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Words of Welcome from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume XV, Issue 6 (December 2021) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* (ISSN 2334-3745). Our independent online journal is an Open Access publication of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* (TRI), Vienna, and the *Institute of Security and Global Affairs* (ISGA) of Leiden University's Campus in The Hague. All past and recent issues can be found at: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism.

Perspectives on Terrorism (PoT) is indexed by JSTOR, SCOPUS, and Google Scholar where it ranks No. 3 of journals in the field of Terrorism Studies. Now completing its 15th year of publication, it has nearly 9,500 registered subscribers and many more occasional readers and website visitors in academia, government and civil society worldwide. The *Articles* of its six annual issues are fully peer-reviewed by external referees while its *Research Notes* and other content are subject to internal editorial quality control.

The current issue features 5 ***Articles***. The opening article by Jonathan Collins seeks to apply David C. Rapoport's wave theory of terrorism to the upsurge of far-right terrorism. The second article by Kristy Campion, Jamie Ferrill, and Kristy Milligan investigates extremist exploitation of the COVID-19 issue in the context of Australian security. In the next article, Wesley S. McCann reports findings of his analysis of a database on CBRN terrorism interdictions during the period 1990–2016. Then Ronan Lee analyses the strategic communications of a new Muslim militant group in Myanmar, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). And finally, Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo provide new insights on the Islamic State's Ripoll cell, responsible for the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks of 2017. These articles are followed by a ***Rejoinder*** from Lorne Dawson, who takes issue with Bart Schuurman's interpretation of his recent article in our journal regarding the role of religion in terrorