists hoped that COVID-19 would fundamentally weaken Western countries. Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other supporters offered apocalyptic predictions that COVID-19 would significantly undermine Western economic power, societal cohesion, and military might. These arguments generally fell into one of four categories.

First, some argued that COVID-19 would cause long-term economic damage and eventually trigger economic collapse. As one al-Qaeda assessment concluded, "With the emergence of COVID-19, the American economy has been struck by a powerful tsunami." It continued that "economies of major nations lie in ruin."¹¹⁷ An article in the Islamic State publication *Al-Naba* argued that COVID-19 brought massive "misfortunes and calamities" to the United States.¹¹⁸ More broadly, Salafi-jihadists hoped COVID-19 would trigger economic collapse in the West and countries across the Arab world.¹¹⁹ "They are on the brink of a great economic disaster" pronounced one Islamic State article.¹²⁰ An Islamic State-aligned group made apocalyptic predictions about economic and societal breakdown around the globe: "In other parts of the world, where we find that the tyrannical ruling regimes are less stable and controlling, these regions will witness collapses and divisions at a faster pace, which will be associated with factors such as the Great Depression, public pressure, and poverty."¹²¹

Second, others argued that the pandemic would kill millions of civilians, more than any terrorist attack could ever kill. An Islamic State spokesperson argued that COVID-19 was divine punishment for Western "Crusaders," and he urged Allah to kill civilians and "empower the plague, the aches, and the sickness over the followers of Pharaoh, the tyrants from among Arabs and the foreigners, the enemies of Islam, because they did not leave a corruption that they did not use to fight the worshipers."¹²² He equated Western countries with Pharaoh in the Biblical story of the ten disasters inflicted on Egypt, as Moses attempted to bring the children of Israel out of the country. In addition, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri remarked that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson "encouraged the spread of the pandemic so as to kill the largest possible number of non-productive sections of society."¹²³ It was, of course, a ludicrous assertion.

Third, some Salafi-jihadists argued that COVID-19 would exacerbate social, economic, and racial divisions in Western societies, including "worsening bloody racial politics."¹²⁴ As one article in *Al-Naba* claimed, the United States was headed toward a precipice because of COVID-19, and the existence of large-scale riots were signs of "feebleness" and "weakness."¹²⁵ In the summer of 2020, Salafi-jihadists attributed the demonstrations and riots in the United States following the death of George Floyd to punishment for corruption and unbelief. They made similar statements during protests in the fall of 2020.¹²⁶

Fourth, Salafi-jihadists hoped that Western economic, health, and societal problems would cause their militaries to withdraw from Muslim lands.¹²⁷ As one group affiliated with al-Qaeda

asked, "O French people ... Would it not have been more judicious to announce the repatriation of the French military forces being in Sahel and Mali"?¹²⁸ Some Western states temporarily withdrew their military forces from Iraq as a protective measure in response to COVID-19.¹²⁹ As a U.S. State Department statement explained, "the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the Iraqi and Syrian people, and to our mission, led to temporary adjustments to protect the force during this period, in full coordination with the Iraqi authorities."¹³⁰ The announcements corresponded with a decision by the UK, France, United States, and several other countries to withdraw their forces from Iraq even before COVID-19.

Yet while Western countries certainly suffered economic, social, and other pressures from COVID-19 – including spikes in infections and lockdowns – none were cataclysmic. In the United States, for example, gross domestic product (GDP) grew 7.4 percent in the third quarter of 2020, which was equivalent to 33.1 percent on an annualized basis.¹³¹ In addition, the eurozone economy rose in the third quarter of 2020, with the combined GDP of the 19 eurozone members up 12.7 percent from the second quarter.¹³²

Conclusion

COVID-19 had a profound impact on international politics, killing millions of people, causing governments to establish quarantines and close their borders, and triggering an economic recession.¹³³ As Henry Kissinger remarked, "The coronavirus epidemic will forever alter the world order."¹³⁴ In examining the Islamic State and al-Qaeda response to COVID-19, it should not be surprising that these entities resorted to apocalyptic predictions and outright fabrications. Their propaganda has always included significant disinformation, misinformation, and lies. Still, there were numerous analysts who believed that COVID-19 provided an opportunity for Salafi-jihadists to resurge and could undermine counterterrorism efforts. As one article summarized: "ISIS is likely to benefit in any case, as COVID-19 saps its enemies' strength."¹³⁵

Despite these predictions, some Salafi-jihadists expressed veritable alarm about the pandemic and attempted to limit its spread. In Somalia, for example, al-Shabaab set up a "consultative forum" on jihad in East Africa and warned, "The Muslim society is hereby called upon to take caution against the infectious diseases that are now on the increase across the world, such as Coronavirus and HIV, whose spread is contributed to by the crusader forces who have invaded the country and the disbelieving countries that support them."¹³⁶ In Syria, the al-Qaeda-linked Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and other groups expressed concern about individuals that tested positive for COVID-19 in Idlib and prayed for help. "Allah, Lord of Corona," one post read, "spare this liberated region from this epidemic, O Allah, heal our patients and protect our people."¹³⁷ Some al-Qaeda announcements urged supporters to ensure hygiene and cleanliness to prevent the spread of COVID-19, even as they characterized the pandemic as an act of God against the sins and corruption of infidel regimes.¹³⁸

It is still too early to assess the long-term implications of COVID-19 on terrorism. But Salafi-jihadists were unsuccessful in achieving most of their objectives – at least in the short term. They failed to increase the number of attacks (including in the West), failed to outperform local regimes in responding to COVID-19, and failed to weaken the West. In addition, COVID-19 created a host of problems for Salafi-jihadists.

First, government quarantines, social distancing requirements, and restrictions on freedom of movement within countries resulted in fewer possible transportation targets for attacks, such as trains, subways, and airports. Some of the most lethal Salafi-jihadist attacks have been transportation targets, such as Madrid in March 2004, London in July 2005, Mumbai in July 2006, Moscow in March 2010, and Brussels in March 2016. In addition, with sporting events, malls, restaurants, concerts, and outdoor events shut down, it was also difficult for terrorists to conduct attacks against large crowds. Examples included the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013; Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya in September 2013; coordinated attacks at restaurants, a football stadium, and other locations in Paris, France in November 2015; Bastille Day attack in Nice, France in July 2016; Christmas market attack in Berlin, Germany in December 2016; and Ariana Grande pop concert in Manchester, England in May 2017.

Second, there was a significant reduction in international travel as countries closed their borders. The decrease in foreign travel meant that there were fewer foreign tourist targets. In the past two decades, Salafi-jihadists have attacked numerous tourist destinations, such as Bali, Indonesia in October 2002 and October 2005; Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in 2005; Dahab, Egypt in April 2006; Sousse, Tunisia in June 2015; and Barcelona, Spain in August 2017. The barriers to travel also impacted terrorist freedom of movement, including the travel of foreign fighters.¹³⁹

Despite these challenges, however, there will likely be opportunities for Salafi-jihadists to conduct attacks and resurge in the future – regardless of COVID-19. Weak and ineffective governance, local grievances, and the withdrawal of Western counterterrorism forces will likely ensure that Salafi-jihadists remain a threat for the foreseeable future across Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the 9/11 predicted that the struggle against Salafi-jihadists would be “a generational challenge.”¹⁴⁰ That reality has not changed.

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**THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON
TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM:
REASSESSING THE EVIDENCE**

By Sam Mullins¹⁴¹

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM: REASSESSING THE EVIDENCE

By Sam Mullins

Following the first international reports of a novel coronavirus outbreak in China in January 2020, COVID-19 (as it was named on February 11th) has spread rapidly around the globe, bringing with it social, political and economic turmoil. Ever keen to exploit instability, violent extremists of all kinds rapidly seized upon the opportunity, putting their own spin on events in an attempt to promote their respective causes and regain some of the attention lost to the virus. Unfortunately, the international media has been all too willing to oblige, eagerly reporting on extremists' views of the pandemic and amplifying their messages far beyond their relatively small body of existing supporters.¹⁴² At the same time, both successful and failed terrorist attacks alike are frequently presented as evidence that terrorists are exploiting the pandemic. In conjunction with this, the preponderance of expert commentary (to include both respected academics and seasoned practitioners), has tended to emphasize the potentially exacerbating effects that the pandemic may have on violent extremism and terrorism.¹⁴³ The picture that emerges is concerning, to say the least.

Yet, much of the discussion thus far has been based on select, anecdotal evidence, logical inference and theoretical supposition, leaving many unanswered questions and a good deal of uncertainty. Thus, although it is clear that violent extremists and terrorists are *trying* to exploit the pandemic, it is not readily apparent that they are being particularly successful. Similarly, there are often few details to substantiate that a given terrorist plot or attack actually involved deliberate exploitation of conditions arising from the pandemic, other than that the events in question took place since the outbreak began. Furthermore, relatively little attention has been paid to information or events that run contrary to the dominant, pessimistic narrative, or to the various challenges and difficulties that terrorists must contend with as a result of the spread of COVID-19.¹⁴⁴ It is therefore necessary to re-examine and re-evaluate the various assertions that have been made, with a view to offering a more balanced threat assessment. This is the goal of the present article. The paper proceeds with an examination of terrorist recruitment efforts during the pandemic, followed by fundraising, health-related governance, and conducting attacks. This is complemented with an analysis of the impact on counter-terrorism (CT), followed by the summary and conclusion.

Recruitment

As noted above, it did not take long for violent extremists and terrorists to seek to capitalize on the pandemic for purposes of propaganda. Jihadist commentators have tended to emphasize that COVID-19 is the work of God, seeing it as divine punishment, first of all for China's treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang; then, as the virus spread, for Iran's "blindness" and "insolence" as a Shia theocracy; the United States' perceived oppression of Muslims worldwide; and eventually also fellow Muslims for their ostensibly "sinful" behavior and laxity of faith.¹⁴⁵ ISIS has taken a predictably aggressive stance, declaring it an ideal time to conduct attacks, given the added burden placed on security forces. By comparison, al-Qaeda has taken the opportunity to invite

non-Muslims to convert to Islam, but has also continued to call for attacks against U.S. and Israeli targets worldwide.¹⁴⁶

The other main set of actors to try to exploit the pandemic for extremist purposes have been members of the far-right, most notably in the U.S., who have promoted a variety of competing conspiracy theories designed to undermine trust in government and engender hatred and violence against ideological enemies. The Chinese, Jews, George Soros, Bill Gates, and the U.S. government have all been blamed for manufacturing and/or exploiting the virus to advance their perceived agendas of domination and oppression, while homosexuals and immigrants have been respectively accused of inviting God's wrath and spreading the virus.¹⁴⁷ Right-wing extremists were also especially quick to recognize that the virus itself might be weaponized and began calling on supporters to deliberately infect their enemies even before the pandemic was officially declared.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, left-wing extremists have called for social protests, rioting, looting and violence against police.¹⁴⁹

Besides simply seeking to maintain relevance in the midst of a global catastrophe that has all but eclipsed them, there are at least three connected aims to all of this output: to galvanize existing supporters; to radicalize and recruit new ones; and to incite people to violence. The critical question is, are they succeeding? To begin with, it is worth noting that conditions arising from the pandemic (the imposition of lockdowns, unemployment, economic hardship, loneliness, frustration and boredom) have potentially increased the vulnerability of large numbers of people to radicalization. In the words of the UN, terrorists have been granted a "captive audience."¹⁵⁰ In support of this theory, researchers have found that along with the proliferation of extremist groups on social media, the volume of related search-traffic and subscribers to these groups have also increased. In the U.S., there was a larger increase in searches for white supremacist material on Google in states that had been under lockdown for a longer period of time.¹⁵¹ Similarly, international traffic to ISIS websites reportedly increased as lockdowns took effect globally.¹⁵²

There are, however, limited inferences that we can draw from this. It suggests increased levels of interest in extremist propaganda during lockdowns, but it does not constitute evidence of wide-spread radicalization, much less mobilization. Of course, there are examples of individuals who have become radicalized since the pandemic began. In one instance, a rail company employee named Eduardo Moreno deliberately crashed a train at the Port of Los Angeles in an attempt to draw public attention to what he believed was a secret government conspiracy surrounding COVID-19 and the USNS Mercy hospital ship, which was there to support the Los Angeles coronavirus response.¹⁵³ In another case in the UK, a 14-year-old convert to Islam, accused of attempting to build an improvised explosive device (IED) in preparation for a jihadist terrorist attack, was initially reported to have radicalized during the month of May when a national lockdown was in effect.¹⁵⁴

Yet in cases such as these, it takes time before we have sufficient information to make an informed judgement. Although anti-government right-wing extremists have been pushing all manner of conspiracy theories, it is currently unknown how Moreno developed his own, apparently delusional mindset and there has so far been no information to suggest that he was influenced by others. In the case of the 14-year-old British convert, it later transpired that he had been engaging with ISIS propaganda online since at least February, which was before the first lockdowns were introduced in the U.K.¹⁵⁵ Not only that, but he was also acquitted. In other cases (such as Timothy Wilson, who planned to blow up a hospital treating coronavirus patients in Missouri; or Aaron Swenson, who allegedly planned to livestream the murder of police officers in Texas), their descent into terrorism either began long before the pandemic, or else was driven by other events.¹⁵⁶

Perhaps the clearest example of pandemic-inspired terrorism to date emerged in the United States in October, when 13 right-wing extremists were charged with plotting to kidnap the Governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, because they were angry at the "unconstitutional" lockdown measures she had enacted and wanted to start a civil war in order to overthrow the government. Yet again, there is information to suggest that the alleged conspirators had developed militant, anti-government beliefs and organizations before the pandemic began. The so-called Wolverine Watchmen, a "militia" to which at least seven of the men belonged, had been recruiting on Facebook since November 2019.¹⁵⁷ And it seems that as far back as May 2018 the apparent plot leader, Adam Fox, had railed against "corrupt self-serving politicians and lawmakers" on Twitter, warning them that "we will come for you and end your era of rule!!"¹⁵⁸ Thus, although the arrival of the pandemic helped spur the men to act, it was not the reason they had radicalized in the first place.

The bigger point here is that besides a relatively small number of individuals who radicalized and mobilized to terrorism as a more-or-less direct result of the current health crisis, it is not apparent that terrorist recruitment efforts have brought about a significant, quantitative increase in either radicalization or associated terrorist activity. Importantly, this gels with assessments made by the intelligence community (IC). For example, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), assessing the situation in the Philippines, reported that there was insufficient information to tell whether ISIS East Asia (ISIS-EA) had significantly shifted its overall intensity of recruitment or attack, and that it "lacked information indicating whether [COVID-19 related terrorist propaganda in the Philippines] resulted in any increase in terrorist violence or recruitment."¹⁵⁹

Looking at terrorist recruitment more broadly, a recent survey of 100 CT and security practitioners, mostly from the Indo-Pacific region (including the United States), found that 51% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that terrorists' pandemic-related propaganda had resulted in increased radicalization/recruitment, compared to 24% who agreed or strongly

agreed.¹⁶⁰ A subsequent study conducted with a more diverse sample of 415 practitioners found almost identical results – 50% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement versus 24% who were of the opposite opinions.¹⁶¹ Based on this, it appears that, although there have been some successes and the reality clearly varies according to location, on balance, terrorist recruitment efforts during the pandemic have been so far largely unsuccessful. Whether this changes over time as the social and economic consequences of the pandemic take their toll – as many fear will happen¹⁶² – remains to be seen.

Fundraising

Less has been written about terrorists' potential ability to exploit the pandemic in order to raise funds, though it remains a distinct possibility and at least one very significant case has been uncovered so far. Commenting on this in April (just one month after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic), the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) noted that Indonesian militants had long been operating charities that claim to provide "humanitarian assistance" and that the authorities should be on the look-out for fundraising efforts connected to the virus, to include potentially bogus appeals for personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers.¹⁶³ Of course, terrorists all over the world have raised money using fraudulent means for many years, to include under the guise of charitable collections, and so this possibility is hardly unique to Indonesia.

Indeed, in August 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it had disrupted three different terrorist fundraising schemes which had been soliciting donations in cryptocurrency on social media, seizing millions of dollars in the process.¹⁶⁴ One of these schemes was allegedly orchestrated by a Turkish-based ISIS facilitator named Murat Cakar, who operated a website (www.FaceMaskCenter.com), fraudulently claiming to provide "Surgical N95 respirators" and other PPE to protect against COVID-19.¹⁶⁵ Though claiming to have been in operation since 1996, FaceMaskCenter.com was established, using a Turkish IP address, on February 26th 2020. Cakar then used four different Facebook pages, which he had previously set up as early as 2014 (and ostensibly used to sell clothing) to advertise the new website.¹⁶⁶

Despite claiming that its products were approved by the U.S. Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), in reality, the masks purportedly for sale were non-approved Turkish-made items. It remains unclear how many customers were duped by this scheme or how much money Cakar made, though it is noteworthy that a U.S.-based individual had contacted the site inquiring about PPE for hospitals, nursing homes and fire departments, thus illustrating its international reach as well as potentially deadly consequences.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, Cakar had been in contact with at least one U.S.-based ISIS sympathizer dating back to 2017: a 27-year-old Long Island woman named Zoobia Shahnaz, who knowingly sent approximately \$100,000 to an alias of Cakar's before being arrested, and in November 2018 pleaded guilty to providing material support

to ISIS.¹⁶⁸ The picture of Cakar that emerges is of a long-time, internationally connected and reasonably successful criminal/ISIS supporter who pounced on the opportunity to exploit the pandemic.

Although – to the author’s knowledge – this is the only public report of its kind to date, it would be naïve to think that other violent extremists and terrorists have not thought of this and at least attempted similar COVID-related schemes, even if most are likely to be on a smaller scale and less sophisticated. However, in the first survey of security practitioners mentioned above, nearly 70% of respondents were of the opinion that terrorists had *not* been able to raise more funds than usual because of the pandemic, with one person asserting that “Raising fund[s] [has] stopped due to the restriction[s] on movements.”¹⁶⁹ Only 9% disagreed with this assessment. The second, larger survey also produced comparable results, with 59% of the opinion that fundraising had not increased versus just 12% who disagreed.¹⁷⁰ These results suggest that successful exploitation of the pandemic by terrorists for financial gain has so far been the exception to the rule, or at the very least is yet to be effectively investigated. Besides the rather sophisticated example above, we have nothing in the way of hard evidence to demonstrate that this is happening on a widespread or large-scale basis. Furthermore, although we know that terrorists routinely employ all manner of extortion and illicit means to raise funds, much of this is predicated on a functioning economy and could well be disrupted in the wake of COVID-19, with serious implications for group finances, decision-making and organizational integrity.¹⁷¹ Indeed, important fundraising activities – such as neo-Nazi music festivals – have had to be cancelled as a result of travel restrictions and lockdowns.¹⁷² Thus, as much as the pandemic has presented potential fundraising opportunities for violent extremists and terrorists, it has also brought setbacks and challenges.

Health-Related Governance

A third way that terrorists are thought to have gained an advantage is in the area of health-related governance, for groups that control territory. Specifically, by providing healthcare services and making effort to control the spread of contagion, the pandemic is seen as an opportunity for terrorist and insurgent organizations to effectively win the “hearts and minds” of people under their control.¹⁷³ This is presumed to increase their perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the people and thus solidify, if not expand popular support.

Drawing on case studies of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria and the Afghan Taliban, Marta Furlan argues that “rebel rulers are better positioned than governments to deal with emergencies [such as COVID-19] because they do not need to demonstrate governance capacity in *absolute* terms but rather governance capacity in *relative* terms vis-a-vis the government.”¹⁷⁴ In the cases of HTS and the Taliban, they appear to be doing just that. In contrast to the inept responses of the Syrian and Afghan governments, the two militant organizations in question have gone to great lengths to show that they are proactively responding to the virus, conducting awareness

campaigns, and distributing PPE, while also establishing quarantine centers and enforcing checkpoints, lockdowns and other forms of control.¹⁷⁵

On the face of it, such efforts are quite impressive, and it is possible they are having the desired effect. Nevertheless, caveats apply. Much of what we know about terrorist groups' responses to the pandemic comes in the form of carefully produced propaganda, which the groups have made themselves. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), "the Taliban's public health scramble may be more window-dressing than substance".¹⁷⁶ This chimes with an assessment of terrorist responses to COVID-19 by Kabir Taneja and Raffaello Pantucci, who argue that the real worth of these activities lies more in their propaganda value than in altering reality on the ground.¹⁷⁷ These same authors point out that in the case of HTS, the group jeopardized its own ideological and internal cohesion by advising people to temporarily avoid going to mosque, effectively "choosing science over religious directives".¹⁷⁸ Others, including Hezbollah and Hamas, have done the same.¹⁷⁹ In Syria, HTS senior leader Abu Malik al-Tali briefly resigned in protest of this decision, while prominent jihadist ideologues such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi have been outspoken in their criticism of orders to close mosques in response to the coronavirus.¹⁸⁰ What this shows is that, much like internationally recognized governments, jihadists governing during the pandemic are often faced with difficult decisions, whereby pragmatic measures to contain the spread of disease invoke significant negative reactions among some of their constituents.

In connection with this, we must be careful to distinguish between *outputs* and *outcomes*. Despite all the effort that HTS and others have made, it is not self-evident that these have been universally approved of by the populations in question, or that they have had an overall positive net effect. Even under democratically elected governments, a substantial proportion of the population has become frustrated and angry in reaction to shutdowns of business and other restrictions designed to protect them. There is no reason to believe that terrorists will be immune from the same, though such feelings are less likely to be publicly expressed for fear of reprisal. This brings us to yet another important point – the effect of any efforts made to contain the pandemic cannot be viewed in isolation from an insurgent organization's overall approach to governance. HTS, for instance, faced mass protests – which it harshly suppressed – for plans to open up a trade crossing with the Syrian regime in May.¹⁸¹ According to one protestor who was interviewed, "the opening of the crossing showed HTS has little concern for the fate of the region's population."¹⁸² In Lebanon, Hezbollah is faced with widespread resentment, despite mobilizing thousands of volunteers to assist with the pandemic.¹⁸³ Meanwhile, the Taliban are fiercely intolerant of any form of criticism or complaint and are still responsible for more than 40% of civilian casualties in Afghanistan – facts that are likely to outweigh any sense of gratitude generated from the distribution of PPE during the pandemic.¹⁸⁴ Many other militant groups are even less adept and even more reliant on fear as a means of coercing the people under their control. In Colombia, dissident members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have taken an especially harsh approach, threatening people to maintain

social distance and obey militant curfews on pain of death. As one human rights campaigner bluntly put it, "COVID is not killing us. Armed groups are killing us."¹⁸⁵

All of this is not to say that terrorist and insurgent-administered health-related governance is entirely ineffective. However, we must be careful to conduct more comprehensive analyses that take into account the complexity of their respective operating environments. As with recruitment efforts (detailed above), numerous terrorist organizations are certainly trying to improve their image – not to mention their own operational security – by implementing pandemic-related controls. But the real impact is difficult to assess and it is equally true that the current crisis may expose their intrinsic limitations and inability to dispense effective governance.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, to the extent that the pandemic is a distraction and drain on resources for governments, the same is also clearly true for terrorists, in particular those involved in civil administration.

Conducting Attacks

A fourth area where terrorists have potentially gained an advantage is in the planning and conducting of attacks. This line of reasoning stems, not only from the supposed increase in radicalization that some believe is taking place, but more directly from the contention that security forces are "distracted" by the coronavirus (or more specifically, that their manpower, resources and capabilities have been negatively impacted as a result of having to take on pandemic-related security duties, while also implementing force protection measures to prevent the spread of disease). The clear implication of this is that CT agencies will not be able to devote sufficient time and resources to effectively contain the terrorist threat, leaving gaps in security that terrorists will be able to exploit. Certainly, this is reflected in the thinking of right-wing violent extremists and jihadist terrorist organizations, as well as analytical assessments published by the likes of the highly esteemed Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the ICG.¹⁸⁷

The impact of the pandemic on CT will be examined below in greater detail. To begin with, it is important to query whether we have actually seen the implied increase in terrorist attacks, and if so, can it be clearly attributed to the effects of the pandemic? To be sure, there has been a significant number of relatively low-level acts of extremist-motivated violence and sabotage – for instance, attacks on Muslims, who are widely blamed for spreading the coronavirus in India, and the destruction of mobile phone towers, based on the mistaken belief that the virus is somehow spread by 5G technology in Europe.¹⁸⁸ However, it is something of a definitional stretch to regard these as acts of terrorism, which usually involve more serious levels of violence, deliberately calibrated to communicate with a mass audience, as well as more clearly articulated political/ideological (as opposed to personally expressive or instrumental) goals.

Focusing on attacks by terrorist organizations, the two most commonly cited examples that tend to be depicted as proof that terrorists are exploiting COVID-related weaknesses in security, are Iraq and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of Iraq, there is some disagreement about the number of attacks that have occurred. Researchers Michael Knights and Alex Almeida reported that ISIS mounted at least 566 attacks in Iraq in the first three months of 2020, representing a staggering 94% increase from the previous year.¹⁸⁹ Yet according to Lt. Gen. Pat White, the American commander of the U.S.-led coalition to defeat ISIS, the number of attacks has been “very consistent” with 2019.¹⁹⁰ In addition, he noted that the attacks have become less sophisticated as the coalition has successfully degraded ISIS’s capabilities.¹⁹¹ Even if we accept that ISIS has managed to step up its operations in Iraq in 2020, the group was reportedly already on the comeback by mid-2019, before the pandemic began.¹⁹² In the view of Jason Blazakis, “it seems more likely that any ISIS resurgence [in Iraq] is tied to pre-existing counterterrorism strategies and decisions.”¹⁹³ Significantly, Knights and Almeida appear to agree, concluding that “the endogenous factors that draw the most international attention – U.S-Iran tensions and COVID-19 – are merely accelerants of an Islamic State recovery in Iraq that was already well underway in late 2019.”¹⁹⁴

A similar story can be seen in Sub-Saharan Africa. Though analysts have been quick to attribute attacks in the region to the onset of the pandemic, often no details are provided to clearly connect the two. For example, Emilia Columbo and Marielle Harris point to the massacre of 92 Chadian troops by Boko Haram at the end of March as evidence that terrorists in the region are “leveraging the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity to intensify attacks”.¹⁹⁵ However, at the time the attack occurred, just three coronavirus cases had been confirmed in Chad and the country had taken few steps to combat the virus, suggesting that whatever failures contributed to the attack in question, COVID-19 most likely had little to do with it.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, any observed increases in terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa must be seen within the context of a rise in attacks in the region dating back to 2004, which has dramatically surged, almost uninterrupted, since 2011.¹⁹⁷

This speaks to a broader issue with much of the commentary on COVID-19 and terrorism: namely, the frequent neglect of existing trends, combined with a failure to distinguish between correlation and causation. Just because a given attack takes place within the context of the pandemic, does not necessarily mean it was enabled by COVID-related gaps in security. Melissa Pavlik of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) makes a similar point in drawing attention to the fact that pre-pandemic trends, and not the coronavirus, are the most likely reasons for observed decreases in political violence in Syria and Afghanistan, and for increases in Libya and Yemen (though it has contributed to various of forms of political violence elsewhere).¹⁹⁸

Importantly, the first survey of security practitioners referred to above found that 78% of respondents (versus just 9%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that

"Because of the coronavirus pandemic, terrorists in my country have been able to conduct more attacks than usual." Yet again, the results from the second survey were highly consistent at 68% versus 12%.¹⁹⁹ As noted by these practitioners, part of the reason why we have not seen an increase in terrorist attacks in most places is because terrorists must also contend with lockdowns and restrictions on movement, which make it harder for them to move around. Indeed, this is one of the reasons given by Lt. Gen. White for ISIS's relatively modest gains in Iraq.²⁰⁰ Thus, whatever potential advantages terrorists may have gained as a result of the pandemic, it appears that in many cases, these have been offset by added security measures designed to halt the spread of disease.

The Impact on Counter-Terrorism

As already noted, it is generally believed that security services responsible for CT have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and that as a result, they have been rendered less effective.²⁰¹ There are indeed many examples of COVID-related impediments, largely relating to the redeployment of forces and/or implementation of force health protection measures, such as social distancing. For instance, in March, the Philippines sent the 12th Marine Battalion, which had been preparing for CT duties in Sulu, to help support the pandemic response in Metro Manila instead.²⁰² Meanwhile, the anti-ISIS coalition multinational training mission, as well as operational support for Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) were temporarily suspended due to coronavirus concerns.²⁰³ U.S. security cooperation activities were likewise put on hold in Africa and two multinational exercises scheduled to take place on the continent had to be cancelled.²⁰⁴ Another issue has been the impact on the IC, whose members cannot work from home, given the need to be able to access classified documents and secure IT systems.²⁰⁵ Finally, in the UK, the pandemic resulted in a significant drop in referrals to the national Prevent program, illustrating that efforts toward preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have also been affected.²⁰⁶

As serious as these developments are yet, the reality is far from being a one-sided story. In the Philippines, security forces have maintained consistent pressure on terrorists operating in the country and in July, President Duterte approved a new anti-terrorism law granting authorities expanded powers.²⁰⁷ In Iraq, the ISF, assisted by coalition airpower and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, has likewise continued to engage in successful CT operations on a daily basis.²⁰⁸ In Africa, Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAF), clarified that despite setbacks experienced at the outset of the pandemic, "[T]hroughout that entire period... U.S. Special Operations Forces stayed engaged and did not leave the continent. We did not walk away from our partners... We stayed engaged and continued to put pressure on these violent extremists."²⁰⁹ Finally, members of the intelligence and P/CVE communities, though hobbled by the need to social distance, have nevertheless adapted, incorporating technological and organizational workarounds that enable them to keep working and, in some cases even "flourish".²¹⁰

To draw once again on the survey data referred to several times above, the results confirm that although the pandemic has presented challenges, many of these appear to have been at least partially overcome. Thus, in the first survey, although 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CT has become more difficult during the pandemic (whether due to diversion of resources or having to implement social distancing), 33% were of the opposite opinion.²¹¹ In the second, larger survey, the results were again almost identical, with 51% agreeing with this statement versus 34% who disagreed.²¹² Most importantly, even those who agreed that CT had become more difficult, explained that alternative working arrangements had been found, allowing them to continue functioning, as one person put it, "at full capacity in most aspects of our work."²¹³ It was furthermore pointed out that vastly reduced international travel and trade had effectively freed up some personnel to focus on other tasks, suggesting that CT resources may have even received a boost in some areas.²¹⁴ The bottom line is that despite the various difficulties, it is not readily apparent that CT has suffered sufficiently to grant terrorists a significant edge. To the contrary, the mostly limited increases in frequency of attacks (in particular, that which we can attribute to the pandemic), suggests that it has not.

Summary and Conclusion

This article set out to reevaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism and CT, considering information both for and against dominant narratives, which tend to emphasize the exacerbating effects of the virus on security. In each of the areas examined (recruitment, fundraising, health-related governance, conducting attacks, and the impact of the pandemic on CT), a somewhat similar story emerges. There is solid evidence to show that terrorists are attempting to exploit the ongoing crisis in order to advance their respective "campaign plans", while at the same time security services have been faced with additional challenges. But there is very limited information to demonstrate that terrorists are meeting their objectives, while at the same time, considerable evidence exists to suggest the contrary. Similarly, there is reason to believe that CT authorities have been able to adapt and continue functioning in an effective manner, in spite of the new and more challenging operating environment.

It is important to emphasize that this does not necessarily imply that the impact of the pandemic has been negligible overall. For example, in the case of Murat Cakar, FaceMaskCenter.com was seemingly able to raise large sums of money for ISIS. That alone is qualitatively significant. Likewise, although the added burden placed on security forces has not necessarily given terrorists the dramatic advantage that some fear, it is still a problem that should not be overlooked. It is also apparent that each particular context and terrorist organization is quite different, if not unique. The impact of the pandemic on terrorism inside and outside of conflict zones, and in urban and rural areas, has not been the same, and of course it will also vary according to different groups and over time, for a multitude of reasons.²¹⁵ With these caveats in mind, it is important to note that it is not the aim of this article to provide firm conclusions

on any of the issues discussed, but rather to promote a more balanced analytical approach to understanding the problem.

As things stand, it is still relatively early in the pandemic and we are generally lacking detailed and reliable information on key issues of concern. In time, COVID-induced stresses and related terrorist recruitment efforts may yet lead to a substantial increase in mobilization to terrorism; terrorists may become far more adept at generating funds based on lessons learned during the pandemic; HTS and others could potentially experience significant gains in public support, thanks in part to their handling of the coronavirus; and terrorist attacks might eventually increase as CT budgets are increasingly strained under the weight of economic recession. But for the time being, it has to be acknowledged that these have yet to pass and are far from inevitable outcomes.

Although there is a growing number of exceptions, public commentary on this issue has generally suffered from failing to give due consideration to conflicting information; ignoring existing, long-term trends and alternative, explanatory factors; conflating correlation with causation; relying too heavily on theoretically-driven inferences and making assumptions beyond the available data. By taking care to address these problems, analysts will produce far more nuanced and valuable insights that would improve our understanding of what is an incredibly complex set of interrelated and continually evolving problems. Indeed, this will be essential for enabling the successful adaptation of CT strategies in a post-pandemic world.

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TERRORIST THREATS POST-COVID-19

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It is too early at this stage to draw any definitive conclusions about what the impact on terrorism from COVID will be, but some early sketches can be drawn of problems which appear to be being exacerbated. The causal link to COVID is hard to tell. But there has been a noticeable shift in various terrorist ideologies in COVID's shadow which merit a stock-take. The aim of this article is to dig into these shifts and try to offer some broad thoughts about where the longer-term threat picture might be going.

What have terrorists said about COVID-19?

As a start point, it is useful to explore what terrorist groups have actually said and done about COVID. In the early days of the virus, groups were commenting on it in much the same way as everyone else was. In some cases, they drew the ideas into the larger conspiracies they are signed up to seeking to explain it as part of a master plan to destroy the world and advance their ideology. Less apocalyptic responses focused instead on the practical things that groups could do to help populations fend off the virus. This form of social services was an attempt to win over hearts and minds to demonstrate how governments were failing. In many cases it built on a history of offering social services to their communities, and merely served to further endear them. And yet others instead chose to make the strategically sensible point that the net result was likely to be less attention by security forces and distracted authorities, therefore offering a useful moment to strike or take territory.²¹⁶

There was also considerable discussion around the idea of trying to weaponize the virus, though the evidence around this happening has been very thin. Extremist forums churned out propaganda about what could be done, but very few actually moved forwards with their plans. One plan was dramatically uncovered in Tunisia, where a preacher was telling his followers to cough or sneeze on security forces in advance of an attack.²¹⁷ For the most part, security services have not reported much change in the threat picture as a result of COVID.²¹⁸ In the US some people have been prosecuted under terrorism legislation for threatening to actively spread the virus, though it is not clear there was any political motive behind their act.²¹⁹

Having said this, there has been a noticeable increase in the volume of noise around terrorist groups,²²⁰ though it is not clear this has actually resulted in an increase in violence. While metrics are hard to get, using the data offered by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), it would appear that all of the conflict and political violence metrics that they follow are down year on year across the world, and in particular in regions where terrorist groups are dominant.²²¹ This is not an entirely surprising outcome. Given the general lockdowns and difficulties in travelling, it has become harder to practically mobilize in the same way as before. And while online activity has made the spread and virulence of extremist ideas and disinformation alongside it easier, it is not yet in a state to replace the physical act of violence.

But a lack of violence does not unfortunately necessarily equate to the absence of a problem. The underlying issues that can cause radicalization can take considerable time to turn into a visible terrorist threat. And the current immediate news environment can telescope our ability to properly assess the timeline required for problems to develop. Given the constant noise of threat that is now produced by groups, alongside constant reporting of threats globally at the same time, it can be harder to assess longer-term changes and patterns. The constant coverage gives an impression of an accelerating threat. This results in an expectation that threats materialize immediately, when in fact they can take time to mature.

This is not an entirely new phenomenon, nor is it one that is exclusive to the study of terrorism and political violence. In general, societal expectations around issues are wildly accelerated by a relentless news cycle which requires a constant digest of new information and news. The net result is a lack of patience in tracing consequences and impact from specific actions. From an analytical perspective, it can make it more complicated to appropriately describe problems and threats as the expectation is often that causal impact will be rapid and immediate. In fact, problems often take time to develop and ultimately articulate themselves in violence. The confusion that this reality creates is augmented in a static situation like that created by COVID-19 which has brought vast sections of human activity around the world to a standstill. Objectively standing back, it is hard to assess that COVID-19 has materially changed for the better many situations that were affected by terrorism, in fact, it can appear that the longer-term situation has likely been made worse.

A current stocktake

A complete overview of all terrorist threats globally for such a short paper would be by its nature incomplete and incorrect. Consequently, the author will focus on two dominant threat ideologies (violent Islamists and the extreme right wing) and provide a brief overview of their current status with some broad analysis of how things are advancing in the shadow of COVID.

Within the violent Islamist cohort, al Qaeda and ISIS-affiliated organizations are the dominant representatives. And in both cases, an assessment with relation to the impact of COVID on them is fairly limited at this stage. Both groups continue to thrive in their different ways, though they appear to be facing issues related to their respective broader operating environments rather than anything linked specifically to COVID. Outside rhetoric, at this stage it is very difficult to find many studies that have conclusively pointed to any major change in behavior.²²²

For example, in 2020 al Qaeda marked the nineteenth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attack. This was communicated across al Qaeda publications and media channels, though the outputs were for the most part repetitive of previous years and revealed little that was new. The key message from leader Ayman al Zawahiri was an attack on an Al Jazeera documentary

made about the attack.²²³ This reflects a broader stasis around the group which while not defunct, has largely faded from the high points of the past few decades. A useful overview of the organization by BBC Monitoring's Mina Al Lami showed how its affiliates in Mali and Somalia are its best beacons of success, while its other affiliates are under considerable pressure.²²⁴

Similarly, while ISIS continues to exist as a global organization, it is very different to the organization which dominated the airwaves during its peak years of controlling territory in Syria and Iraq. Its core entity in the Levant is a shrunken version of its former self but is gradually gaining some space on the ground in Iraq in particular.²²⁵ Its global network of affiliates remains loose, with different ones showing greater degrees of effectiveness and connection to the core. Some are reduced in effectiveness, while others appear ascendant.²²⁶ As an overall organization, however, it appears to be in a stage of being an irritant in most of the environments it is present, rather than the existential threat it previously posed when controlling vast pieces of territory in the Levant.

This is certainly not to say that either organization is completely down. Key for the current paper, however, is the fact that neither group appears to have been impacted particularly by COVID. Rather, both persist on roughly the same trajectory that they did before the outbreak of the virus. The threat from them remains relatively constant, with some parts of the threat rising and others falling. The key point, however, is persistence with security agencies still prioritizing the threat from violent Islamist actors.²²⁷

More dynamic and impacted to a greater degree in some ways by the virus is the extreme right wing. A threat which was ascendant across Europe, North America and select parts of Asia (Australia and New Zealand) before the outbreak of COVID-19, white supremacist terrorism was something which has been an escalating concern for some time.²²⁸ However, in the shadow of the virus, the problem appears to have mushroomed in a number of different directions. Most prominently in the United States there has been a growth in prominence of a number of different groups, ideas and violence. Whilst their individual strains might be slightly different, there are key themes which appear to tie many of them together. From the anti-state Boogaloo Bois who are expecting an impending civil war, the now-prominent Proud Boys (a drinking club dedicated to fighting leftist protestors), to more classic far right groups stoking race war or the constellation of new groups clustering around aspects of the far right like the Incel movement, QAnon conspiracy theorists or angry online communities gathering on sites like 8kun, 4chan or Gab. The world of far right in the United States has achieved greater prominence recently.

These have all been exacerbated in recent times, though it is not clear whether this is related to the virus, or more simply American politics which have gone in a deeply divisive direction under President Trump. His active inflaming of racial tensions and anger towards left-wing protestors feeds the extreme right, groups he has actively promoted from his position as President of the United States of America. During the first Presidential debate, his comments about the Proud

Boys group quite specifically brought prominence to them²²⁹, while his earlier tweeting has brought international prominence to a far-right British group Britain First.²³⁰

But he is not solely responsible for this rising right-wing. Under the auspices of COVID, some aspects of the acceleration of extreme right anger can be linked to the expansion of the state, something that has been happening in some parts of the country in response to COVID-19.²³¹ And there has been a growth in conspiracy theories linked to COVID-19 response – like fears around vaccines or the impact of 5G technology – which have often stoked some of the growing constellation of groups gathered on the extreme right.²³² This will be covered again later, but they are clearly playing into long-standing US narratives of an overbearing federal state which is seeking to disenfranchise groups, removing their guns, infringing on their liberties and generally becoming a menace to the free state as defined in the US constitution. Such Patriot or Sovereign Citizen groups have long been a feature of the American discourse, but recent political clashes, somewhat exacerbated by the further expansion of the state in response to COVID and polarized political narratives, have strengthened their hold amongst fringe communities.

In Europe, a more classic extreme right tends to dominate, with racist networks flourishing in the shadows of a growth of far-right political movements and a polarized debate around immigration. This phenomenon has been developing for some time, with Germany facing the National Socialist Underground (NSU) in the late 2000s, while angry protest groups like the UK's English Defence League (EDL) spawned imitators across Europe. Annual Europol reports point to a growing extreme right wing threat in Europe, while individual security forces point to disrupted plots.²³³ Renaud Camus' totemic text *The Great Replacement* has captured a particular mood across the continent²³⁴, while mass violence associated with such ideas can be found earlier in Anders Behring Breivik's 2011 attack in Oslo and Utoya Island.²³⁵ Europe has also seen an emergence of conspiracy theorists, QAnon²³⁶ and Incels,²³⁷ and a growing rumbling of anti-government anger similar to that in the US.²³⁸

But similar to the narrative on the violent Islamist side, what has been happening on the extreme right is in many ways merely an extension of what was going on before. Extreme right-wing terrorism had been a growing phenomenon for the past few years and its fragmentation had started even before the outbreak of COVID-19 and the lockdowns that followed. For some countries, the return to dominance of the extreme right was a reflection of a balance of threat that existed pre-September 11, 2001.²³⁹

Future threats

COVID-19 has, however, changed how society is functioning and this will have some sort of effect on terrorist threats. In particular, the change to society that is going to be wrought in the longer time by the virus or existing issues whose impact was accelerated by the virus will have some effect on terrorist threats.

As stated at the outset, it is at this stage quite difficult to measure the exact causal effect, but some trends appear to be accelerated in the shadow of the virus which point to how this moment might impact the longer-term threat picture. While life is returning to some semblance of normality, the constant fear of new waves of the virus and the consequent disruption to society that follows continues to hang over things. The economic damage done by the virus has still not been calculated and may be being artificially suppressed temporarily due to economic stimulus programs. But their impact will be felt in many different ways in terms of government budgets both at home and abroad. The abrupt shift online is likely to permanently change some industries and eliminate others. The effect on the workforces will be dramatic and abrupt, creating potentially large unemployed or underemployed communities.

The potential impact on political violence and terrorism is hard to gauge, but three areas stand out as potential spaces in which political violence may grow in the future in part as a result of the impact of COVID-19's ravaging the planet. In many ways these are also extensions of previous problems, but their acceleration against other trends impacted by COVID is potentially going to create greater problems than might otherwise have emerged.

A web spun by COVID

One of the biggest winners of COVID-19 is the Internet. With the advent of lockdowns and working from home, people found themselves increasingly spending time online. The impact of this on terrorism is complicated and goes in many different directions. In the first instance there is the impact on online radicalization. Something that used to be seen as a peripheral aspect of the problem, with the majority of radicalization still requiring physical contact with other extremists, the last few years have seen a growth in cases involving individuals who are choosing to move towards terrorist ideas and then into action solely on the basis of contacts or material they have found online.

In some cases, this is simply a shift online of what used to happen offline. The phenomenon of remote direction as popularized by ISIS is a shifting of the relationship between group and individual attacker online. Whereas previously individuals would head to a training camp and then be directed to launch an attack back home, now the approach was to simply direct people from a distance to launch their attacks using the many encrypted applications that exist. Individuals like Junaid Hussain²⁴⁰ or Rachid Kassim²⁴¹ became infamous for the networks of young westerners they directed from ISIS held territory to launch terrorist attacks.

But more recently this has developed differently where people are now seemingly ready to launch attacks in advance of ideas they have found online with little to no connection with the actual group itself. In some cases, the individuals are not even joining a group. In the case of something like Incel or QAnon, they are simply following an online phenomenon or chat group and stirring themselves onto violence. The connection between terrorist violence and

organized networks and hierarchies is shifting. This has been described as 'post-organizational' terrorist plotting where groups, their links and structures are no longer as clear as they used to be.²⁴² While structured organizations still exist, the growth of ideologies online which people can piece together themselves, connect with as imprecisely as they would like, and ultimately interpret in any way that they would like has created a range of problems which live beyond our current interpretations of political violence.

The expression of this can be found in how security services find themselves talking about threats. In the United Kingdom, there has been a growth in individuals who are radicalizing with an ideology which appears to be a mix of contradictory issues and ideas, they are being bracketed by the Home Office as being "mixed, unstable or unclear".²⁴³ In the United States, terrorism is now handled by the Department for Homeland Security (DHS) alongside "Targeted Threats".²⁴⁴ In Canada they talk of "ideologically motivated violent extremism".²⁴⁵ The key point is that there is a growth of individuals who are acting out in a manner which is reminiscent of terrorism, and yet when some investigation is done into their ideological motivation, it is unclear exactly what it is. It is even possible to question whether this should properly be called terrorism or whether it is in fact simply an expression of personal anger using the vernacular of terrorism to give it greater meaning.²⁴⁶

Whatever the case, this cohort of individuals is a growing phenomenon. There is a number of individuals who are becoming involved in terrorist activity who are suffering from mental health issues, others that are being identified as having autism spectrum disorders and a growing proportion of very young individuals being drawn into violent activity. Again, absolute numbers are hard to identify, but the number of studies looking into the question has grown while security agencies have increasingly expressed concerns. And while none of these phenomena are new, there is some evidence that the cases are being exacerbated as a result of the lockdown from COVID. In the UK there is the case of the fourteen-year-old boy who reportedly became fascinated with ISIS videos while stuck at home in lockdown, and started to make bombs off models he found online (he was ultimately cleared by a court).²⁴⁷ In Spain, a radical who had been under observation by security services, was arrested after authorities started to grow concerned about the fact that he was radicalizing further and moving towards action during lockdown.²⁴⁸ Finally, there have been lower level cases, like individuals who were going through periods of probation and suddenly found themselves underemployed who instead turned back to online activity.

And this roster accounts only for those of violent Islamist inclination. There is a growing concern around these issues for other ideologies as well. Focusing on the UK, there have been the disturbing cases in recent history of a deeply disturbed man arrested on charges related to left-wing terrorist activity who committed suicide while incarcerated.²⁴⁹ Online extreme right networks in Europe have been found to have been led by very young teenagers.²⁵⁰ There have been Incels found in Europe making explosives, including very young teenagers who have

been identified as suffering from autism spectrum disorders.²⁵¹ And then there is the confusing phenomena of very young individuals whose ideology appears to be a self-created mix of ideas drawing on a wide pool of extreme material they find online.

Such individuals who are self-assembling extremist ideas are often drawn towards conspiracy theories, or dark holes on the internet where such ideas can lurk. And the strength and potency of such online conspiracies has only grown – enhanced by the uncertainty and instability that COVID and geopolitics has created. Conspiracy theories like fears of the dangers of 5G, the threats from vaccines, super-conspiracies like those underpinning QAnon about dark cabals of pedophiles ruling the world are all now circulating online amongst communities of people who are spending ever larger volumes of time online on social media. While work has gone into trying to change or break the algorithms, companies are still struggling to completely control them and often these ideas grow in spaces beyond the big social media companies.

All of this is further exacerbated by active government disinformation campaigns that are working to stir up tensions online. In part this is directed against elections, but it is also simply a way of causing trouble. Sometimes it is not even clear the degree to which it is directed by states, rather than angry groups or bored children. But whatever the case, its impact is felt much more deeply part as a result of the general polarization that is taking place in politics, but also by the fact that an ever-increasing volume of people are spending time online.

Left, luddism and environmentalism

Tracking all of this forwards, the time spent online is not only something which is transforming our methods of communication and absorption of information, but it is further likely to have longer-term repercussions on the shape of our economies and workforces. As lockdowns and restrictions continue, entire industries are suffering and likely to be closing down. Physical retail, already in retreat thanks to the boom in online markets, is likely to take a further beating, while the food and beverage industry is going to continue to suffer for some time to come. The fundamental point is that a growing number of these services will shift online in some capacity, meaning that the physical jobs needed in shops or restaurants to serve people will not necessarily exist anymore. This will create a growing community of unemployed people, or people who end up under-employed or forced to take even more menial jobs. It is hard to gauge exactly what the volume of this shift will be, but it might start to inspire a backlash against the technology and firms that are abetting this shift.

Luddism, a concept first advanced in the 19th century by textile workers angry at the advance of modern technology which was rendering their jobs redundant, could make a comeback. This is not new. Theodore Kaczynski, the infamous Unabomber, was an earlier luddite whose anger at technology's dominance of society was something which led him to launch a one-man letter bombing campaign from 1978 to 1995 from a remote cabin in Montana.²⁵² His manifesto,

"Industrial Society and Its Future" was published September 1995 in the Washington Post and started with the premise that "the industrial revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race."²⁵³ He may have been twenty years early, but many of the issues he raises in his manifesto are relevant today. As we enter an ever more interconnected and online world, not only are we likely to see more people reacting negatively to it, but also we will see more people becoming disenfranchised as a result. Stories have already emerged about the horrors of working for some of the big online retail companies,²⁵⁴ and these are likely to be exaggerated further in COVID's wake as we see them assume an even more dominant place within our society.

It is not only a modern form of luddism that may emerge in reaction. Many of the ideas rejecting society or large industrial take over is reminiscent of ideas emanating from the left – where capitalism's imposing structures crush individuals in advance of profit. These fundamental ideas which are often appropriated by groups on both sides. Consequently, the massive expansion of some companies, of an internet which is controlled by large firms and which is ultimately disempowering people and eliminating employment has the potential to be attractive as an adversary to those on the far left as well. Anti-globalization groups that used to have prominence in the pre-September 11 world,²⁵⁵ have in the past two decades been dominated by a terrorist narrative which focuses on the threat from violent Islamist groups and latterly those on the extreme right wing. The left has receded as a dominant threat, notwithstanding President Trump's declarations otherwise.²⁵⁶ Yet, within the chaos wrought by COVID-19, it is possible to see a re-emergence of elements of a far-left threat, angry at the rampant far-right and seeing inequality deepening.

Atop this, issues around environmentalism may have been pushed to one side due to COVID-19 concerns, but the problems remain. From a governmental perspective, there is still a need to resolve them, though the pace of change is one that is not happening fast enough for a number of activists. Whilst violence associated with the environmental movement is rare, the fall-out from COVID and the likely de-prioritization of environmental issues in favor of healthcare and repairing stricken economies, may stir more violence. An interesting phenomenon of the past few years has in fact been the mainstreaming of environmental anger into other ideologies. In some cases, like al Shabaab's banning of plastic bags, it appears banal and almost comical,²⁵⁷ but in others, like the attackers in El Paso and Christchurch declaring they are eco-fascists,²⁵⁸ it shows how environmental ideas can be absorbed into more mainstream violent ideologies in a way that enhances the narrative. Suggesting that for environmental issues to become a terrorist problem, they do not necessarily have to emerge solely from the environmental movement's mainstream or fringe. Played against the broader backdrop of instability and likely environmental degradation which will continue in the post-COVID-19 world, it is possible such narratives will gain greater salience.

China

A final threat which is likely to rise further, accelerated by COVID-19, is the growth of China as a target for violence and terrorism. Already a trend that was visible pre-COVID-19, it was something which was likely in part a product of China's rise to a preeminent place on the international stage, as well as a reaction to China's domestic and foreign policy. At home, the treatment of its Uighur minority has long-spurred anger rhetoric against China, but it has generated surprisingly little terrorism. Domestic violence within China associated with Uighur extremism is often rather expressions of anger at the state, with only some incidents justifiably considered terrorism.²⁵⁹ China's heavy-handed crackdown has largely suppressed these instances of violence at home, but there have been a few abroad associated with Uighur networks.²⁶⁰ More dominant has been the growing targeting of Chinese nationals and interests by groups elsewhere – more often than not local networks rather than international ones.

For example, in Pakistan, China has increasingly become the target of Baluchi and Sindhi separatists. While there is a consistent level of concern around violent Islamist groups within the country, they have for the most part not targeted Chinese specifically.²⁶¹ When they have hit Chinese targets, it has tended to be incidental and as part of a larger assault against foreigners or the state. In contrast, Sindhi and Baluchi groups have specifically targeted Chinese institutions and repeatedly put out messaging saying that China was their target. Similarly, in Indonesia, there may be a long history of anti-Chinese sentiment, but recently there has been a growth in specific thinking about targeting Chinese nationals within the country by violent Islamist groups. In part they consider this retribution for the treatment of Uighurs, but it also reflects an anger towards China as an invading colonial force.²⁶²

This particular anger is something that is only likely to grow going forwards. Beijing will find that as China rises to become an ever more central pillar in international affairs, it will attract as many detractors as it will supporters. And some of these detractors will be infuriated at Chinese behavior enough to want to commit acts of violence against Chinese interests. This trend is likely to be accelerated by the COVID-19 moment the world is going through. Beijing's unapologetic response to its links to the origin of the virus, subsequent aggressive public relations diplomacy captured under the moniker 'wolf warrior'²⁶³ and forceful posture on the world stage has done little to endear China to the international community.²⁶⁴ All of this is likely to attract different levels of public anger, some of which is likely to articulate itself as terrorism.

In some parts of the world this has already taken something of an ugly twist with the growing targeting of East Asian nationals in racist attacks.²⁶⁵ Taken alongside the growing levels of tension towards China, this is the sort of violence that has in other contexts ended up expressing itself through violence. China and ethnic East Asians are likely to find themselves increasingly potential targets of violence going forwards.

Conclusions

Much of this is of course speculative at this point. The world is still battling COVID with no clear timeline for when we will be able to talk about being in a post-COVID-19 world. And the longer the world suffers from COVID, the deeper the consequences touched upon in this paper are likely to be. The societal divisions, the economic damage, the transformed economies, and societies are all issues where impact is already visible, and this will only become more acute as more time passes. Society will change and this will have some sort of knock-on effect on the world of terrorism and political violence.

It will likely take some time, even years, before a clear causal link will be possible between the current events and the longer-term changes that might take place in terms of politically motivated violence and terrorism. Some of these effects might in fact be mere accelerations of what was already happening. This is something that is visible already in the growing prominence of the extreme right. Its rise was already visible pre-COVID, with the pattern tracing back years. But in the shadow of the disease and the societal, political and economic impact it has wrought we are seeing its rise sped up and worsened. Of course, this has to be played against the polarized political environment in Washington, DC in particular, which has amplified the noise around the far-right, something which has also likely been made worse by COVID-19. The point being that separating out effects and causal links will be something which is going to be hard to measure and quantify.

One issue which is likely to change in the west in particular in the wake of COVID-19 is the role of state in society. The massive bailouts, new healthcare and security infrastructure which will be needed to ensure future pandemics are better managed, and large public debt that will follow will require management. They will generate unhappiness in unexpected quarters, and in some cases, outright rejection. Given terrorism is at its root a form of anti-establishmentarianism, the massive growth of the state that is likely to result in post-COVID world could be a key underlying issue to look at when trying to explore how terrorism might evolve in the future. This is already most prominently visible in the United States, where it builds on a long history of libertarian and anti-federal government activity, but it is possible that similar strains may start to emerge elsewhere. In some ways, the anti-Chinese anger which may become exacerbated is another expression of this, with China becoming such a dominant figure globally that it is consequently attracting ire.

All of this needs to be kept into perspective of course. While COVID may have some effect on terrorism and political violence, its principal impact will most immediately and dramatically be felt in other aspects of human behavior. However, understanding how these ripples will echo in terrorism remains an important aspect to observe.

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GENERATION Z AND TERRORISM²⁶⁶

By Carolin Görzig

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Each generation is influenced by certain events and actors, be it “Hot Wars” or Cold Wars (or their endings), the Arab Spring and Arab Winter, or gentle seasonal changes that bring about changes of no less importance, introduced by actors such as Amazon, Google or YouTube. When I was studying in Brussels my fellow American students always talked about the September 11 attacks and how this day – and everything that happened afterwards – had become a dramatic, major experience for them. Members of the Generation Z, also called Generation YouTube or Generation Digital Native, are a generation of people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Very often Generation Z have no memories of September 11, 2001, in contrast to their parents who usually belong to the Generation X (people born between 1960 and 1980). For me and my fellow students – who belong to the Generation X – 9/11 was a milestone in our lives. At the same time the events of September 11 mark the 20th anniversary by next year, it will be the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Red Army Faction (RAF).

What would Andreas Baader have said about the September 11 attacks? Almost 25 years after his death, Usama bin Ladin led al-Qaeda to commit an attack right in the heart of US capitalism – would the former leader of the left-wing militant RAF have cheered full of joy? In 1971, RAF co-founder Ulrike Meinhof wrote in an essay called “The Concept of the Urban Guerrilla” that American imperialism is a “paper tiger” which can be defeated by anti-imperialist fightings all over the world. This was expressed just in the same way by Bin Ladin in an interview regarding the withdrawal of the US from Somalia. But here is a scenario to think about: does this mean the RAF and al-Qaeda would have made common cause? Even though this might seem absurd at first glance, a more thorough consideration allows to draw the conclusion that there are in fact parallels between people who have maneuvered themselves towards the underground and who are exposed to constraints and contradictions that seem almost impossible to bear. The facts that members of the RAF want to get rid of the fascist legacy of their parents and at the same time are being trained by two organizations that fight against Israel, namely the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), clearly show what sort of contradictions are inevitable when fighting from the underground.

Stephan B., the attacker of the Halle synagogue shooting on October 9, 2019, where two people were killed after he unsuccessfully tried to enter the temple, blames the Jews for being guilty of the „Great Replacement“ consequences. In 2016, Renaud Camus published his book “Revolt against the Great Replacement” which is considered the ideological basis for right-wing terrorist attacks. The criticism of the elite in Camus' book presents a seemingly paradox parallel, as the author describes how a white population is being threatened by migration. According to Camus, so-called “replacist elites” are actively engaging in a population exchange within the framework of a global capitalism. He stresses that the single individual is becoming more and more interchangeable within a capitalist system. Is this criticism of the elite and of capitalism in a new guise, with the Right learning from the Left? Terrorism evolves very slowly and unexpectedly, ranging from the Red Army Faction (RAF) to Islamist and right-wing terrorism. All of the evolution cycles depend on both the global political happenings and the

state authorities and can bring certain particularities with them. However, it is possible to draw comparisons which show that violence and counter-violence always have something in common.

A generation perspective

One possibility of working out the common features between violence and counter-violence is to focus on the causes and motivations of terrorism. Quite often it has been assumed that poverty, lack of opportunities or no education are reasons for resorting to terrorism. However, several study projects have been able to weaken these arguments. For example, some researchers observed that a high level of education can even be related to a more radical approach.²⁶⁷ Among the right-wing extremists in Germany there are individuals right from the middle of society, and separatist movements often operate in more prosperous regions. Even though separatism does not necessarily turn into terrorism, separatist movements often "form" a radicalization environment. But how come many attackers originally come from the very heart and middle of a society and an educated, prosperous environment? One could almost say that especially the more privileged tend to be committing terrorist attacks. Moreover, upon reversion, can the conclusion be drawn that terrorism is a privilege?

Very often, narratives of the past and of the future play decisive roles for terrorist groups: far-right extremists refer to old Knights Templar orders, Islamists speak of the glorious times of Islam, and the Left pick up ideas of anarchy. Other than legitimizing their existence by putting themselves within a wider, historic framework it is the future visions of each group that aim at mobilizing others. Sometimes these visions are apocalyptic predictions, and sometimes the creation of a new world is the main goal.

What can we assume about terrorists who do not fit into a "standard" victim pattern (poverty and lack of perspectives) but who are rewriting time and space? Why do some people put themselves voluntarily in dangerous, illegal situations even though they are actually privileged? We all know these situations: We get caught in those little white lies and suddenly everything gets out of hand until we realize that unintentionally we have put ourselves in a dilemma. But does this explain how one becomes a terrorist and how they find themselves in life-threatening situations? We could almost state that terrorists are either really stupid or competent. Life in the underground demands a lot of competencies actually, for example you must identify clearly between friend and enemy, which is not always an easy distinction. Furthermore, people who have put themselves in the middle of such controversies are being confronted with group dynamics that can exacerbate the situation even more.

Concluding from this, it is valid to question whether the way into such tricky situations can ever be a voluntary one. Anyone who is going down the path towards illegality does not choose a life full of restrictions and contradictions – but has been subject to particular constraints

and restrictions his or her whole life long. The motivation can be as diverse as the individuals themselves are. Going through the biographies of radicalized individuals, a high variance can be noted.

Osama Bin Laden originally came from an entrepreneurial family of multimillionaires from Saudi Arabia. What did he miss, although it looks like he had everything? Andreas Baader had to leave high school and came into conflict with the law several times. Instead of starting a professional training he made pottery and painted. The question arises as to what really drove him, and also why did he have to leave the private school (financed by his mother) even though he was considered highly gifted? Stephan B., the attacker of the Halle synagogue shooting in October 2019, was unemployed, railed at everything and everyone according to his own mother, and blamed "the Jews" for his situation. Did he see himself defeated by certain constraints and if yes, what kind of constraints were those and did he want to rebel against them?

Millionaires' son, highly gifted dropout and unemployed individual – looking for the common denominator is quite difficult and leads to the assumption that radicalization processes are as individual as the radicalized individuals themselves are. Among them there are the more or less privileged, highly and little educated, wealthy persons as well as those fighting for survival. For this reason, I want to go beyond the analysis of the motivations of individuals and also examine the development of organizations and movements within the framework of which individuals are acting. Considering individuals alone and without their greater framework or putting the investigation's focus only on organizations and without their members, bears the risk of looking at only one side of the whole story. For this reason, it makes sense to concentrate on the connection between both the individuals and the organizations: the generations.

Differences between generations influence families, organizations, and societies, and can cause conflicts but also result in learning effects. Some researchers believe that generational differences automatically bring about tensions among organizations and within a society.²⁶⁸ Divergent world views or expectations could be reasons for this, and certain structures within organizations can intensify already existing tensions among generations,²⁶⁹ as is the case when power falls into the hands of a minority and its leaders do not want to create any change, for example. Such factors can hinder the transfer of knowledge and resources between generations²⁷⁰. These effects that last over generations are closely connected to constraints lived out in families, and they often determine the lives of entire generations. These constraints are in most cases the result of traumata inherited by previous generations. In systemic therapy, the generation perspective suggests that problems, conflicts or certain tasks are passed on to subsequent generations: "It is assumed that everything that happened earlier, especially subconsciously, afflicted with conflict and unresolved, continues to be effective today and to have decisive influence on all patterns of experience and behavior²⁷¹. Transfer processes and compulsive repetition within families stop to evolve."²⁷² We can still feel the legacy of the Nazi era until today's present, for example. However, as children oftentimes rebel against their

parents, we experience today that grandchildren draw nearer their grandparents. The so-called RAF phenomenon of the 1970s originated in unsolved problems of the parents from the Nazi regime. Now the Left is revolting against the Fascist ideology while the Far-Right is beginning to take these ideas back on.

Rapoport's "Four Waves Theory" and terrorism's fifth wave

The idea of the development of terrorism throughout generations also agrees with the theory of David Rapoport, political scientist and pioneer of the study of terrorism.²⁷³ According to Rapoport, terrorism has evolved in four overlapping historical waves since the 1880s, namely the anarchist wave (1880s – 1920s), the anti-colonial wave (1920s – 1960s), the New Left wave (ca. 1960s – 1990s) and the current religious wave that has started to spread in the 1970s and 1980s. If we are to follow Rapoport's assumption that each wave of non-state terrorism has always lasted about forty years, with the last one – the religious wave – emerging in 1979, we are at the threshold of a new wave right now. Does this in fact mean, that a fifth wave of terrorism is currently developing? And if that is the case, is it worth to take a look back to the beginnings of terrorism?

How does anarchy or anti-colonialism relate to the Generation Z? If we assume a generation pattern of passing on certain constraints, they do have much in common. In this regard, it makes sense to check the theory of four waves by Rapoport for a possible generation pattern. Additionally, it might be useful to comprehend terrorism as a reply to state terrorism, in order to be able to see the bigger picture. Terrorist groups interact with whole states and provoke them to overreact, for instance. We might even use the term "co-escalation" in this regard. If we apply this idea for the Four Waves Theory, imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and the war against terror can be understood as the state side-counterparts of the anarchist wave, the anti-colonialism wave, the New Left wave and the religious wave. The pattern of action – reaction, as well as state violence – non-state violence can be projected into the future. Therefore, we can imagine a fifth wave of terrorism as a reaction to globalization.

Looking closely at the four previous waves it is interesting to note that the first and the third waves are similar, just like the second and the fourth wave resemble one another. The anarchists of the fourth wave of terrorism and the New Left of the third wave propagated mainly their criticism of the political system; the second anti-colonial wave and the religious fourth one had territorial claims. Islamist groups want to free territories occupied by their enemies – very often in the form of Western occupiers – which is the case of Palestine, for example. In contrary to the opinion of groups pertaining to the religious wave only having faith-related concerns on their agenda, religion often only serves as legitimization or cover-up of secular ambitions. According to the pattern of a wave-skipping generation effect, the socialist activists of the third wave can certainly be considered the "grandchildren" of the anarchist revolutionaries, and Arabic Islamists be understood as liberators of neo-colonial oppression. The fact that one

wave resembles the penultimate wave suggests that we can actually speak of a generation pattern where grandparents pass on their heritage to the grandchildren.

While "children" rebel against their "parents" and do not continue the paths of their waves, they take on the ideas of their grandparents' generation. Hence what can we deduce from our observations on repeating developments for the next fifth wave of terrorism? If the grandparents-grandchildren-pattern is to continue, we must assume that the fifth wave will be based on the criticism of (political) systems, and if it will be a reaction to globalization – the expression of the dominant world order – then its answer could be in the withdrawal towards the local. The strengthening of anti-liberal and far-right extremist forces is a trend which has clearly been visible with the rise of populists such as Trump or Orbán, and also with the experience of recent attacks in Christchurch, Halle and Hanau.

Far-right extremists rely on local traditions and customs such as the connection to Germanic neo-heathenism, the American frontier mentality or even to Christian fundamentalisms, all of which show certain parallels to the religious wave. At the same time, activists of new far-right movements such as the Identitarian Movement (*Identitäre Bewegung*) or the alt-right movement in the US see themselves as revolutionary actors and take over symbols and concepts of the Left. For example, they complain about language and thinking bans as a result of liberal anti-discrimination. While right-wing attacks are often dealt with as isolated events committed by lone wolves and without considering their transnational connections²⁷⁴, an increasing perception of the level of threat is fast developing and it is repeatedly questioned how lonely those wolves really are.

Thanks to the internet, far-right terrorists act highly global. This can be seen in the Christchurch attack already, where the perpetrator explicitly mentioned his American role-models, the discourses and even the Norwegian attacker Breivik. There is not only a connection between the different far-right attackers but also between far-right terrorism and other forms of terrorism and violence. Metaphorically speaking, when we examine today's far-right terrorism we could describe it as the grandchild of left-wing terrorism, the stepchild of religious terrorism and the little brother of right-wing populist regimes. In any case we cannot examine the far-right phenomena without considering historical or global developments. Left-wing terrorism, religious terrorism, far-right terrorism – they all leave traces in their changes and developments towards a fifth, right-wing terrorist wave.

Dynamics between generations can also be closely connected with pressure and constraints, the latter being also related to operating in the dark. In the underground, any form of contact and each movement can turn into a threat. What are the constraints under which far-right terrorists are operating today? What can be said is the fact that far-right extremism is becoming both more and less visible at the same time. Far-right extremist phenomena happening in elections are more visible, for instance. The most different movements originating in the right spectrum

are merging into a mishmash of European political parties, and because they do not distance themselves clearly enough from the radical milieu they are providing even more ground for extreme right-wing views than there actually is. Furthermore, so-called troll armies swamping social media channels with their fake profiles suggest that far-right radicals have become a huge movement. There is a simultaneous development happening in the background also, which is almost impossible to assess. The police and army forces are being infiltrated, and tendencies towards "swarm attacks" entail unpredictable individual attackers. The possibilities for fast reactions are rather limited: Even though it is possible to react to the visible actions in politics by weakening their arguments or by taking preventive steps, repressions are always reactive and can even support the development of far-right extremist structures. The phenomenon of individual attackers can also be considered an adaptation by terrorist groups to state repressions. The actions of an individual are much less traceable. Now what can we do, and what solutions can the generation Z find to get rid of the constraints its previous generation has imposed upon them? How to deal with the far-right extremist danger, and what counter-measures and responses can we formulate?

Generations as a source for problem solving

You could always choose to turn a crisis into an opportunity. Generations do not only pass on their traumata and problems but can also become the source of problem-solving. Intergenerational relations do not always have to be conflictual; they can also lead to mutual learning processes. Research indicates that the mixing of generations within the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has strongly contributed to the organization developing into a more political body. Young people who are full of energy and ready for action can change their views over the years. With their peace initiative, the leaders of the IRA wanted to protect the youth from making the same mistakes again. Another example is the Egyptian Gamaa Islamija, the organization responsible for the Luxor massacre in November 1997, who is geographically and ideologically far away from the IRA but who also turned their back on violence. According to their own words, they consider themselves young and stupid whenever they are confronted with their violent past. In about 20 books the leaders of Gamaa Islamija reflect upon their change of heart and also describe what it means for them to admit faults – a confession anything but easy to make. It is one thing to lead thousands of people and to risk their lives and then realize that everything has been a mistake. It's another level of commitment to actually communicate this mistake to those people. What can we learn from the experiences of Gamaa Islamija? Maybe the fact that generations reflect upon their mistakes and are able to communicate them? Learning processes within terrorist organizations do lead to the questioning of violence in general more often than widely expected. Also, a certain deradicalization logic can be detected in search for patterns in the development of terrorism, namely that groups do question the means and values that define their goals. These considerations can arise from the discrepancy between set and actually achieved goals, or it can be the case that goals contradict themselves and the groups then try to solve this conflict.

In order to start the mechanisms of deradicalization, the groups have to address those contradictions and problems themselves first. In their work on organization learning, scientists Chris Argyris and Donald Schön developed the concept of double-loop learning in organizational structures²⁷⁵ and describe how so-called double binds should be made more discussible. Those are situations characterized by incompatible requirements where your only option is losing, never winning. Very often, however, any such contradictions are never addressed in organizations, which is for example the case whenever a leader is not aware of double binds. If a co-worker or follower is not able to articulate certain issues too, the situation becomes even more desperate: "If one wanted to design a strategy to inhibit double-loop learning and to encourage error, a better one could not be found."²⁷⁶

Is it either cognitive abilities or perception errors that explain why organizations and their members are becoming incapable of learning? According to Argyris and Schön, the problem are defensive routines which are often enabled when they are actually the most counterproductive. Such routines develop out of feelings of shame and fear of losing countenance. The leaders of Gamaa Islamija wrote in their books how they were able to track down the causes of their mistakes and how to remedy them. They found that a lack of self-criticism, ignorance and also self-glorification are the main problems that lead to the leaders being afraid of losing their members or followers, or to do very poorly against competitors. The Gamaa Islamija leaders overcome any such fears, admit their mistakes and deal with the contradictions that have formed out of their past counterproductive violence. Continuing to fight would only lead to more victims from within their own ranks and giving up was not an option at first. This apparently hopeless situation leads to the leaders' decision to prioritize and to choose the lesser evil and opt for the greater benefit.²⁷⁷ This way they were able to dissolve several double-bind situations.

Together with my research group at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany, I have investigated the learning processes of Islamist, ethno-separatist and left terrorist groups and compared them to each other. I found that groups who openly question the values and norms of their goals and initiate new cognitive processes within their group structures in doing so are the ones most capable of learning in general. Leaders must overcome themselves in particular, and also address and deal with taboos. Looking at how groups are communicating with one another over different continents with different world views, and still learning new things from each other this way, is especially revealing for our research. This is the case, for example, with the Northern Irish IRA learning from the African National Congress (ANC) how far they can possibly go in negotiations, or the IRA positioning herself alongside anti-colonial fightings in India, Vietnam or Palestine. It is also the case with the Gamaa Islamija sparking a debate within Islam and projecting her findings upon al-Qaeda with the result that the latter clearly has a lack of insight into reality because the group looks at life itself as if it was a chemistry lab.²⁷⁸

Generations of terrorist groups are influenced by global events that connect them. When I was interviewing former IRA-members in Belfast last year, the influence of the South African ANC became obvious rather quickly. Representatives of the ANC had visited prisons in Northern Ireland in order to discuss a possible change of course with IRA-members. For the leaders of the Irish Republican Army the ANC provided significant arguments, since they had successfully closed their own negotiations before themselves. This example made it more accessible for the IRA to understand that non-violence is also a tool to "win" a fight, and that peaceful change is in fact possible. An interview partner of mine told me that the meeting with the ANC had been a crucial event in his life, which had let him to rethink his entire standards.²⁷⁹ The concept of "ideas travel" shows its fruits with this example of the Northern Ireland conflict, where Catholics often consider themselves similar to the South African black population, and Protestants to the white one.

Sometimes terrorist groups learn something by separating themselves from one another. For instance, members of the IRA distance themselves from the German RAF by stating that they are not a group of six against six million; instead, the IRA really carries weight.²⁸⁰ But actually, being invisible brings tactical advantages because the hunt for catching the three criminal members of RAF from the third generation would definitely be a lot more difficult if the support network was smaller, which could bust them. The more visible terrorist groups become, the more responsibility they have to assume and break the taboo which often dominates such groups, namely giving up the fight. For some a taboo break might mean a protection from a taboo break for others. For example: there are strong reasons for some taboos, such as the ban of Nazi insignia in Germany or the drawing of Mohammed caricatures. Making the non-discussable discussable again can help to prevent the following generation from blundering into hopeless situations and restrictions.

Final remarks: the Generation Z and terrorism

What are the constraints the generation Z is dealing with? What possibilities do they have? Generation Z is often named "Generation YouTube" or "Generation Digital Natives". Could it be the Internet itself providing the necessary tools to make the unspeakable speakable? Or is it mainly hate that is being communicated via the global network? Both scenarios are possible. On the one hand, filter bubbles and Likes can hinder your own capabilities of questioning information. Hate is also becoming more and more acceptable online thanks to certain dynamics, such as considering it "cool" to create extreme posts. On the other, new ways for communication and information are evolving that can bring transparency along with them too. Digital libraries could contribute to taking a new look on historical connections, for instance. The creation of new and common identities can reduce tensions. Historians could turn into agents of conflict transformation within conflict situations such as the current one between Israel and Palestine. Historiography has a lot to do with acknowledgement. Therefore, the digitalization of knowledge should play a role in this regard too.

The statements of members of terrorist groups can also turn into sources of cognitive processes and conflict transformation. In one of their books, the leaders of Gamaa Islamija mention that unfortunately, all human beings only have one life instead of two – one life to collect experiences and a second to learn from these. But the reality is that both must take place within one lifetime only²⁸¹. Each generation collects her experiences but can also learn from the past and future generations. Until the 20th century, intergenerational learning meant that the elder pass on their knowledge to the young. However, digitalization and modernization have led to the younger generation teaching the old one their knowledge and to the introduction of the new term of 'life-long learning': "The different generations must in fact learn from one another and with each other, in order to deal with complex social challenges."²⁸² Whether it be conflict-ridden or solution-oriented: the effects of certain powers across generations influences and characterizes individuals, organizations and movements all the same.

What will the generation Z teach us about terrorism? Terrorist groups create visions of both the past and the future, maybe because their present means they have to spend their lives in secrecy and under pressure. But terrorist groups also learn in the here and now. Unexpected events may completely turn history upside down and influence entire generations. The coronavirus pandemic, for instance, which has overrun and overwhelmed us since the beginning of 2020, can play into the hands of terrorism. Wherever states are failing, terrorist groups fill this gap and offer their social services in order to mobilize as many members as possible. With terrorist groups filling new niches, the response of the state is decisive. With view to COVID-19, the war rhetoric of some heads of state suggests that we are currently facing a fight with nature. The call from UN Secretary General Guterres for a global ceasefire shows that things can be handled and solved differently, also shown by the efforts of the youngest generation for protecting the climate. What sort of past, present and future tenses will the generation Z create? What kind of historical footprint will the Digital Natives leave and what taboos will they break?

Generation Z is characterized not only by the Internet or the current coronavirus pandemic, she is also the result of their parents', grandparents' and great-grandparents' influence. Each and every one of us is a child of its time, following certain trails and leaving traces behind. Gamaa Islamija compared her renunciation of violence with flying a plane: with no communication, you are in danger of crashing. On the other hand, al-Quaeda described the renunciation of violence with using the image of a driverless car.²⁸³ Gamaa Islamija's approach shows how easy it is to loose one's track and how communication can help with finding the way back – sometimes such accidents even make history, when people set out on a journey and eventually find something else, as numerous examples on historical discoveries show. Terrorist groups also live with the unexpected. Witnessing members of terrorist organizations who end up in prison and who – against the assumption of further radicalization – undergo a process of self-education and reflection is especially revealing. Imprisoned Gamaa Islamija leaders and members did understand very well how counterproductive their fight had been, especially for themselves. In

their books, they even warn other Muslim brothers against falling into the trap of the thesis of the clash of civilizations.²⁸⁴ This means they have been using western narratives and exposed their radicalization potential.

Not all issues can be solved and corrected at any time. Sometimes we learn from the mistakes our role models have made, sometimes we make mistakes ourselves and sometimes we are shaking the status quo. If we dare an optimistic mental game, both digitalization and globalization could make the concepts of borders, identities and enemy stereotypes obsolete. It is almost ironic that Gamaa Islamiya – a former Islamist terrorist group – warns against the “Clash of Civilizations” trap. Peace must be worth it, as one member of the IRA mentioned: “We all wanted peace, but not at any price.”²⁸⁵ Just how high must any effort be in order to reshuffle the pack and for revolutions to become redundant? Members of terrorist groups not only want to physically leave prison one day, but to also leave their imprisonment mentally behind. Questioning the repetitive patterns of violence and counter-violence could contribute to breaking mental limits and to strengthening the imaginative power for creating a peaceful world. Breaking up generation borders could definitely support this quest.

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**STOCHASTIC TERRORISM. MASS MEDIA ESCALATION
AGAINST VICTIM GROUPS AS A RADICALIZATION
PLATFORM FOR TERRORIST INDIVIDUAL PERPETRATORS?**

By Karolin Schwarz

STOCHASTIC TERRORISM. MASS MEDIA ESCALATION AGAINST VICTIM GROUPS AS A RADICALIZATION PLATFORM FOR TERRORIST INDIVIDUAL PERPETRATORS?

By Karolin Schwarz

The attacks by right-wing extremist and Islamist alleged "lone wolves" in the 2010s put pressure on security agencies and academia to explain the killings. This is especially true of the right-wing terrorist attacks on a church in Charleston (South Carolina) in 2015 and a synagogue in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) in 2018 and the subsequent attacks in Christchurch, Poway (California), El Paso (Texas), Bærum and Halle in 2019. In all these cases, the perpetrators announced their attacks online on image boards and, in one case, on the social media platform Gab. Almost all of them also published pamphlets in which they explained their motivations and ideology, sometimes in more, sometimes in less detail. Two of them succeeded in broadcasting their attack live on the Internet: Brenton T. in Christchurch and Stephan B. in Halle.

In response to the terrorists' deeds and obvious references to right-wing extremist online subcultures, which can be found in references and inside "jokes" in their writings, two lines of explanation were frequently discussed. On the one hand, the "gamification of terror",²⁸⁶ which refers to terrorist fan communities on the Internet, in which, among other things, lists are being circulated in which the perpetrators are ranked according to the number of murders they committed. Stephan B. also published a series of "achievements" that he considered desirable for his attack. He named possible victims and different ways of killing people. These references, which can be traced back to the world of gaming, led some experts to the conclusion that the killings were being gamified here. However, other references, for example the anime in Stephan B.'s pamphlet, can also be found in the writings of the perpetrators. Brenton T., on the other hand, made fun of the debate on the possible radicalization of terrorists and school shooters via games and gaming platforms in a document he published, claiming to have been radicalized by a children's game.

Another paradigm that is used to explain the attacks is "stochastic terrorism". Basically, the concept suggests that terrorist acts that appear randomly are the effect of mass media radicalization. Two characteristics of the terrorist attacks of recent years are connected with this: First, there is the fact that the perpetrators are usually not formally members of right-wing extremist or terrorist organizations. Moreover, mass media, especially digital platforms, play a central role:

1. For the radicalization of terrorists, particularly through the construction and constant thematization of their "enemies" on the Internet.
2. For the dissemination of imagery of the attacks and the perpetrators and their propaganda material.

The Internet is used constantly to construct and reinforce the extremists' bogeymen. This is especially true on the platforms that Islamists and right-wing extremists have appropriated and built up themselves in recent years. But it also applies to the platforms that are frequented by the broad public and mass media, which have been massively used by hatemongers in recent

years to place their ideology within a broader reach. Organized right-wing extremists have already begun to strategically use the Internet in the 1990s and 2000s. This applies both to addressing potential new supporters and to networking among themselves. Over the years, they developed new platforms and tools and formulated and perfected their strategies, so that today it is hardly surprising that they are often several steps ahead of public authorities and Internet companies. For a long time, the deadly potential of their actions was simply not taken seriously enough.

Lone(ly) wolves?

It usually follows the same pattern: after a terrorist attack, the focus of politics, security authorities and the media is first directed at the perpetrators. People want to know: How could this happen? What kind of person was the perpetrator? When and why did he decide to take action? It is also common to try to use psychological disorders to explain the causes of attacks. This is shown not least by the long struggle to classify David S.'s attack on the Olympia shopping center in Munich in July 2016, which was only classified years later as a politically right-wing motivated act. Many right-wing personalities often try to absolve themselves of any responsibility for violent acts by declaring the perpetrators to not be sane. However, this explanation is completely inadequate. On the one hand, because less than half of the perpetrators are considered to be mentally ill²⁸⁷ and, on the other hand, because mental illness is not a sufficient explanation for why the perpetrators direct their hatred toward marginalized groups. The overwhelming majority of perpetrators acting alone are male. A majority of them are also unmarried, and while some can be described as socially isolated, others cultivated social contacts away from the Internet.²⁸⁸

The biographies of the perpetrators were analyzed and compared where possible in recent years. However, it is not possible to draw up a generally valid profile of lone-actor terrorists. Even though there are often similarities between them, a look at the perpetrators alone is not enough and carries the danger of individualizing right-wing terrorism. It is essential, however, to also include the digital communities to which they refer and which they want to impress with their actions.²⁸⁹ In the digital age, those who incite hatred and violence online and normalize dehumanizing expressions are partly to blame for the violence.

A look at the digital environment of the perpetrators

The range of options for right-wing extremists on the Internet is overwhelmingly large. This not only applies to the sheer mass of accounts on mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram plus the corresponding content on the alt-tech platforms that right-wing extremists have appropriated or created as mainstream platforms increasingly intervened by moderating content. Above all, this also applies to the different audiences that are being targeted today. Whether young or old, gamers, literature lovers, athletes or fans of

conspiracy theories - the scene has become considerably more differentiated in recent years and is subject to constant change. The influx of refugees to Europe, especially to Germany, has benefited above all racist and Islamophobic actors in 2015 and 2016. The ongoing crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 benefited conspiracy ideologues in particular, who were active as influencers on Telegram or other channels or as anonymous communities like the conspiracy movement QAnon.²⁹⁰

Right-wing extremist actors use the Internet in a targeted manner to attract new supporters and radicalize accordingly. The term "red pill" has become established in the scene, at least among some groups. The term is used as a reference to the film "The Matrix", in which the protagonist Neo is confronted with the choice of swallowing a blue pill that ensures that the world in which he used to live does not change for him. The red pill in turn causes Neo to recognize reality as such. Among right-wingers, the "red pill" is now used as a synonym for the appropriation of right-wing ideology.

Researcher Luke Munn has used videos, chat transcripts and posts by members of the Alt-Right to investigate the individual radicalization.²⁹¹ He found that the development can be divided into three phases, which, however, do not have to be distinctly linear, but can also overlap: Normalization, acclimatization and dehumanization. Based on the results, it can be traced that radicalization is also by no means to be seen as a singular event, i.e., the symbolic taking of a single "red pill", but rather that different set pieces of right-wing extremist ideology are consumed and internalized piece by piece via the Internet. The dosage form varies: From YouTube videos to podcasts, music or memes.²⁹²

In addition, time does not matter: in contrast to concerts, trips and demonstrations off the Internet, content can be viewed and distributed at will, whenever the recipients want to. Communication can also be time-delayed, for example via chats or image boards. Thus, the total amount of right-wing extremist propaganda available online - if it is not deleted - is continuously growing.

The terrorists from Christchurch, El Paso, Bærum and Halle used image boards like 8chan, Endchan and Meguca to publish their pamphlets, photos and links to their live streams. It is no coincidence that these platforms were chosen. Hate and the glorification of violence are part of the tone of conversation on many of these forums. This is especially true for the subforums /pol/ and /b/, which are part of the repertoire in many imageboards. Studies confirm, for example, that 4chan has a significantly higher percentage of hate postings than other platforms. This also applies to anti-Semitism, which is cultivated there. The percentage of anti-Semitic and negatively stereotyping posts is higher on 4chan than on Reddit and Twitter, for example.²⁹³

The glorification of violence against minorities and women is part of the norm on image boards. In threads about right-wing terrorist attacks, open denunciations of violence tends to be a

minority of posts and is often linked to the fact that the authors fear that their forums will be shut down. If terrorists spread their announcements and propaganda PR packages on image boards, the role of the recipients is usually predefined by the perpetrators. They are interested in being included in the ranking of terrorists who have their own fan communities. In addition, the users are supposed to spread the propaganda by distributing the pamphlets, videos and photos not only on image boards, but on as many platforms and accounts as possible. After the Christchurch attack, Brenton T.'s propaganda strategy worked, at least for a while: The video showing his murders was uploaded in hundreds of different versions several million times on platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The digital terror fan community became the terrorist's extended arm.

Terrorist fan communities beyond imageboards

In August 2019, right-wing terrorist Patrick C. carried out an attack on the premises of a supermarket in El Paso, Texas, in which 23 people died. Like Brenton T., he published a pamphlet on 8chan. As a consequence, several service providers terminated their contracts with 8chan, which ultimately resulted in the site being unavailable for a prolonged period of time. Many image boards have backup forums that are kept ready in case of a possible shutdown. 8chan was also initially accessible via darknet and is now back online under a new name. Nevertheless, the fan scene of right-wing terrorists has sought another digital home. There are now numerous channels on Telegram in which the terrorists are being worshipped. All in all, right-wing extremists have discovered Telegram as one of the most important platforms in recent years, following Islamist groups that had already discovered the messenger service for themselves.

In the channels of the terrorist supporters the writings of their idols can be found. Neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic book classics such as "Siege", "The Turner Diaries" and the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" can be found there as well as instructions on how to build weapons and bombs and relevant music.

It can be expected that the scene on Telegram will continue to grow. Although Telegram has recently deleted a few right-wing extremist channels, the operators of Telegram channels are very well interlinked, so that the operators of de-platformed channels can easily create new channels and advertise them. Just as right-wing extremists are represented online in a decentralized manner on all conceivable platforms, the terror-affiliated communities are also diversifying their presence.

Sometimes socially isolated – but no lonely wolves

Although these right-wing terrorists of recent years are not formally members of right-wing extremist organizations, their deeds can be summarized into a series within which several similarities are striking:

1. Announcements: The attacks were announced on relevant online platforms that are popular with right-wing extremists, such as imageboards and the Twitter alternative Gab.
2. "Role models": The majority of the perpetrators reference other attacks in their pamphlets and posts, especially the attack by Anders B. in Oslo and on Utøya in 2011.
3. Community: The jargon of the perpetrators often suggests that the perpetrators have spent some time on the platforms where they leave announcements and pamphlets. In many cases, the users of the image boards and alternative platforms are also addressed directly.

The perpetrators consider their possible fan base already when writing their scripts and announcements. Oftentimes they have studied previous attacks in detail. The terrorists see themselves as a community, which in turn is embedded in the circle of their fan community. The terrorist from Halle did not want to disappoint his potential fan community: This became apparent when he repeatedly called himself a failure during the attack. The significance of the digital communities he frequented is demonstrated by the fact that he refused to provide any information about them in court.

It is essential to include the terrorists' digital contacts in the evaluation of their crimes and the elaboration of possible consequences and prevention programs. Beyond anonymous forums such as 4chan, there is sufficient evidence that relationships among right-wing extremists are established and maintained via the Internet - possibly even beyond the Internet. Brenton T. sought contact to right-wing extremist organizations worldwide via the Internet, and David S. was celebrated online by William A. from the US after the attack in Munich. A. shot two Hispanic students at a high school in New Mexico a few months after the Munich attack. The two murderers were operating a racist group on the gaming platform Steam.

The ideological references of the terrorists of recent years are by no means new. However, digital relationships, both one-sided and reciprocal, are becoming increasingly important. The digital communities are above all a complement to the existing networks and forms of organization that continue to spawn terrorists. These include the murder of the German politician Walter Lübcke in June 2019, for example, as well as the terror cell of the National Socialist underground, whose network was not disbanded after the core cell's self-exposure. And even if Stephan E., the suspected murderer of Walter Lübcke, was well networked with other neo-Nazis for many years away from the Internet, the digital hate community still played a role for him. E. was present when Walter Lübcke addressed agitators present at a citizens' meeting and suggested to them that one could leave the country if one could not identify with the values of a country, one could leave it. The meeting was about the admission of refugees into Germany. E. filmed the scene and later uploaded it to YouTube. It came to be the trigger for years of hatred, which unleashed itself towards Lübcke. Digital hatred was also a factor in the recent Islamist attack on a history teacher in France. Islamists had called for acts of violence in dozens of posts on the Internet.

The Internet has long served as a tool for forming and maintaining relationships. This also applies to right-wing extremists and Islamists. Especially in 2020, when much of the everyday life was transferred to the digital realm due to the pandemic, this effect is likely to have only increased.

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**FOILED VERSUS LAUNCHED TERROR PLOTS:
SOME LESSONS LEARNED**

By Petter Nesser

FOILED VERSUS LAUNCHED TERROR PLOTS: SOME LESSONS LEARNED

By Petter Nesser

Introduction²⁹⁴

The common approach to measuring terrorism is to count attacks. Nearly all quantitative studies of terrorism rely on attacks as metric for terrorist activity. Such studies typically draw upon the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which is widely accepted as the gold standard for data on terrorism.²⁹⁵ Attacks are also the focus of public debate on terrorism.

This focus on attacks is natural since they are the most tangible and measurable output of terrorist activity. Yet, to solely focus on launched terror attacks is problematic. The reason is that attacks constitute the “tip of the iceberg”, what is left after security services have done their job at foiling attack plots.²⁹⁶ Not considering the foiled plots come with a risk of misrepresenting the scale and nature of terror threats.

To base analyses of terrorism on launched attacks only implies ignoring how countermeasures affect threat patterns. Many terror attacks are never completed, usually because the security apparatus intervenes. So for every launched attack there will be foiled ones, and these are seldom considered in scientific studies. If there was a fixed relationship between foiled and launched plots this problem would be limited. For example, if there were two foiled plots per attack, and the foiled plots pursued the same modus operandi as the attacks, it would usually suffice to study the latter. However, this is not the case.

Counterterrorism varies for different reasons, between countries, and over time. There is also variance in how security regimes prioritize different types of threat actors of different types of modi operandi. Since 9/11 western governments have prioritized countering jihadism, necessarily at the expense of other threats. Similarly, states will prioritize avoiding highly disruptive and lethal types of terrorism, such as attacks on aviation or WMD (weapons of mass destruction) terrorism, over less lethal types, such as knife attacks. What this means is that attacks become a precarious measure for assessing terrorist threat patterns. The attacks may not be representative of the overall threat. The scale of a threat could be higher than it would seem based on the number of attacks, because of vigilant counterterrorism. A threat's modus operandi could also be more diversified than the attack's signal. Not considering foiled plots could also distort comparative analyses of the threat from actors, such as jihadis, nationalist-separatists, or right-wing militancy.

Both research and public discourse influence policy decisions on how to tackle political violence: how much resources should be allocated for this purpose, which types of countermeasures should be put in place, and what types of threats should be prioritized. An effective counterterrorism policy hinges on an accurate understanding of the threat. It is therefore important to examine how analyses of attacks can misrepresent terrorism, and what can be gained by analyzing foiled plots. However, research on foiled plots involves methodological pitfalls. Therefore, this untapped resource in terrorism research ought to be used with caution.

Despite a growing awareness about the value added of foiled plots as a units of analysis, there exist few databases that systematically include them.

This paper will discuss what can be gained from researching foiled plots. As a background it will present some lessons learned from a data collection project at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), mapping launched and foiled terror plots by jihadi terrorists in Western Europe. This section will highlight some of the methodological challenges of studying foiled terror plots. The paper then looks briefly at the state of research on foiled plots. Next it will show some examples on how jihadi threat in Europe looks different when we include foiled plots than it does when we leave them out of the analysis. The paper concludes with a call for more data on foiled plots in terrorism research.

The jihadi plots in Europe dataset (JPED)

In 2003 the Terrorism Research Group at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment started mapping the activities of al-Qaida in Western Europe based on open sources, such as media and judicial documents. Most of what al-Qaida was doing in Europe at that time revolved around propaganda, recruitment, money laundering, and weapons smuggling. These activities were geared toward supporting jihadis in conflict zones.

However, there was also an emerging pattern of attack plotting. Cells linked to al-Qaida attempted to strike US and Jewish targets in Europe but ended up being intercepted by counterterrorism. We decided to focus the data collection on this attack-geared activity, and to assemble as much information as possible about the foiled plots in a chronology. Closer analyses of these foiled plots showed that there was a well-organized, persistent effort by al-Qaida to launch attacks in Europe. Then, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, this effort resulted in the 2004 Madrid bombings and the 2005 London bombings. From that point FFI's data collection consisted of both foiled plots and attacks.²⁹⁷

We also decided to include historical data on jihadi terrorism in the region, tracing the beginning of phenomenon to the mid-1990s, with the Algerian GIA's bombing campaign in France.²⁹⁸ Over time the chronology has become a dataset, maintained through day-to-day monitoring of media, and other sources. The dataset currently contains a total of 341 observations of plots and attacks attributed to jihadis in Western Europe. JPED only looks at Western Europe and not former Eastern bloc states. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, it makes the data collection manageable. Secondly, it eases cross-country comparisons, because Western European states are similar in terms of political systems, access to sources, and history with jihadism. Broadly speaking JPED covers three waves of terrorist plotting: The GIA terror wave in France and Belgium in the mid-1990s, the al-Qaida wave of the 2000s, and the IS wave from the mid-2010s. Each observation in the dataset is coded as a terrorist plot.

What are terror plots?

There exists no unified definition of what constitutes a terrorist plot.²⁹⁹ The concept is used to describe different phenomena ranging from an expressed idea or vague intention to conduct an attack, to very concrete acts of preparation and implementation. Sometimes the word "plot" is also used about actions by extremists which are not directly linked to attack planning, such as recruitment of foreign fighters. In JPED, the term "terrorist plots" narrowly refers to attacks and concrete plans thereof. This needs to be qualified though, as JPED can only include attack plans which are documented in publicly available sources. This means that there will be dark figures, as we must assume that security services make early interventions, and prevent some attack plans that the public never hears about. To use the iceberg analogy, there will always be parts of the iceberg that cannot be captured by JPED. Still, because there are incentives for security services to report on what they have managed to stop, the dark figures are probably not huge.

In JPED terror plots are either foiled or launched. A plot is launched when perpetrators reach the stage where they physically attempt to hurt the target. A launched plot therefore equals an attack. A plot is foiled when an attack plan gets thwarted before the perpetrator can implement. This mostly happens because security services intervene, but sometimes because perpetrators run into problems during the planning process, or have a change of heart. One example of the latter is the case of Sajjid Badat. He was supposed to bomb a transatlantic airliner for al-Qaida but hid the bomb under the bed and tried to forget about the whole thing.³⁰⁰ Each observation or "plot" in JPED is coded for more than twenty variables signifying outcome (e.g. the number of people killed or injured), perpetrator profiles (e.g. involvement of women, or minors), cell-configuration (group vs. single actors), and modus operandi (weapons, tactics and targets). JPED does currently not code for how plots are foiled, mainly because open sources offer limited information about the security services' methods.

The ambition for JPED is to give an updated and reliable overview of jihadi terrorist attack activity in Western European countries, and make the dataset available to academic researchers. There are three main challenges with the project. Firstly, since the dataset includes foiled terror plots, which are essentially non-events, there needs to be a continuous and critical assessment of which cases should be included and which cases should not. Secondly, because of the secret nature of terrorism and the many biases involved in the discourse on terrorism, it can be challenging to obtain reliable sources. Thirdly, maintaining this type of dataset is very labor-intensive.

Inclusion criteria

With regards to the inclusion of cases, JPED applies a narrow definition of terrorism. The terror plots must involve some level of organization and sustained preparation, and be designed to

spread a political message and fear, through killing people. This excludes, for example, sabotage against property or spontaneous hate crime, even though these can be highly politicized and the latter very lethal.³⁰¹ When identifying terror plots (launched or foiled) for JPED, and including them, there are three main criteria. Firstly, perpetrators must be "jihadi" in the way that they subscribe to the ideology of al-Qaida and IS. Secondly, there must be information about a target or target type. Last, there must be concrete evidence, such as bomb-making material or reconnaissance. If all three aspects are well-documented the case is category 1 (C1). This applies to most attacks. If two aspects are well-documented it is category 2 (C2). This applies to most foiled plots. If there are uncertainties regarding all three, the case is defined as category 3 (C3).

JPED also sticks to the principle that perpetrators must be considered rational, meaning that plots by persons known to suffer from severe mental illness are either coded C3, or not included in the dataset at all. An example of such an assessment is the case of Mark Townley, a serial fraudster and former porn director, suffering from personality disorders.³⁰² He contemplated assassinating Prince Harry of Britain. Townley received a three-years-sentence for planning murder in 2014, but was released in 2015. The case was for a long time coded C2 in JPED, but was in the end categorized as C3. While technically this was at least a C2 plot, the circumstances and Townley's background were just too bizarre. Last, JPED does not set as an absolute criterion that a verdict must have been reached on terrorism charges for a case to be included. A verdict strengthens the reliability of the case, but on the other hand a dismissal of a case does not necessarily mean that an attack was not in the making. Terrorism laws vary between countries and are changing to deal with evolving threats. For data collection designed to capture trends in how the threat picture evolves, it makes sense to include based on how they are presented during investigation rather than applying a legalistic principle.

FFI's analyses of trends in jihadi terror plotting are based on C1 and C2 plots. The purpose of this classification system is partly to not miss out on cases that may not seem terror-related at first but become linked to terrorism as investigations proceed. More importantly, the purpose is to avoid making generalizations based on cases that are dubious. Exploiting data on foiled plots comes with a risk of exaggerating the threat. However, because of the strict inclusion criteria, this risk is mitigated, and it can be argued that some level of over-reporting is less of a problem than a high level of under-reporting when it comes to measuring terrorist attack activity. After having built a dataset containing both clear-cut, and not so clear-cut cases of terror plotting, the job is far from done. For the dataset to give an as accurate picture of the threat possible, the cases need to be reassessed, and re-coded as new sources emerge.

Sources

Sources are a challenge in all types of terrorism research but becomes even more of an issue when looking at foiled plots. Terrorism is secret activity and the information about foiled terror

plots that reaches the public domain usually comes from law enforcement spokes figures or leaks from investigations. It can be in the interest of states to manipulate information to justify countermeasures or be able to disrupt an extremist milieu that might be considering attacks, but has yet to take the plans further. This problem is probably limited in well-functioning democracies, as there are institutionalized checks on what security services can and cannot do. Still, it is a factor that cannot be ignored, and necessitates a careful assessment of the sources and triangulating them when possible.

Media sources have been the main tool in building JPED (especially local newspapers from European countries where plots have occurred). Looking at the attack activity by transnational terror networks, media sources are a highly effective tool. Yet, working with media sources has its challenges. The quality of the reporting varies across different publications, between countries, and between journalists. Sometimes reporters exaggerate to pursue an angle and make headlines. To the extent possible, we have tried to cross-check media against judicial documents, official reports, other research, and interviews with investigators or former extremists. All of these sources come with biases, so there will always be an element of uncertainty. A more recent challenge is that paywalls are making the collection of sources and triangulation more difficult and costly. In sum, maintaining a dataset of both terror attacks and foiled plots has proved possible, yet labor-intensive and costly, something that helps explain why such datasets are few and far between.

Data on foiled terror plots

Foiled plots have always been an object of analysis, both for security analyst and terrorism researchers. Security services have taken foiled plots into consideration when producing threat assessments, but they seldom share their data.³⁰³ Europol obtains data on foiled plots from EU member states. Analyses based on these data are presented in their T-Sat report.³⁰⁴ This report emerged in 2007 and lacks data before that. T-Sat's inclusion of foiled plots does not appear to have been systematic from its inception but has become more so over the last few years.

Terrorism research has a tradition for examining foiled plots.³⁰⁵ However, early terrorism studies tended to focus on foiled plots when looking at types of terrorism where few attacks materialized, such as chemical, biological or nuclear (CBRN) terrorism.³⁰⁶ From the mid-2000s, jihadism research began to examine foiled plots systematically, primarily in qualitative studies.³⁰⁷ Then in the 2010s, research on both right-wing and jihadi terrorism began using mixed methods in studies of foiled plots³⁰⁸ Most of this research focused on *modi operandi*, perpetrator profiles, or effects of countermeasures. Studies of foiled plots remain sparse, however, compared to the vast body of quantitative terrorism research, which uses attacks as metric.

The main reason for this is that the main data databases used in quantitative terrorism studies, the *Global Terrorism Database (GTD)* and the *International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE)*, never included foiled plots. GTD does include failed attacks according to the "out-the-door"-principle, when perpetrators are stopped on their way to launching an attack. It does not, however, include plots that were planned, prepared, and potentially very lethal, but intercepted last minute.

If we acknowledge that foiled plots are an essential part of the total attack activity, terrorism is therefore under-reported in the main database for quantitative studies. Because of this lack of data on foiled plots in databases, there have emerged separate data collections that include them. These collections are usually narrow with regards to actor, geographical and temporal scope. They tend to look at one type of terrorism (mostly jihadism, but also far-right violence and CBRN), in one country (mostly the US), over a limited time interval. They are typically published as chronologies of incidents rather than tabulated data.

As for full worthy datasets that include foiled plots, very few exists, and none are openly available (although academics can apply for access to some of them). One such dataset is POICN, which contains CBRN incidents by non-state actors between 1993 and 2017.³⁰⁹ Another is the RTV dataset which documents right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe since 1990.³¹⁰ The third, and closest thing to JPED, is a dataset by Crenshaw et al, which includes jihadi plots in NATO countries, EU countries, Australia and New Zealand between 1993 and 2017.³¹¹

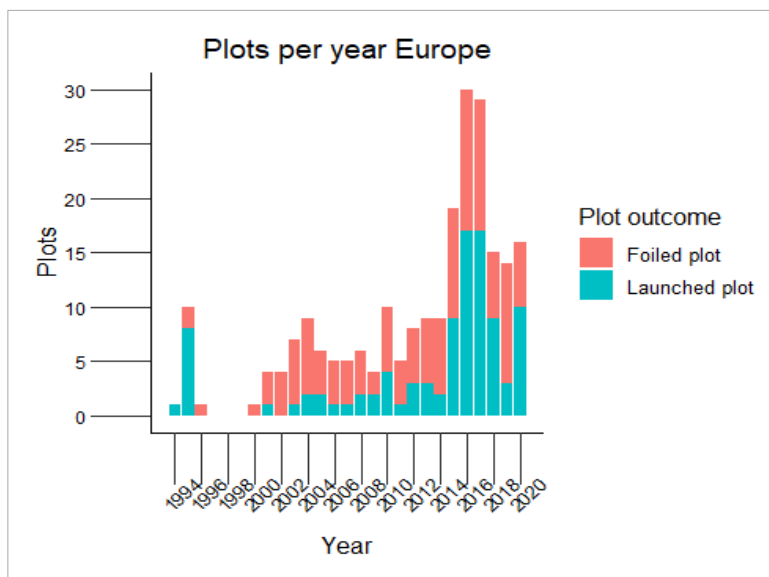
Although systematic data on foiled plots are increasing, there is still a long way to go. The existing datasets cover different time periods and different actors, using different inclusion criteria, something that makes comparison across them challenging. Yet they provide an opportunity to assess the value added of including foiled plots in terrorism research. The following provides examples, based on preliminary data from JPED, on how the inclusion of foiled plots can inform threat analyses.

Examples on the usage of foiled plots data

By 2020, Islamic State was militarily defeated and two years had passed since Europe saw the last mass casualty attack (plus 10 deaths). Although there were still smaller attacks by individuals linked to or influenced by jihadi networks, these received less attention from the public and policy makers. While security services and experts warned that jihadism still posed a threat, the general feeling was that it was time to concentrate on other security challenges such as hybrid warfare or terror from the far-right. In late 2020 a series of grisly attacks by extremists in France, seemingly to avenge the re-publication of Mohammed cartoons alerted the public to the fact that jihadism remained a potent threat.³¹²

The scale of the threat

Data from JPED show how the idea of a waning jihadi threat to Europe is premature at best. JPED currently includes 343 plots in total, whereas 227 plots are considered sufficiently documented for trend analyses. Statistics presented in this paper are based on the latter. Of the 227 well-documented plots, 99 cases (44 percent) are launched attacks and 128 cases (56 percent) are foiled. We have currently registered 652 deaths and 5616 injuries as a result of jihadi attack activity in the region.



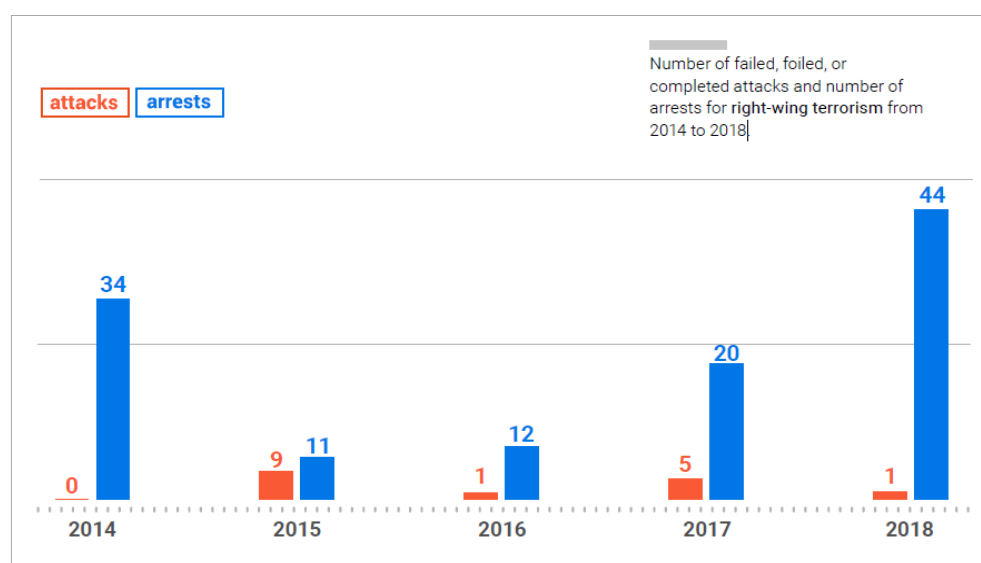
Jihadi plot activity Europe (JPED, 2020)

The total attack activity (launched and foiled plots) has remained elevated after the collapse of IS and the historical trend also shows that al-Qaida was able to uphold substantial levels of terrorist plotting after losing its Afghanistan camps in 2001. From 2018 onward plots the total attack activity decreased some 50 % compared to the unprecedented numbers 2016-2017. Yet we notice that total attack after 2017 remains higher than any given year before 2015 (when al-Qaida was targeting Europe).

Comparative threats

Acknowledging that attacks constitute the "tip of the iceberg" complicates comparison across different terror trends. Data from GTD and Europol's T-Sat report have been invoked to show that jihadis are behind far fewer terror attacks in Europe than nationalist-separatists, such as IRA off-shoots, the Spanish ETA or the Corsican FLNC.³¹³

Large-scale attacks by right-wing militants in Europe and elsewhere have created fears of a new wave of terror from the far-right. The massacres by Anders Behring Breivik in Norway in 2011, and that of Brenton Tarrant in a New Zealand mosque in 2019, are cases in point. So are recent reports that right-wing terrorism is the fastest growing threat in some European countries.³¹⁴ At the same time, Europol's 2019 T-Sat report suggests that, despite an increase in extremist activity and arrests, right-wing terrorist plotting appears to be very low compared to jihadism.³¹⁵



Right-wing arrests and terror plots (T-Sat, 2019)

Comparing the threat from jihadism with nationalist-separatist militancy, or right-wing terror is problematic for different reasons. Nationalist-separatist groups operate locally while jihadis constitute a transnational threat. Furthermore, nationalist-separatist groups tend to launch smaller-scale attacks against representatives of the state or sabotage, whereas jihadis often aim for large-scale, indiscriminate attacks. As for right-wing militancy, it differs from jihadism by being less embedded in armed conflicts.

The main problem, however, is that comparisons between these three types of terrorism rarely account for the fact that European governments had a special focus on jihadism, and thereby stopped many mass atrocities, which rarely show up in databases such as the GTD. One famous example is the 2006 transatlantic airliner plot, which could have killed in the thousands.³¹⁶ More recently European security services have stopped multiple plans to launch mass casualty attacks in France, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands (see below). To properly compare the scale and nature of nationalist, jihadi and right-wing terror, we need quality data for all of

the actors, which also include foiled plots. A closer look at JPED data illustrates how launched attacks do not accurately represent the nature of the threat Europe is facing from jihadism.

The nature of the threat

Since IS came under severe military pressure, most of the jihadi attacks in Europe have been low-tech, conducted by single actors, using melee weapon or vehicles.³¹⁷ We have not seen complex mass casualty attacks like those in Paris in November 2015, which involved a group of attackers, employing different weapons and tactics, such as suicide bombings and mass shootings. An analysis based on launched attacks would therefore indicate a major change in the threat situation.

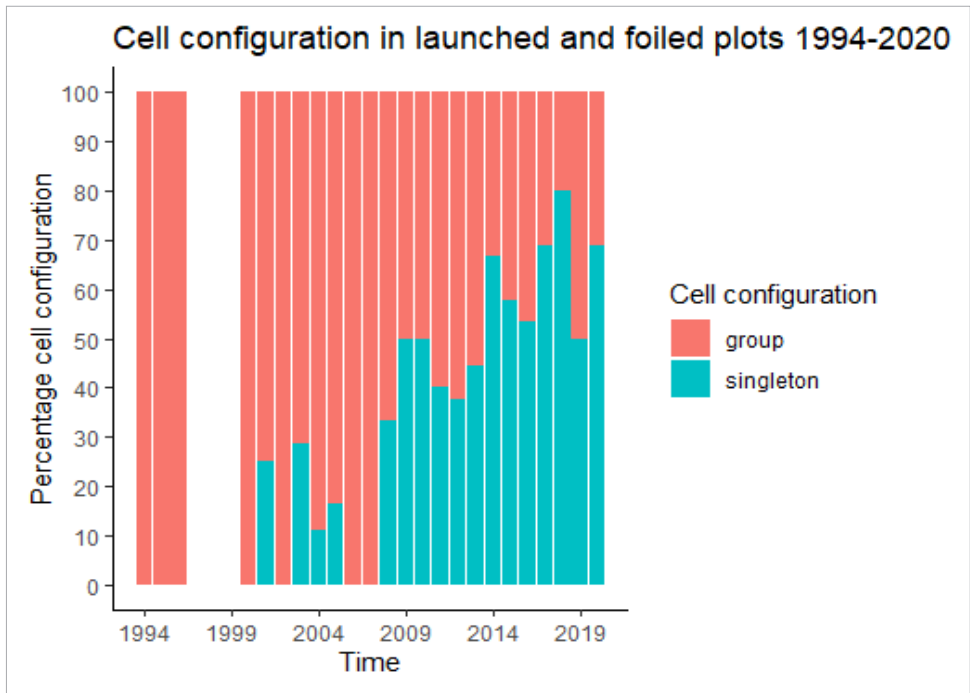
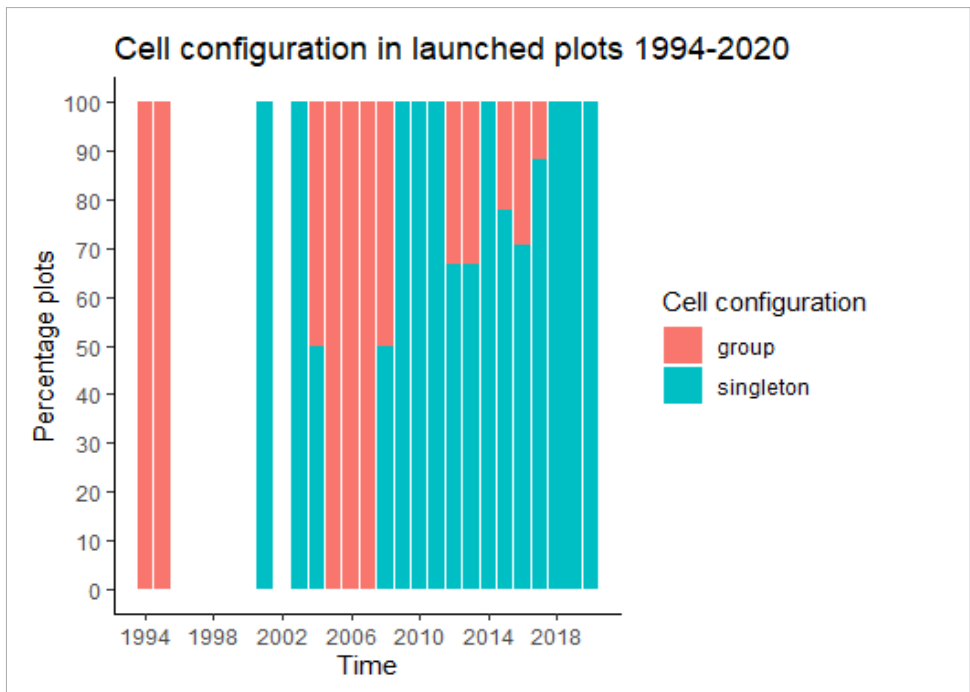
Low-tech, plots by individual attackers can be very lethal such as the truck attack in Nice in 2016 (which killed 87). In most instances, however, they kill fewer than complex, group-based attacks, and trigger different state responses. The large-scale ones are the ones that makes states go to war, whereas the smaller attacks usually trigger more limited responses.

Tactics

Data from JPED show that even though single actors dominate the threat situation, this is not the whole picture. Among the foiled plots there are multiple plans by groups to launch large-scale attacks that receive limited media coverage compared to attacks. For example, in November 2019 a jihadi terrorist launched an attack with knives at a prisoners' rehabilitation event at the Fishmonger's Hall, near London Bridge. He killed two people before he was overpowered by bystanders. One of them, also a prisoner, attacked the terrorist with a decorative narwhal tusk from Fishmonger's hall. The case received worldwide attention because the terrorist had just been released from prison after serving time for involvement in an al-Qaida linked attack plot in the UK, in 2012.³¹⁸ Although the attack had a tragic lethal outcome, it signified a very different threat pattern than the attacks on Bataclan and other locations in Paris in 2015.

At the same time, since the collapse of IS, there have been quite a few plots to launch big, group-based attacks by jihadis in Europe, that were foiled by vigilant counterterrorism. One example is an alleged Dutch terror cell, which was foiled in late September 2018. According to different sources this seven-member cell planned a so-called "Mumbai-style" attack (after the attacks in India in 2008) with guns and explosives at a public event, while setting off a car-bomb at another location. The cell had international connections to IS networks in the Middle East, as well an alleged terror cell in Denmark.³¹⁹ JPED codes plots for "cell configuration," to measure the ratio of group plots versus plots by single actors.

The data provide an interesting picture of the historical pattern. During the GIA-wave in the 1990s the terrorists were consistently operating in groups. Towards the end of the 2000s



al-Qaida-wave the share of plots involving single actors increased as the organization came under pressure and urged followers to act on their own to avenge cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. During the IS-phase (2010s) this trend has continued and intensified.³²⁰ However, by including foiled plots we notice that the militants have persisted pursuing group-based attacks, up until today. According to JPED data as much as 79 percent group plots are foiled, whereas single actor plots are foiled at a rate of only 31 percent.

The logic explanation is that group-based plots involve more communication and coordination than single actor plots. The data suggest that, were it not for vigilant counterterrorism, Europe would have seen more large-scale attacks. They also suggest that there is urgent need for better protection against single actors.

Weapons

In addition to foiling group-based "Mumbai-style", plots, European security services have foiled at least two plots to employ the deadly poison ricin, one in Germany and one in France.³²¹ These plots received massive media attention, because CBRN incidents always generate fear and headlines, but they do not appear in attack databases such as GTD. Data from JPED illustrates that in general, high-tech plots (bombs, CBRN) are foiled at a much higher rate than low-tech ones (knives, vehicles).

Percentage foiled per weapon (JPED, 2020)

Weapon	Total	Foiled	Percentage
CBRN	9	8	90
Explosive	122	88	70
Firearms	53	29	70
Vehicle	20	8	40
Melee	61	15	25

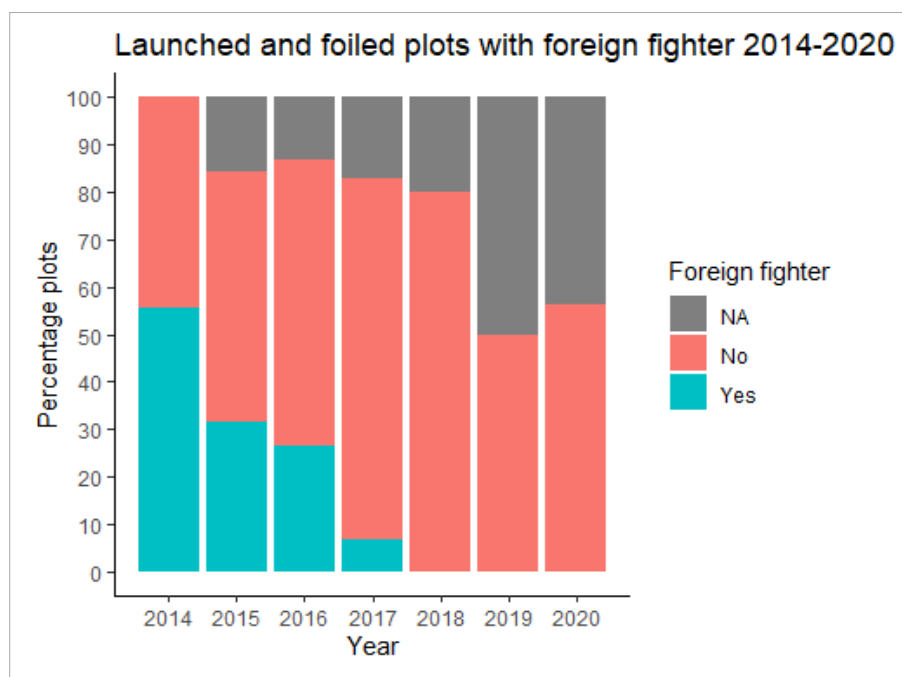
On the one hand the data suggest that European counterterrorism regimes have been relatively effective in foiling plots that require procuring firearms and chemicals. On the other hand, they indicate that open societies are vulnerable to plots that can be implemented with items not considered weapons, such as a vehicle.

Foreign fighters

Analyses of foiled plots can also add to our understanding of the threat posed by foreign fighters. JPED codes for whether or not plots involve at least one foreign fighter (defined as people who join jihadi groups in another country than they live in). Preliminary data indicate

that plots involving at least one foreign fighter have a higher chance of being foiled than plots without foreign fighters. Looking at all plots from 1994 until today, in which sources say at least one foreign fighter took part, 73 percent have been foiled. For plots where available sources say no foreign fighter participated the percentage is at 43 percent. The logic explanation is that foreign fightings draw attention from security services, and that there has been an increasing awareness over time that foreign fighters play a significant role in attack activity. Foreign fighters have been involved in massive attacks, such as those in France in November 2015, and in recent years, there are multiple examples that foreign fighters have recruited contacts back home for attacks, using communication apps.³²²

JPED also allows for examining year-by-year involvement of foreign fighters in plots, which can provide one metric for how the countermeasures work. In line with what we see regarding cell configuration and weapons, JPED shows a significant difference in foreign fighter involvement, when we compare launched plots and total plots. If we look at the IS wave from 2014 onward, there is at least one foreign fighter in only 5 percent of launched plots. If we include foiled plots, involvement increases to 16 percent. Importantly, these numbers only represent direct participation by foreign fighters in plots, and not in-direct forms of involvement, such as instructing attackers via communication apps.



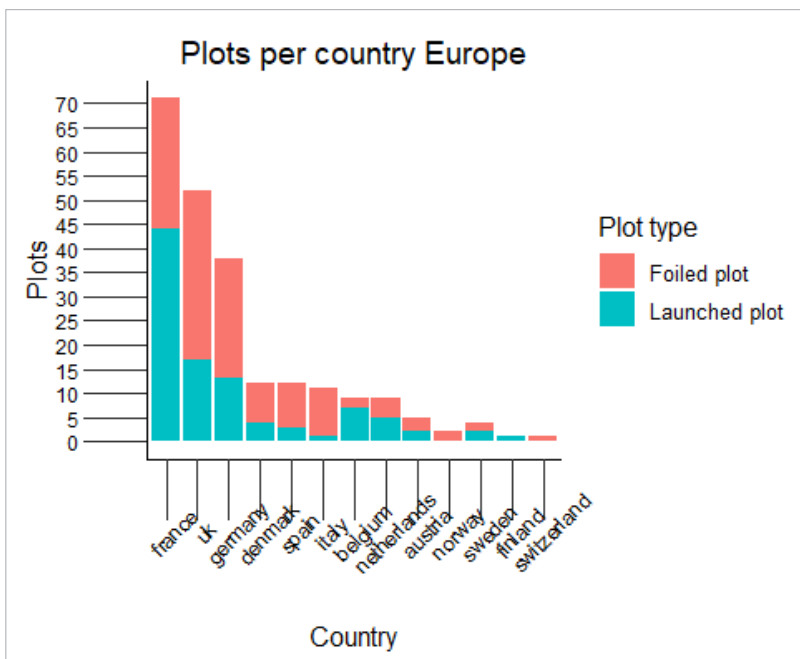
Foreign fighters in plots (JPED, 2020)

We notice how there was a significant foreign fighter involvement at the beginning of the IS-wave in Europe, but that the share of foreign fighter plots fell once European states adapted its laws and counterterrorism regimes, to prevent the threat from returnees. In addition to misrepresenting the scale and nature of the threat, ignoring foiled plots can also lead to problematic inferences about causal mechanisms.

The threat's causes

A research note by Hegghammer and Ketchley compares datasets that only include attacks with datasets that also include foiled plots. According to their findings, counts of attacks and foiled plots correlate imperfectly.³²³ It shows that one gets statistically different results when measuring the effect of common variables such as economic factors, demographics, state characteristics, political grievances, and events on the number of attacks only, versus when foiled plots are included. This potentially challenges the results of many statistical studies on terrorism.

Data from JPED illustrates how counting just the attacks can blur the vision when formulating hypotheses about what causes jihadi threats to Europe. For example, if we only consider attacks, France towers as the main target for jihadism in Europe. This has led many to highlight explanations specific to France: in particular its integration policy, aiming to assimilate Muslim immigrants.



Distribution of jihadi plots in Europe (JPED, 2020)

When foiled plots are included, the difference between France and some other countries becomes less pronounced. We notice that the UK, for example, experiences a very high frequency of plots, the difference being that the Brits foil more plots than the French. This is highly relevant to the formulation of hypotheses regarding the threat's causes. The UK has a very different approach to integration than France, relying on multiculturalism rather than assimilation. That two countries with opposite integration policies face a relatively similar threat is a strong indicator that the main causes lie elsewhere.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of including foiled plots in terrorism research and offered some lessons learned from working with the Jihadi Plots in Europe Dataset (JPED). Analyses that only use the launched attacks as a metric risk misrepresenting the scale and nature of terrorism, and could also produce faulty conclusions regarding what causes terrorism. As discussed in the paper, a threat may seem smaller than it actually is, because the current counterterrorism regime foils the most lethal plots. Yet, it is the launched attacks that dominate research and public debate. Because research and public debate influence policy decisions, we may end up with counterterrorism designs that are not suited to meet tomorrow's threat.

Research on foiled plots remains sparse but is increasing. There are efforts to build new datasets, such as JPED, Crenshaw et al, RTV and POICN. Building such datasets is challenging and labor-intensive because sources on foiled plots are rarer than for attacks and can be manipulated, or biased. At the same time, the value added of including foiled plots makes the effort to exploit this data resource imperative. Ideally, we should have a global database that includes foiled plots. This may not be feasible, however, as plot research requires trustworthy sources from counterterrorism investigations. In open democracies such sources are attainable. In authoritarian and failed states, however, it is more difficult to ascertain that sources are reliable. In the absence of a global plot database, researchers should seek to build local, or regional datasets like the ones discussed in this paper, for the main types of extremism.

SOURCES:

- 294 The author thanks Thomas Hegghammer for key contributions to the paper, and, Anne Stenersen, Vidar B. Skretting and Henrik Gråtrud for contributions to developing and maintaining the Jihadi Plots in Europe Dataset (JPED)
- 295 (LaFree and Dugan 2007)
- 296 (Crenshaw and LaFree 2017)
- 297 See for example (Nesser 2008)
- 298 (Lia and Kjøk 2001)
- 299 For a closer discussion of how to define a foiled plot, consult (Hegghammer and Ketchley 2020)
- 300 (“Shoe-Bomber Supergrass Testifies in US” 2012)
- 301 There is no unified definition of terrorism, but there is progress toward an academic consensus (Schmid 2012)
- 302 (“Prince Harry Death Plot Man Was Kicked Out of British Army” 2014)
- 303 See for example (FBI 1988), or a recent report by the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) on how terror plots are foiled in Europe (PST 2020)
- 304 (Europol 2019)
- 305 (Rapoport 1971)
- 306 (Jenkins et al. 1983)
- 307 See e.g. (Nesser 2004) and (Sageman 2004)
- 308 (Nesser and Stenersen 2014), (“A Mixed Method Examination of Law Enforcement Investigatory Strategies Used in Jihadi and Far-Right Foiled Terrorist Plots Before and After 9/11” 2019), (Simcox 2018)
- 309 (Binder and Ackerman 2019)
- 310 (Ravndal 2016)
- 311 (Crenshaw, Wilson, and Dahl 2017)
- 312 (“A Day After the Fatal Church Attack in Nice, Here’s What We Know so Far” 2020)
- 313 (Obeidallah 2015), (“Terrorism in Europe Classified” 2019), (“EU Sees Terror Attacks Record in 2015” 2016)
- 314 (Dodd and Grierson 2019)
- 315 (Europol 2019)
- 316 (Sciolino and Grey 2006)
- 317 (Silva 2017)
- 318 (“UK to Introduce Tougher Jail Terms for Convicted Terrorists After London Bridge Attack” 2020)
- 319 (Daragahi 2018)
- 320 (Nesser, Stenersen, and Oftedal 2016)
- 321 (Samuel 2018), (“Cologne Ricin Plot Bigger Than Initially Suspected” 2018)
- 322 see e.g. (Hamid 2018)
- 323 (Hegghammer and Ketchley 2020)

**HYBRID LOANS AND TACTICS OF JIHADISM. WILL
HYBRIDITY REMAIN THE NARRATIVE OF CONVERGENT,
POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE?³²⁴**

By Dirk Freudenberg

HYBRID LOANS AND TACTICS OF JIHADISM. WILL HYBRIDITY REMAIN THE NARRATIVE OF CONVERGENT, POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE?

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Preliminary remarks

This article's topic requires the author to draw some lines in order to be able to determine the position of approaching the subject of the paper, an endeavor which causes certain difficulties. From a legal and political science-related perspective, the determination of the position is decisive since the great diversity of possible viewpoints brings with it a great diversity of research results, too.

The following explanations consider jihadism primarily an ideology in the sense of a political world view which is governed by religious conditions and strongly influenced and steered by both power and interests. This is why ideological movements disconnect from the rest of the world and exist and operate on their own. The same is true for Islamist and fundamentalist movements.³²⁵ This jihadism – a phenomenon of Islamist movements – has put itself on the global stage militarily in the form of irregular wars³²⁶. The most important differentiating characteristic is the factor "violence", even though the word "military" does not only suggest the use of violence in a selective, single way but describes violence as a comprehensively organized, strategic instrument. Furthermore, transnationally operative jihadists represent a new completely new form of Islamism³²⁷. Thanks to their ability to project violence globally, consequently a new quality of projection of irregular power has developed. Looking at the bigger picture we can conclude that there is a dangerous, political moment that lies in the connection of religious views and social motives, because thanks to this connection religious views become the carriers of political ideologies. The effects such ideologies can have on individuals and societies must not be undervalued. Militant religions have always been the most successful politically.³²⁸

Therefore, not the "woolly thoughts" of the "mentally insanities" are determinative factors for any action but rational considerations, which follow strategic-political goals in accordance with their world views in their operative concepts and tactical implementations, and these goals and views also produce their (own) rationale. Regarding the question of "hybridity" it is necessary to elaborate what the author actually means when using this term in his following explanations, in particular in relation to the approach used for this article. The linguistic term "hybridity" seems difficult to define, also because different authors try to explain the phenomenon from different perspectives or deal with it from unequal points of view. In general, it can be noted that the understanding of what hybrid phenomena actually are and why they differ from other phenomena is very inconsistent. First of all, we can question whether this is merely about "old wine in new bottles"³²⁹ or we can argue alongside Melanie Alamir who doubts whether the concepts behind the term "hybrid" are too generic and therefore, according to her approach, without any visible analytic value in a series of less blurry terms, such as "asymmetric warfare" or "irregular warfare".³³⁰ The diffuse occurrence of hybrid threats as well as the fact that their causes and actors are too difficult

and sometimes too late to identify accordingly further demonstrates the importance of this in particular.³³¹

Therefore, this article aims at taking a closer look at what are the liabilities, effects and maybe even the consequences that result for the area of "civil defense", a field which has been rather neglected in literature but is a main part of a comprehensive defense system, next to military defense. From this kind of perspective we can argue and also justify the use of the word "hybrid" in an innovative sense. It is this concept we want to determine from different points of view of security policy-related factors and frameworks, also considering the possible innovative effects.

Urbanity as security policy condition

The global population is growing constantly and will reach 10 billion by the middle of the 21st century.³³² The number of people living in large cities will also grow considerably, leading to a significant enlargement of cities and the assumption that by 2050, about two thirds of the world's population will be living in urban areas, with 10 million people living in each of the 43 so-called megacities.³³³ The larger German cities are also considerably rising regarding population figures.³³⁴ This led to a concentration of people living in urban centers and, subsequently, a growing dependence of this population share on public service, in particular on so-called "critical infrastructures". From a security policy view this development creates huge challenges for civil defense, especially with view to hybrid threats and hybrid warfare.³³⁵

Term and focus on hybrid warfare

The conception of what hybrid threats really are and how they differentiate from other phenomena is inconsistent throughout the respective literature. In his academic work, Johann Schmid focuses on the perspectives according to which hybrid threats target different gravity fields and also mentions those perspectives which do not necessarily aim at military war decisions.³³⁶ Based on the arguments put forward here, hybrid warfare can be distinguished by the fact that its weapons and targets both mainly concern and aim at the civilian sector. This means that by the use of civilian effectors and operating from a civilian sphere, certain effects in civilian space are the target of action. As a result, a "void battlefield" could develop for conventional, military forces and capacities in a classic sense. This could simply happen by classic military forces being slowly used concomitantly at best in order to obscure, support or secure hybrid action, instead of an equivalent counterpart taking over the stage. The focus of vulnerabilities and of the effectors targeting them is therefore definitely put on the civilian sector. However, the significance of the dependencies of civilian critical infrastructures and their respective dependencies for the population and for Germany as an important business location has risen considerably throughout the past decades, and it has even led to the protection of critical infrastructures becoming a national security factor. From this, the demand of changing

the approach towards civil defense and of considering it an additional competence – a rather tedious appendix of a primarily military defense system – opposite classic warfare has started to become louder.

Right now it is becoming more and more important considering civil defense an equivalent pillar of a comprehensive defense system because in order to continue to maintain an entire social system, raising awareness for the significance of civil defense and strengthening its capacities are required.³³⁷ Moreover, the Conception Civil Defense (*Konzeption Zivile Verteidigung, KZV*) already mentions the parallels between crises in times of peace and in times of defense.³³⁸ In this respect the packages of measures – as developed from parts of the Conception Civil Defense – could possibly be the fundamental basis of a future, comprehensive crisis management concept.

Modern weapons of hybrid warfare

Threats from and within cyber space belong to the negative downsides of modern information technology (IT), be it in form of criminal actions or cyber wars.³³⁹ With the support of IT tools, they are accurate, politically motivated strikes that have strong effects on the lives and health of an entire population, and/or the economic or political capacity to act of states (not necessarily including the use of armed forces).³⁴⁰ This means that hybrid warfare is about the paralyzation, penetration or even the "twisting" of electronically operated systems of an enemy – the strategically and existentially important information technology – and has disastrous consequences for a state apparatus, its autonomy and for society as a whole.³⁴¹ From any point the targets within the virtual space of cyber war can be reached and deactivated within seconds, be it out of motion, at sea or land level, out of the air and even from outer space^{342 343}. This scenario of information warfare leads to space-related limits of war becoming less seizable and lets it turn into a placeless phenomenon³⁴⁴. War becomes invisible within the spacial nowhere, and without any differentiation between civilian and military spheres.³⁴⁵

The kinetic inferiority of an actor can be offset by a way of asymmetric warfare in order to cause damage electronically at the enemy's home front, especially for critical infrastructures, in the event of war³⁴⁶. Moreover, attacks can be committed from a distance via cyber space which means that the immediate presence of a perpetrator is no longer bound to the location of an attack.³⁴⁷ Any attack is primarily about destroying or eliminating the information necessary for maintaining a military or civilian system, without actually targeting the material destruction of these goods.³⁴⁸ States can be immobilized in some cases and put back into their services right after they surrender,³⁴⁹ which shows that there are no considerable costs for reconstruction. Concurrently, the time of state re-activation is reduced, which makes the consequences for the entire social system and the population in general manageable considering the overall timeline.³⁵⁰ In academia the term "digital first strike"³⁵¹ repeatedly comes up, since the dimension of cyber war makes the chances of reaching very quickly and completely supremacy through the act of a digital decapitation strike possible. This means a "victory" can happen

without using conventional powers. The classic military principle of achieving and making use of the advantage of surprise receives in this new form of warfare a new chance, contrary to the growing comprehensive information according to conventional concepts.³⁵²

Effects on urban spaces

It is possible to assume that the failure of critical infrastructures is enormous for large cities and their inhabitants – as malfunctions during times of peace already prove – and in a sense their consequences for a digital decapitation strike can be anticipated. These are not limited locations such as single city parts, whole cities or regions, but extensive failures that can even affect the entire national territory of a state. In the shortest possible time public services will collapse and not be available or accessible anymore to the people. If the urban population retreats to near rural areas that are less affected, the (rudimentary) infrastructures and resources still functioning there could also experience a collapse within a short period of time, and disrupt eventually.³⁵³

Consequences

The hybrid possibilities within cyber space clearly show that a strict separation between internal and external security is constantly challenged³⁵⁴, gradually dissolves and proves that only military risks are actually a thing of the past.³⁵⁵ These conclusions have effects on the use of armed forces or the military capacities of interior state affairs.³⁵⁶ Therefore it is important to create solutions, protection and defensive measures in an appropriate variety.³⁵⁷ This also includes the phases of threat analysis and the planning of how to deal with the challenges accordingly. Leaving the assessment of (military) threats mainly to the armed forces (as foreseen in the Concept of Civil Defense³⁵⁸), has become almost completely inconsistent seen from the perspectives of hybrid threats and the author's previous remarks.³⁵⁹

In total, territorial defense, homeland security and civilian defense and protection are affected by hybrid threats. Under these conditions, established ways (and tools) of reaction are in danger of not serving adequately and of taking full effects too late in order to bring about decisions, due to their traditional forms and original functions.³⁶⁰ From this we can conclude that we should interconnect the capacities of a social, comprehensive prevention with national security-responsible actors according to their use.³⁶¹

The 2016 White Book establishes that hybrid threats demand hybrid analyses and defense preparedness, which in turn has consequences for both the character and understanding of state and alliance defense in the 21st century.³⁶² The abstract danger situation (meaning the mental work and materialization of the threat) already shows that there are demands for an efficient, civilian-military comprehensive defense system.³⁶³ This demand also results from reversing the original explanation for the inferior supporting role civilian protection is

experiencing, according to which civilian defense allots the decisive supportive role for military defense in times of crises and wars, which guarantees primarily the upholding of the defense capacity and operational freedom of the armed forces.³⁶⁴ This one-sided priority, however, is no longer suitable considering the conditions of hybrid threats today,³⁶⁵ on the contrary: the modern approach towards hybrid warfare as postulated by Russian Chief of General Staff of the Russian armed forces, Gerasimov, is based exactly on the idea of changing the fundamental rules of war by increasing the role of non-military means to achieve certain political and strategic goals, and by those means exceeding in many ways the effectiveness of weapons.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, orienting hybrid threats and hybrid wars towards non-military gravity centers does not necessarily require a military war of conflict decision.³⁶⁷ The demand of adjusting the importance of civilian defense is therefore based on the fact that attacks with hybrid capacities can likely underrun a state's own military capabilities, making any defense and reaction only possible by using civilian means.³⁶⁸ This concept can be explained also in a constitutional sense: civilian defense is a necessary factor which includes an effective comprehensive defense according to its constitutional mandate.³⁶⁹ As a result, civilian defense and protection must be analyzed in a new way according to their comprehensive defense framework and for a wider population protection, and eventually both must be adapted and equipped with new capacities and means of military defense.³⁷⁰

Constant factors of warfare

In spite of all the changes and developments, the fundamental nature of war remains the same. War is politically motivated and does not follow an independent logic. The overall aim of war is reaching a state where specific interests can be ensured in the long run, and to make the enemy fulfil a certain will by using organized violence (according to the teachings of Clausewitz³⁷¹).³⁷² Following the Clausewitzian analysis, the use of strategic instruments therefore serves exclusively the modification of the will of the political Other, because peace and conflict and war are all political phenomena.³⁷³ Furthermore, he explains that "...the political mean as the original motif for war will become the measure for both the goal which must be achieved through an act of war as well as for the necessary efforts."³⁷⁴

In correspondence with this assessment, Ihno Krumpelt explains that the measure of violence used in war will follow the level of conflicting interests on both sides and the level of the goal to be achieved.³⁷⁵ Clausewitz puts this goal in connection with the political and real price that is to pay for actually achieving it. This price also describes the extent and at the same time limits the engagement of action by connecting the value with the risk. The smaller the sacrifice we demand from our enemy, the lesser will be the enemy's efforts to withhold it from us. Furthermore, the smaller our political aim the lesser the importance we place on it, and the more likely we will let it go. Our efforts, consequently, will be the lesser too.³⁷⁶ Dangers and risks are connected with their goal, and the decisions taken according to the respective assessment of costs and benefits. This has remained valid until today. In order to impose their own will on

an enemy, one must put this enemy in a position which is more harmful than the sacrifice that is demanded.³⁷⁷

Importance of resilience

It is society's own will – the will and the capacity of both society and its security structure – that must be strengthened in order to successfully counter hybrid threats.³⁷⁸ One academic approach is to identify one's own level of vulnerability and to minimize it to increase society's resilience.³⁷⁹ For providing a nationwide security precaution, strengthening resilience is particularly important and understood as an individual's capacity to successfully deal with difficult situations in this regard^{380 381}. However, this raises the question of how high the level of resilience and society's will to actually endure any kind of threat and its consequences is, and whether they eventually give in if they do not actively oppose the threat they are experiencing.³⁸²

The term "resilience" first describes a system's capacity of dealing with any kind of disturbance in a useful, sensible way. However, "resilience" is not only about resistance or sturdiness, but also about adaptability, buoyancy and agility, which also includes going out of a crisis stronger.³⁸³ All this means that it is about a system's capacity to adapt to new conditions, meaning this very system replicates through change and inherits this capability of establishing itself after any kind of disturbance has happened during its daily routine, even though it may be established in a completely new form.³⁸⁴ Hence, resilient systems are capable of returning to their original state or to even reach an improved, transformed state after a disturbance.³⁸⁵ Finally, "resilience" also describes the capability of surviving in the eye of alien powers.³⁸⁶ Still this requires that the systems remain unharmed in their very core, which is a prerequisite for being able to repair their previous condition within an appropriate amount of time, or for a completely destroyed system to become so redundant that its functions can be transferred to other units. Therefore, all those critical infrastructures whose breakdown cannot be tolerated in any way must be strengthened and protected to secure their resilience and survival.³⁸⁷

However, any measures directed only towards the inner affairs of a system cannot suffice for the general strengthening of resilience.³⁸⁸ For this reason, increasing the complexity for enemies until reaching an overall overload and at the same time propagating resilience must become the central measure against hybrid threats.³⁸⁹ The key to strategic success lies in confronting the enemy with multiple dilemmas³⁹⁰, meaning that the enemy party must reach a status of complete overload and disorientation through a complexity and great number of events overwhelming them. In this situation of confusion, the enemy will no longer be capable of reacting accordingly and of sticking to priorities, and at the same time the system's own cohesion and upkeep of certain procedures must remain.³⁹¹ In a tactical sense this method corresponds to so-called *swarming*, or at least it contains some basic elements of this approach. This allows to consider the enormous danger and threat for the enemy, since this approach also means there is very likely only little time to react and counter threats reliably.

Here, some thoughts on preventive and preemptive measures for actively getting involved can open up new possibilities. However, at the end of all considerations a combination of capacities – in the sense of a comprehensive general approach of an interconnected security structure – and of the general defense will be expedient the most, since on the one hand such approach will increase social cohesion and beware of failure through resilience, and on the other it involves initiatives that provide active features that can be used effectively to counter hybrid threats. In any case it is necessary for the systems not to be completely destroyed or not too have been much affected in their core existence, so that restoration and restarting are possible.³⁹²

Conclusion

At the end of all considerations, warfare is nothing less than the arrangement of violence and leadership within a fight, in all its individual and different facets. Within armed conflicts, the involved actors can use a whole range of conventional and irregular resources.³⁹³ This also accounts for all forms of irregular powers which kind of increase from below their resources and ways.³⁹⁴ Therefore, these rationales apply to the phenomenon of jihadism as narrative of convergent, politically motivated violence.

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**KEY TRENDS IN TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM.
A SOFTWARE-BASED KEY FACTOR FORESIGHT ANALYSIS**
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1. Methodology and Scope

The instant research design is based on an algorithm-processed trend- and key factor analysis (Foresight Strategy Cockpit- FSC) of transnational terrorism.

At the very beginning of the analytical process, current trends related with (predominantly Islamist) terrorism, partially rooted in aggregated expert analyses³⁹⁵ were identified that are expected to shape the phenomenon for around five years to come. Based on these trends, the overall influencing "key factors" are determined, thoroughly described and operationalized according to criteria like probability, impact and stability of the trend. These are foresight relevant key drivers that will very likely constitute a period of 5-10 years in the surrounding field ("*Umfeldanalyse*") of transnational terrorism and the phenomenon itself.

The methodological core process of this study is a cross-impact-analysis that examines the interdependence of the identified key-factors and outlines the extent they influence and "drive" each other. Also, on the passive side, i.e. the degree to which they are affected and pushed. On a scale ranging from 1 (weak), 2 (moderate) to 3 (strong) the impact between the factors is estimated and weighted against each other. It goes without mentioning that such kind of analysis rather attempts to paint the bigger picture, sort of a "Bayeux Tapestry" of transnational terrorism, as strategic foresight is about to sketch possible scenarios with a certain level of adaption. However, this methodology does not rule out a phenomenal description of key factors that encompasses etiology, outreach and interdependence alike. Given the timeliness of the pandemic, any such analysis has to start with the topic that keeps everything going at the moment: COVID-19.

2. COVID-19 and Terrorism

2.1 Situation Awareness

Without doubt, COVID-19 can be regarded as a key driver for the development of transnational terrorism. The ongoing global health crisis has a tremendous impact on security and terrorism in particular. By advancing a pandemic-related social division originating in the erosion of socioeconomic cohesion, it will most likely have an accelerating effect on societal radicalization tendencies and consequently on politically motivated violence.³⁹⁶ Not surprisingly, COVID-19 leverages almost any other key driver identified in the research matrix. According to the key factor cross-impact analysis, it indicates the highest active sum (3,0) when measuring the degree of influencing other key factors among all examined items, whereas on the passive side, it is only affected partially by other key factors with an average degree of 1,6 on the scale.

In the slipstream of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, after a perceived détente phase, the Salafi-jihadi terrorist threat is reemerging in and around Europe. Islamist terrorism has never really disappeared from the scene, rather it remained under the clandestine surface as statistics on foiled plots, related arrests but also very recent attacks suggest. For Gilles de Kerchove, the EU's counter-terrorism coordinator the „*fact that the number of [Isis]-inspired attacks has declined in the EU does not mean that the threat has disappeared. It primarily means that we have got better at detecting and breaking up terrorist plots.*”³⁹⁷

While most states around the world are still directly concerned with containing the virus and attempting to limit its lasting damage, jihadist terrorist organizations such as ISIS, which is in the aftermath of the collapse of the so-called “caliphate” considered to be fundamentally weakened, are trying to capitalize on the misery.³⁹⁸

In recent ISIS propaganda, the novel coronavirus is called the “crusaders' biggest nightmare” and “Allah's scourge for the infidels”.³⁹⁹ At the same time, practical hygiene recommendations for Islamist adherents to protect themselves from the viral pathogen are provided there, as a concession to the high infection rate of the virus and a cautious admission that COVID-19 might not stop at extremists. In addition, “Al-Naba” proclaimed a clear message to its fellow jihadist comrades-in-arms: The moment would be right to attack an enemy weakened by the effects of the pandemic.⁴⁰⁰ The spread of the coronavirus should hence be seen as an „*opportunity to capitalize on now and launch attacks on the west, in the west for the following reasons: (i) the peoples of the world and especially the “crusaders” (the west) allocate massive resources to fight the spread of the pandemic. Therefore, their security forces are tied to public safety and civilian assistance duties; (ii) the fear of an economic hardship that will hurt the poor as a result of the markets decline; (iii) the possibility of chaos and anarchy that will be manifested in an increase of attacks against people and property.*”⁴⁰¹ According to this prescription, Islamists were supposed to carry out terrorist attacks and strike in metropolises such as Paris, London or Brussels⁴⁰², especially since the local security authorities, as well as the respective health care systems there, have often reached the limits of both, their capacity and performance.

In the wake of COVID-19-related restrictions such as lockdowns or other measures to ban people from crowding the streets, one could confidently assume that sympathizers of ISIS or respective jihadi groups would lose simple targets due to the lack of large crowds and events. Likewise, the fact that the borders between the nation states are largely sealed off and at least rigidly controlled for reasons of disease containment, contributes to the assessment that a further influx of former foreign terrorist fighters into the Schengen area seems to be transiently prevented, at least as a collateral effect of the (partial) border closures. Neither assumption has proven wrong, but there are three essential factors that must be taken into account that seemingly correspond with the logic of ISIS propagandists:

Shock and Awe Strategy

Firstly, terrorism strategically aims at provocation and attrition maintained by a general “shock and awe” effect, which is why terrorist attacks may have an even stronger psychological impact on the population during the pandemic. Especially now that the first phase of what has been called the “new normality” (i.e. learning to live with the virus) was developing only gently like a delicate plant, the current second wave of the pandemic is already considered as a major setback. Even small-scale attacks carried out by individual perpetrators could under these circumstances unfold oversized fear effects and unleash disproportionate governmental reactions as desired by the terrorists. And yet, this is exactly what happened very recently in Paris, Dresden and Nice.⁴⁰³ All of them being lone actor attacks carried out using cut and thrust weapons, in the French cases the attackers did not even shy away from beheadings, a brutal form of execution associated with ISIS. Media reporting covering these terrorist incidents even overshadowed the extensive 24/7 crisis news regarding SARS-CoV2 all over Europe.

The November 2 attack in Vienna, a projected single actor “plus” scenario⁴⁰⁴ (inspired; logistic and planning support) with ties to the Islamist scene in Germany, Switzerland and very likely also the Balkans, even transcended this in terms of international attention and media coverage, as Vienna was long considered not being in the imminent focus of jihadist violence. Before these attacks in Europe, Salafi-jihadist attacks appeared to be in decline. According to latest EUROPOL reportings in 2019 there were 21 Islamist attacks in Europe down from 24 in 2018 and 33 in 2017.⁴⁰⁵ Drawing on Petter Nesser’s research published in this volume, it may be assumed that up to 56% of jihadi terrorist plots are usually successfully thwarted.⁴⁰⁶ Obviously, the recent republishing of the Mohammed cartoons in the French Charlie Hebdo satire magazine reignited the terrorist networks’ ambitions and probably fueled the intent to start a campaign.

Pandemic-Driven Shift of Security Focus

Secondly, it is perceivable that the immediate focus of European security authorities at the moment may entirely be dedicated to fighting terrorism and that any capacities to combat the virus and its consequences are still being maintained as a governmental priority. In a recent CSIS commentary this popular trend to bundle security capacities and simultaneously split functionalities tackling COVID-19 is critically reflected concerning its several possible implications on the system: “As countries around the world continue to struggle to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, governments may rely upon their security forces to perform a range of functions. While there are important, short-term benefits to leveraging security forces for crisis response, this approach can reinforce dependencies on the security sector for civilian competencies, exacerbate conflict drivers, and strengthen authoritarian tendencies in governments”.⁴⁰⁷ This concentration on the pandemic could resort into a gradual weakening of interior security, as also fiscal necessities may further affect the security sector as a whole.

Awareness among Terrorists

Thirdly, it is no less relevant that any proper assessment of the current threat-potential of ISIS adherents already present in the Schengen area should take the multifaceted effects of COVID-19 on counter-terrorism into consideration. As mentioned above, when countering terrorism, European authorities – for good or worse – are currently forced to turn their attention to urgent public health and also economy matters. Terrorist organizations register that crisis-driven shift of security focus and consider this as a chance. Against the backdrop of an expected further consolidation of ISIS' terrorist network also in its safe haven in Iraq and Syria⁴⁰⁸, a declared intention to target Europe with terrorist attacks, and a capacity to implement it, especially by individually supported actors, should not be underestimated, given the constant pressure of COVID-19 on any field of security. The alert-level concerning Islamist-motivated attacks in Europe is furthermore high, what the recent plots seem to confirm.

2.2 Global Health

COVID-19 is exactly what forecast analysis usually calls a "disruption"⁴⁰⁹, an instantaneous phenomenon described as kind of "known unknown", something we knew that could happen, but we had practically no idea about the severity of its implications. The novel coronavirus is a game changer. It has triggered a serious global health crisis, that has both short and long-term effects on a multitude of societal aspects. It is a fundamental truth that nowhere around the globe healthcare systems were designed to deal with this challenge appropriately.⁴¹⁰ In its consequences unpredictable and as a large-scale health crisis, COVID-19 requires urgent mobilization of resources and significantly affects the whole population. Currently the health and social care systems' ability and efficiency to tackle the pandemic are in the focus. In a recent assessment Deloitte asserts that "leaders around the world are putting in place emergency measures to cope with this health crisis, adjusting in real-time and spending each day fixing errors they made yesterday."⁴¹¹

According to Deloitte's in-depth analysis, healthcare systems would probably face major, additional, "collateral" issues like the physical and mental exhaustion of the healthcare workforce, along with worn-out hospital infrastructure.⁴¹² Partly this has become true. In addition, local governmental containment measures, such as lockdowns and curfews, will severely affect society's mental and physical health enormously. Continuous progress concerning appropriate medical treatment and the "race" towards providing an efficient vaccine may give optimism. However, probably not before Summer 2021 any improvement regarding the overall health situation should be expected.⁴¹³

Strategically, it remains crucial to prepare for future pandemics that a very likely to hit us in the future. It goes without saying that COVID-19 increases governmental demands to update states' and international organizations' risk assessment based upon manmade threats that should be reflected in political guidelines such as national crisis response plans, and finally also

in national strategies. Preparedness and measures to ensure resilience are key assets for the struggle against the pandemic as well as terrorism.

2.3 Global Wealth

Without doubt, the current coronavirus poses significant challenges to national and international economic policies with protracted implications for all national budgets. The severity and extent of the global COVID-19 recession that is expected to fully effect in 2021 is unprecedented. According to Moody's Analytics' baseline economic forecast, real global GDP will decline by 4.5% this year due to COVID-19.⁴¹⁴ The baseline scenario for the US indicates that it will take until the middle of the decade for the economy to return to full employment.

*„COVID-19 has caused massive damage to the global economy. Quickly reopening economies will boost growth by unleashing pent-up demand but will also raise the specter of a re-intensification of COVID-19 and another economic downdraft, which could lead to a worldwide depression. We construct our economic forecasts to help market participants navigate this daunting uncertainty and make better decisions“.*⁴¹⁵

In the course of almost all past global downturns, there has been at least one significant part of the world that has managed the economic problems with appropriate dedication and turned out to be critical to the subsequent recovery as a catalyst for global growth. China played this role during and after the 2008 financial crisis, using its considerable monetary and fiscal resources to support its large economy and given its central role in the global supply chain, much of the rest of the world. No part of the world seems willing and able to play this leading role in this pandemic. While the pandemic has affected economies around the world, some may have weathered the storm better than others so far. The U.S. economy has suffered more than any other, at least in terms of the rise in unemployment. The unemployment rate in the US almost reached 15% in April 2020.⁴¹⁶ Canada is closest with an unemployment rate of 7,5%, Germany and Australia with an unemployment rate of almost 6% while Japan's unemployment is still somewhere about 3%.⁴¹⁷ The extraordinary job losses in the U.S. are considered to be rooted largely in the Trump administration's poor management of the pandemic.⁴¹⁸ It was late in recognizing the threat of the virus and eventually handed over most of the crisis management to local government authorities, resulting in an uncoordinated patchwork of responses that was slow to get underway. By contrast, in much of Asia and Europe, the management of the health crisis was much more aggressive at an early stage and the subsequent contact tracing of infections was more comprehensive until a certain point. Asian and European economies were severely affected by the pandemic, but not nearly as seriously as in North America.

Fareed Zakaria has recently concluded ten "lessons" for the time after COVID-19.⁴¹⁹ In his account he argues that the economy will change fundamentally, inequality will grow, that digitalization will further advance, and that crisis management will be determined largely by

(health?) experts. Moreover, he predicts that the world will become bipolar any time soon.⁴²⁰ This may be true, however for the time being, neither the U.S. nor China can emerge as sole leading players in the theater of geopolitics, as Europe and Russia with different possibilities and ambitions still competing in that arena.

3. Geopolitical Impact

3.1 Confrontative Multipolarity

The key factor "developments in global power", which comes down to a cross-referential analysis and assessment of geopolitical power projection and conversion capabilities of global players, is actively determining almost any other key factors (by a degree of 2,6). It is also influenced and driven by other key factors as the relatively high passive sum of 1,9 indicates. According to the FSC research matrix for the key factor "developments in global power", four possible scenarios were elaborated that should capture the actual global power constellations, and at the same time incorporate the range of likely developments in geopolitics for the next years to come:

1. A cooperative unipolar model,
2. a confrontational unipolar model,
3. a cooperative multipolar model,
4. and a confrontational multipolar model.
- (5.) A wild card scenario: anarchy in the global system (everything between an eroding, volatile and dysfunctional order structure and a global security vacuum)

Concerning the polarity, the distinction refers to unipolarity as a centripetal security architecture that is either constructed around a single actor with a wide-ranging power projection capability (be it an empire or a hegemony). Multipolarity in contrast is centered around at least two (bipolar) or more state actors that struggle for dominance at a geopolitical range. With respect to the cooperation vs. confrontation distinction, the aspect of belligerence, conflict-proneness and natural impetus to cooperate among great powers are weighted up against each other. The usual "wild card scenario" is rooted in the probability that none of the above scenarios may be sufficient to clearly describe ongoing power shifts and developments in global security.

A most recent assessment of global power and geopolitical impact regards confrontational multipolarity as the likeliest scenario for the next 10 years to come.⁴²¹ However, with recourse to the immediate geopolitical constellation it may be concluded that the long-lasting phase of U.S.-led unipolarity is probably over. However, there is an ongoing intense debate among international relations experts whether we currently find ourselves amidst a global security vacuum as elaborated in the "wild card scenario" or rather in a phase of ascending bipolarity (USA vs. China).

Undoubtedly, we face growing instability in the global power structure due to a fundamental change in U.S. foreign policy that culminated in the Trump administration's de-commitment policy in international relations according to the 45th president's "America-First-Strategy". Accordingly, a further disengagement of the USA as international crisis manager can be expected, also under the 46th president. In that context, the progressing abandonment of America's former role as "globo-cop" makes perfect sense. Any new U.S. government will continue the path of disengagement in order to reduce costs. The Europeans should not estimate or even hope that a Biden administration will, despite its announcement to foster international cooperation, ignore that strategic imperative of decoupling and focusing on self-interest. This recessive trend poses enormous new political challenges, especially for Europe, as European security must now be guaranteed autonomously. In general, an intensification of particularistic great power interests seems very likely.

There are several international security-trends that suggest more of the same in the international arena for the next 4-5 years:

1. A possible (further) disengagement of the USA within NATO could contribute to a sustainable shift in multipolar balance of power (probably in favor of Russia) and encourage a bilateral confrontation with China, thus automatically enforcing a Sino-Russian security cooperation, sometimes referred to as the "dragon-bear"-scenario. However, the containment of the "dragon" (China) could turn out to be a viable foreign policy strategy for President Biden.
3. An emerging, resurgent Anglo-Saxon transatlantic axis (USA/UK) in the wake of BREXIT could destabilize the Euro-Continental security architecture (NATO and EU).
4. The damaged transatlantic relations could be used as a pretext to promote the fragmentation of the EU to strengthen Washington's geopolitical position.
5. A continuation of the existing "Moneyball America" (Ian Bremmer) course (i.e. a primacy of the economy) could be set up under new auspices by the Biden administration.
6. The enhancement of U.S. unilateralist ambitions could tempt other global power actors (Russia, China) to give priority to their own immediate power interests. A lack of incentives for cooperation feeds a growing unilateralism among all key players. This in turn could lead to a further hardening of the geopolitical conflict lines, facilitate confrontation and perhaps lead to proxy wars in contested regions.
6. A further serious weakening of international structures (IOs) is possible, even under a Biden administration and could have a lasting negative impact on Europe, where the rule of law and international law take precedence in international relations.
7. Side actors and hotspots in the global power struggle, such as Ukraine, Turkey, Syria, Iran and Egypt – all on the European periphery – could become the cue-ball of these great power solo-efforts in geopolitics.

A growing geopolitical instability, which ties up and weakens Europe's power resources is associated with an increasing threat potential in global security policy. Strategic competition between and conflicting interests of the United States, Russia and China could continue to find their expression on playing fields at the periphery (e.g. throughout Africa, the Greater Middle East, possibly also in the Ukraine) in the form of proxy wars or low intensity conflicts.

3.2 Conflicts in the Euro-Strategic Environment

Having said that, there is growing consent among security policy analysts that the European Southern periphery (from the Levante, the Maghreb to Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond), polemically referred to as the "ring of fire", will be the major "battlefield", where great power interests will be materialized.⁴²² European crisis management there is crucially needed, as Europe is routinely in the focus of refugee and illegal migration from these regions, sometimes resulting in welfare state or security challenges. Conflicts and instability in this surrounding geographical environment have a significant impact on European security and terrorism in particular.

Referring to a differentiated typology of conflicts, the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) annually presents a "Conflict Barometer 2019", which distinguishes between interstate, intrastate, substate and trans-state conflicts.⁴²³ Interstate conflicts involve recognized state actors, intrastate conflicts both recognized states and non-state actors, whereas substate conflicts are carried out solely by non-state actors. Trans-state conflicts are a hybrid form- they involve state and non-state actors alike but are led under the patronage of at least two sovereign states.⁴²⁴

intensity Level	terminology	level of violence	intensity class
1	dispute	non-violent conflicts	low intensity
2	non-violent crisis		
3	violent crisis	violent conflicts	medium intensity
4	limited war		high intensity
5	war		

Source: HIIK Conflict Barometer 2019

With respect to the Middle East and Maghreb area it refers to four "limited wars": Iraq (opposition), Israel (Hamas et al.), Libya (inter-tribal rivalry) and Syria (inter-opposition rivalry).⁴²⁵ Conflicts defined as "wars" are identified in Afghanistan (Taliban et al.), Egypt (militant groups, Sinai peninsula), Libya (opposition), Syria / Iraq et al (ISIS), Syria (opposition), Syria (Turkey- SDF / Northern Syria), Turkey (PKK /TAK), Yemen/Saudi Arabia (al-Houthi).⁴²⁶ The same applies for Sub-Saharan Africa, where HIIK names eight conflicts as "limited wars" and five "wars".⁴²⁷ Most of these conflicts are geopolitically influenced, therefore more or less relevant for European security and consequently impact the Salafi-jihadist scene in Europe. Conflicts in the euro-strategic environment and their direct nexus with terrorist activity in Europe in particular, are according to FSC cross-impact-matrix an important driver for Islamist terrorism in Europe- with a relatively high active score of 2,7 (passive sum score at 2,2) ranking second after the key factor "COVID-19", which is currently the main driver in almost any sphere. Regularly, both, returning foreign terrorist fighters but also homegrown radicals draw upon regional conflicts and possible intervention by Western governments or even armed forces in their narratives as a justification for violent extremism.⁴²⁸

3.3. Conflict Terror-Nexus

Geo-strategically, the significant three main poles of the Islamic world are located in South East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. In terms of maritime security this includes highly strategic channels and straits, such as the Straits of Malacca, the Hormuz Strait in the midst of the Middle Eastern Islamic countries, and the Bab al-Mandeb and Suez Canal, as well as the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits, all waterways of international eminence. As Naji & Jawan (2013) emphasize in their study, the *"...strategic role of these marine routes in pursuing strategic goals, international transportation and transfer of goods, as well as crude oil has been so critical that all great powers during the modern world systems have stressed the need to control these points"*.⁴²⁹ This may be the underlying "deeper reason" (Thucydides) for conflicts in the Islamic world, rooted in the Western intention to "control streams and waves", what could be termed as "fluid security".⁴³⁰ In terms of their power projection and power conversion capability⁴³¹, the Islamic world remains bound to regional influence, some states emerge as hegemonic stakeholders.

With the exception of the "fortunate few" who have sufficient oil and gas resources for export, the majority of Muslim states has not played a significant role in recent geopolitics and given the declining role of fossil fuels in the world economy, most of them will hardly be able to catch up with other global regions due to the lack of industrial or technological infrastructure. Poverty is widespread, the number of young people who cannot find adequate employment is very high, as are corruption and social inequality.⁴³² OECD countries *"appear to experience Islamist violence as a result of large numbers of economically and socially segregated immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa"*.⁴³³

Good governance is largely absent, as is widespread state social legislation or a state social system in all but a few oil-rich states. All these factors make armed rebellion under the banner of Islamist jihad a tempting option.⁴³⁴

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan claims a leading role for the Islamic world and has repeatedly underlined this pretension, recently evident in the dispute with French President Macron over the republishing of Charlie Hebdo's Mohammed cartoons, the beheading of a Parisian teacher who showed these in classroom and the following debate in France whether a Western liberal society should allow this kind of satirical critique considered as blasphemy by Erdoğan. In the course of this discussion Erdoğan said: *"What else can one say about a head of state who treats millions of members from different faith groups this way: first of all, have a mental check"*.⁴³⁵

Very clearly he intended to stylize himself seeking *"...to fashion himself as the voice of the Muslim world and defender of the faith"*.⁴³⁶ In a series of tweets he added that *"by attacking Islam, clearly without having any understanding of it, President Macron has attacked & hurt the sentiments of millions of Muslims in Europe & across the world."*⁴³⁷ Critical observers consider this an attempt to shift the attention abroad and to distract from economic and pandemic problems at home.⁴³⁸

However, this does not change the fact that neither Turkey nor any other regional players in the Greater Middle East are competing for more than limited regional hegemony, while the four eminent geostrategic powers - the USA, China, Russia and (gradually also) the EU - each with different ambitions and capabilities, are struggling for global dominance. This geopolitical side actor role of most Islamic countries with some gradual regional exceptions (e.g. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and U.A.E.), more or less perceived as chess pieces in the Great Game, is cleverly interwoven into a "status quo-description"- narrative by Salafi-jihadi ideologists, where they call themselves *"heroic defenders of the Muslim world – the ummah (community of Muslims) – against Western colonization and the domination of Arab and other Muslim lands by pro-Western Muslim rulers who are portrayed as puppets of the West."*⁴³⁹ In the extremists' mindset, Muslims hence would not be sufficiently able to defend themselves, because they allegedly have deviated from the right path of 'true Islam'. ISIS falsely claims to stand for "pure and unadulterated Islam."⁴⁴⁰ Islamist propagandists provide a simple solution: A way out of the "misery" is according to their extremist ideology not offered by negotiations or reforms, but exclusively by "jihad on the path of God".⁴⁴¹⁴⁴² Bearing in mind that a partially reconsolidating ISIS could fill the security gap in fragile states such as in Libya, Yemen, Lebanon or Afghanistan given a consequent retreat of US military in the Middle East, the terrorist threat in the region but also abroad ("the distant enemy") is likely to increase.⁴⁴³ On a larger scale the Saudi-Iranian conflict plays into the reemergence of ISIS as it deliberately fosters an anti-Shiite narrative to recruit Arab Sunnites.⁴⁴⁴

To a certain extent, most of these factors and conflict relations suggest a direct connection between geopolitically relevant, regional conflicts (in particular in the Greater Middle East) and Islamist terrorism. Without doubt, there is noteworthy evidence for the claim that a manifest nexus between regional conflicts in the Islamic world and international Salafi-Jihadist terrorism exists, at least concerning propaganda and motivation.⁴⁴⁵ Regularly jihadist perpetrators recourse to seek revenge for invasion, occupation or war in their home countries. Already in the aftermath of the U.S. campaign in Iraq starting 2003, *"the invasion and the occupation of Iraq has stirred a great deal of anger among jihadists in Europe"*.⁴⁴⁶ Ever since 2003 *"...proxy wars in Syria by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and some Western states as well after 2011 have destabilised an already volatile region, producing millions of refugees, dozens of non-state armed groups of which most are religiously inspired."*⁴⁴⁷ The inherent intentionality of this Salafi-jihadist propaganda is to draw attention to political issues related to conflicts allegedly "brought" to Islam-dominated regions and to exploit them in the sense of a "clash of civilizations"-narrative using exclusive rhetoric to ignite a spark of terrorist violence in the West. As a counter-terrorist measure it turns out to be crucial for Europe to identify reliable strategic partners in the Muslim world to successfully cooperate and tackle the emerging threat *ab origine* and *in situ*. Beyond all doubt, the "conflict-terror nexus", in its phenomenology not new, can be regarded as an essential characteristic of the current hybrid transnational terrorism.

4. "Erosion of Cohesion"

4.1. Polarization

COVID-19 will contribute to intensifying centrifugal tendencies and the strengthening of the ideological, indeed extremist edges of society. Discourses will be shaped by fake news, conspiracy theories and a narrative that seeks to divide. A further polarization has to be expected. In general, the observation that extremist actors of all at any scale of the ideological spectrum discursively associate the novel coronavirus with their respective agendas is not surprising at all. Given these uncertain times, conspiracy theories are abused in a targeted manner to present complex issues in a simple and ideological way and to strengthen enemy images. Furthermore, as has been shown, not all narratives presented by extremist groups in this context can be classified as extremist: Statements on everyday issues that are *per se* unproblematic are often linked to ideological positions. This applies to the discursive way in which these groups deal with the pandemic as well as with other events. However, if one looks at, reads or shares a certain posts or content on social media platforms (such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter), due to algorithms, similar content from other profiles or further posts by the same user are suggested to the user. A spiral is set off- by consuming such content, it can easily happen that increasingly radical messages are conveyed and offered on social media to the consumers. It seems likely that this process is influenced and accelerated by the pandemic: Due to the widespread restriction of public life, a large part of social interaction

is shifting to the virtual world. As a result, at least some people spend more time on social media and are therefore more often confronted with narratives of all kinds. This would explain, for example, why some channels of right-wing extremist actors using the messenger service Telegram have gained hundreds of new subscribers within the last weeks. Some experts fear⁴⁴⁸ that self-isolation could also increase individual susceptibility to extremist narratives and accelerate the spread of extremist content and conspiracy theories, especially via the Internet.

Progressive polarization can symptomatically lead to what may be called the "erosion of cohesion", a wide-ranging societal divide that could spur extremism. Any kind of radicalization process has to be put into this context of the cohesive condition of a society. A stable center can withstand any kind of attack from the edges. From the perspective of ISIS, the pandemic is regarded as an „*opportunity to exploit the divisions and weaknesses among its enemies that have arisen because of its pandemic*".⁴⁴⁹ In the cross-impact matrix, the key factor "polarization" has a relatively strong passive sum (factor 2,6) and also an above the average value on the active side (2,4 on the scale). It is mainly driven by economic factors as well as by radicalization, which is reciprocally also a manifest driver for polarization.

4.1. Hybrid Radicalization

The still ongoing French debate whether recent forms of radicalization should be regarded as Islamization of radicalism (Olivier Roy) or radicalization of Islam (Gilles Kepel) has a wide-ranging leverage not only on Islamic studies but even more on terrorism research.⁴⁵⁰

"Radicalization of (within) Islam"

The renowned French sociologist Gilles Kepel believes that the religious aspect of terrorist attacks is underestimated. Even the Parisian banlieue riots of 2005 (in which more than 10,000 cars burned out) flared up when a tear gas bomb was thrown into the entrance of a mosque. Already in the same year, the Syrian Abu Mussab al Suri called for "global Islamic resistance" and explicitly named satirical magazines, that publish cartoons vituperating the prophet, such as "Charlie Hebdo" as targets. For Kepel, this was kind of a "*playbook for the atrocities of the Islamic State jihadists that have bedeviled France*".⁴⁵¹ This was the starting signal for the new wave of jihadist violence in Europe that reached its preliminary climax in the Parisian terrorist attacks of 2015. Kepel takes the "religious" dimension broadly and in France this also includes an "anti-colonial" motive: Mohamed Merah, a petty criminal from Toulouse, killed Jewish school children on March 19, exactly 50 years to the day after the ceasefire of the Algerian war, which in French Algerian nostalgia is still regarded as a day of defeat.⁴⁵²

"Islamization of radicalism"

Olivier Roy considers the religious component of the attacks only as a pretext and speaks unlike Gilles Kepel not of the "radicalization of Islam" but of the "Islamization of radicalism".

The young banlieue terrorists in France usually had no idea about the Qur'an or the Algerian war (1954 to 1962); the religious or even anti-colonial slogans they had heard were all about their indoctrination by Syrian recruiters. They smoked, used drugs and were often converts. Their nihilism, even their reflexes of violence, were in stark contrast to the Islamic tradition.

A political scientist, Oliver Roy, understands the radicalized, "home-grown" young people who follow ISIS or al-Qaeda in Europe and other regions outside the war zones in Afghanistan, Iraq or Chechnya as a violent "youth movement" that has much in common with other forms of violent protest or subversion and at best flirts with fundamentalist Islam. For him, the success of Islamists does not consist in creating a modern and efficient Islamist political organization, but in inventing a narrative that allows "disenfranchised" rebels to associate with a "cause" for no reason. This legitimizes the nihilistic rebellion with an ostensible sense. Islamist terrorism, also through its demonization, serves this purpose, but it could ultimately be another reason that promises attention, radicalism and meaning.

In fact, both Roy's and Kepel's approaches are justified in terms of methodology and explanatory value, and from the point of view of terrorism research, based on the findings of individual case analyses from recent years, there is quite strong evidence that each perspective is appropriate to retrace and classify individual radicalization processes of jihadist perpetrators. However, a combination of the two theses seems most useful to describe the current phenomenon. Right now, a hybrid mix of "Islamization of radicalism" and "radicalization of Islam" may best describe how young men turn into Islamist terrorists, for it is most likely a whole set of causes and conditions shapes the individual radicalization process. The case of the later perpetrator from Belgian Molenbeek, Salah Abdeslam, shows that Islamist radicalization is to a large extent the culmination of religious and sociological affects and mechanisms. The later logistical supporter of the Paris attacks of November 2015, Abdeslam, did not follow the strict directives of radical Islam, and as a petty criminal, he preferred to spend his time playing video games, smoking pot and going to gay clubs.⁴⁵³ Also he never grew a beard, he regularly drank alcohol and may not have ever prayed in a mosque. Unlike other attackers, Abdeslam may have never visited Syria. So far this plays into Roy's sociological argument. But if we suppose that his behavior could be regarded as an example of *taqiya*, i.e. a calculated pretense, in which the jihadi preparing for 'martyrdom' melts in with the enemy, adopting his Western way of life, to avoid detection, this would suggest that Kepel's religious approach may be right.

In order to prevent violent extremism, it is a crucial task to properly study radicalization alongside these propositions, as effective counter-strategies will depend on a solid assessment of root causes, catalysts and processes.

5. New Active Areas?

5.1. Emerging Technologies

Technology is a main driver in any field. According to the cross-matrix analysis it actively influences all other key factors by a degree of 2,7. On the passive side it is influenced only at a level of 1,8. Technological progress is rapidly changing every aspect of our lives, offering amazing opportunities to society, but it also dramatically increases our vulnerability and poses a veritable threat to security. Criminal actors and terrorists as a special type thereof, systematically misuse any kind of digital technologies to carry out a wide range of activities, from sabotage to organizing complex operations involving people from different countries. Modern terrorism is monitoring emerging technologies with growing interest. In the perception of terrorists, technology is regarded a powerful amplifier of the scale of the attacks. A field where this has gained significance is bioterrorism and the terrorist weaponization of CBRN in general.⁴⁵⁴ Jihadists are constantly assessing the strategic ramifications of using WMD. Whereas there is still a gap between motivation and capabilities, this may turn out a serious threat in the next decade and beyond.

Correspondingly, the planned tactical use of advanced digital technologies for terrorist purposes is an alarming trend. Scenarios based on the hacking of critical infrastructures (power plants, airports and the like) or the use of drones as terrorist weapons were widely discussed. The "Internet of things" (traffic control systems, building services engineering, etc.) also reveals security gaps that could be exploited by terrorists at large costs for states.⁴⁵⁵

International networks and extremist groups increasingly use the Internet and digital communication media in order to disseminate jihadist propaganda and influence politics. During the last years, a migration of extremist content from websites, chat rooms and forums towards social media has occurred, as the latter are more flexible in terms of (dis-)appearance and also allow terrorist groups to address a much larger public. These groups hence use social media platforms for a deliberate dispersion of fake information, effective propaganda, hate speech and direct appeals to violence, as well as the publication of professionally produced media, in order to communicate to a very broad, global public within seconds.

„Most domestic extremists use the internet and social media platforms to release propaganda, coordinate training, raise funds, recruit members, and communicate with others. They have used various combinations of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Gab, Reddit, (...) Telegram, Vkontakte, MeWe, Discord, Wire, Twitch, and other online communication platforms".⁴⁵⁶

In this light it seems evident that the Internet more and more plays an important role concerning "online radicalization" of lone attackers and respective groups. Additionally, indoctrination and recruitment occur more and more online. Social media contribute to the spreading and

amplifying terrorist attacks, increase the media interest with the negative effect that the world community spreads the terrorist messages and favors radicalization. Attacks become even more instantaneous and unpredictable, they can happen anywhere, at any moment and thanks to digital media they can reach a wide, sometimes global audience. Technology brings terror into our homes, and thanks to mobile devices it can be followed everywhere.

Our networked society is even more vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Cyberspace is an environment without borders, it is easy for terrorists to find resources on the web and Darknet, to carry out propaganda activities, to create communication channels and to gather information about potential targets.⁴⁵⁷ In recent cases Darknet channels have been successfully used to acquire guns or IEDs for later terrorist attacks.⁴⁵⁸

The conquering of cyber-space has given Salafi-jihadists access to domains that in the past were solely controlled by states.⁴⁵⁹ The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which includes industry giants such as Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter or YouTube, is cooperating intensely to remove any kind of terrorist information or propaganda. Particularly Google and Facebook are investing heavily in AI-based programs to prevent these extremist contents, but creators are often finding alternative ways to spread their messages. Laws have not been sufficient to keep extremists from using the Internet as a strategic asset.⁴⁶⁰

5.2. Cyber-caliphate

In the vast literature on terrorism and violent extremism the essential role of the Internet has been emphasized for several years.⁴⁶¹ Relevant studies point to the key role of the Internet in information gathering, communication, and the dissemination of/and agreement on extremist attitudes. Furthermore, the Internet allows radical and violent ideologies to be translated into political activism.⁴⁶² Social science has focused on describing the extremist and terrorist online landscape (actors, portals, networks, content). Case studies of extremist and terrorist biographies have also found clear evidence that Internet propaganda has played a significant role in individual radicalization processes.⁴⁶³ However, the question of which propaganda content is actually effective, and how exactly it works, remains quite unsolved.

With regard to online radicalization, researchers have collected case study-based information on terrorist perpetrators concerning the following aspects: Acquiring technical knowledge via the Internet (e.g., bomb-making), communication channels (chat rooms, e-mail, etc.) and downloading ideological texts.⁴⁶⁴ Individual radicalization processes, ideological development, and the corresponding training were actually only made possible by the Internet, as recent studies suggest.⁴⁶⁵

The web, with reference to Islamist propaganda functionally denominated as "cyber-caliphate", is the most important mobilization medium for groups, recruiters, and strategists of extreme

movements. Angela Gendron noted that the Internet strengthens the bond between charismatic leaders and their followers.⁴⁶⁶ These studies largely agree that extremist online content (e.g. texts, videos, music, etc.) contributes to ideologization and radicalization in general. To counter this dispersion of jihadist propaganda on social media it is crucial to implement automatic recognition based on algorithms and to cooperate with the platforms that involuntarily host any kind of extremist content.

5.3. Tactical Implication

In terms of radicalization, recruiting, plotting attacks and coordination, the Internet offers the entire "value chain" for terrorist groups and affiliates. Nearly everything from the early-stage idea until the execution of the attack, and even afterwards the exploitative dissemination of the attack as "*propaganda of the deed*" can be maintained on the net. Very interestingly, regarding the plotting and carrying out of attacks, despite a usual preference for personal real-life communication of some perpetrators, the Internet has become sort of a virtual playground for preparation. According to a UNODC report, "*...the use of the Internet in furtherance of the execution of acts of terrorism may, inter alia, offer logistical advantages, reduce the likelihood of detection or obscure the identity of responsible parties. Internet activity may also facilitate the acquisition of items necessary for the execution of the attack. Terrorists may purchase individual components or services required to perpetrate violent acts of terrorism by means of electronic commerce. Misappropriated credit cards or other forms of compromised electronic payment may be used to finance such purchases*".⁴⁶⁷ On a tactical level also the phenomenon of what Robert Evans called "*The Gamification of Terror*" more and more plays a significant role for the modus operandi of jihadi perpetrators.⁴⁶⁸ Using the combat style aesthetics of ego-shooter online games like "Counter-Strike" during their attacks, terrorists frequently stream their killings live on the Internet – from the moment they get to the scene until they are forcefully stopped by the intervention of security forces. In extremist chat fora a competition concerning the number of casualties between terrorist attackers has been sparked. Random social media networks are intensively used to propagandistically exploit the attacks. What was originally primarily associated with right-wing extremists, is becoming popular among jihadist perpetrators (e.g. attack in Magnanville 2016).⁴⁶⁹

This racing-fast virtualization of Salafi-jihadist terrorism has a tremendous impact on counter-terrorism approaches. It is a space that can only partially be controlled by security services but that everybody has access to. And there is the Darknet.

6. Hybrid Terrorism

In the first volume of this EICTP series the concept of "hybrid terrorism" has been elaborated in detail. According to the FSC cross-matrix-analysis, hybrid terrorism is a key driver, that actively influences all other determinants with a relatively high factor of 2,9 on the scale and

is equally driven to a surprising extent of 2,6. This, however unsurprisingly, suggests that it can be regarded as the fundamental development in the sphere of transnational terrorism for the years to come as it practically touches upon any kind of relation among key factors and trends.

Hybrid terrorism as a concept refers to a structural interdependence, the intentional merging of different forms, methods and patterns seeking to create something new, 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"*.⁴⁷⁰

In the light of constant transformation, we must expect an intensification and further acceleration of already prevalent dynamics in the field of tactics, *modi operandi* and radicalization. Most likely hybrid operational tactics (*"Jihadist Auftragstaktik"*), hybrid organizations (terror militia and terrorist organization at once), hybrid perpetrators (*"single actor plus"* and/or loose franchise networks) and *modi operandi* (opportunity driven and/or projected attacks), hybrid radicalization (*"Islamization of radicalism"* and *"radicalization of Islam"*) will shape and set the stage of Salafi-jihadist violence for the time to come.⁴⁷¹

6.1. The ISIS-Effect

Due to the phenomenal binary development of hybrid terrorism (opportunity driven and projected scenarios) and the associated *"simplicity paradigm"* (for efficiency reasons simple plots with random targeting will be trending), the ongoing shift towards low-level single perpetrators (maybe single actor *"plus"*) is expected to be sustainable. It no longer requires complex logistics to perpetrate scattered terrorist attacks with significant attention. In connection with the loose franchise dynamics- *"act autonomously and get the credits"* (McJihad)⁴⁷² -this creates what I would like to call the *"ISIS-effect"*: *"Such a loose franchise system has proven efficient. Terrorist action is handled under the primacy of spontaneity paired with an unprecedented simplicity in implementation"*.⁴⁷³

Tactically, we are currently confronted with opportunity-driven attacks or hybrid forms between coincidental and planned (network) scenarios. The *"low level"* category actually includes very different constellations, which all have only one thing in common: terrorist attacks (mostly a single actor variant) result from the combination of operational propaganda and a favorable environment. In a very cautious assessment, it can be presumed that if there is no direct connection with ISIS or other extremist groups, most likely there are still indications of inspiration, a prevalent contact with a terrorist organization or even *"remote control"*. When it comes to jihadi operational thinking, loose network-affiliates may reduce the number of red flags retraceable for security authorities.

6.2. Counter-Approach

Looking at these specific hybrid forms of individual perpetrator jihadism in Europe it is crucial trying to understand the loose relationship between lone attackers and their social networks (physically and virtually). While physical networks (cells, radical mosques, etc.) have been in the focus of European security bodies for some time now, internet platforms have long been widely neglected or under the radar. This is expected to change in the near future, as attempts by international organizations in cooperation with industry giants such as Google or Facebook have been made to tackle this issue. Further measures imply new regulations on the providers and site owners to prevent dissemination of extremist content.⁴⁷⁴

The acting persons should nevertheless still remain in the focus. Certainly, the awareness among citizens about the homegrown terrorist threat should be raised, to encourage early reporting of suspicious behavior.⁴⁷⁵ That being said, predominantly lone attackers are at least inspired by or connected with a group: "Most of the terrorist acts initially believed to involve a 'lone wolf' turned out to be connected to extremist networks..."⁴⁷⁶

7. Conclusion

COVID-19 is without doubt a game changer. In the sphere of security, it has aggravated already symptomatic developments. The emerging erosion of cohesion in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis is expected to reinforce the gradual weakening of the political center with its recourse to democracy and the rule of law. Simultaneously the reinvigoration of the political edges will likely contribute to a renaissance of global extremism. Conflicts resulting from geopolitical tensions, that again could be carried out in the Middle East or elsewhere in the Arab world, will more than ever impact security, particularly in Europe. Also, warfare and terrorism as a hybrid of crime and war, will be shaped upon new paradigms. Geo-strategically, fluid security may gain further significance, just as hybridity, asymmetry and low intensity conflicts will set the stage for the time to come. Terrorism, notably Salafi-jihadist violence, is expected to increasingly turn online. The entire terrorist "value chain" from a young radicalized person's first contact with propaganda to the preparation of the attack and its subsequent exploitation through dissemination can be maintained virtually. Terrorists are excessively trying to exploit state of the art technology in any possible way – be it drones, the Internet of things or even CBRN scenarios. Last but not least, terrorism goes hybrid. Tactical innovation supports the development of new kinds of (preferably simple) attack scenarios, *modi operandi*, perpetrators and even radicalization, that emerge from convergence of formerly known and adapted forms in each context. And there is more to come, as technical innovation will phenomenologically impact any variation of terrorism, as its masterminds are anarchically adaptive.

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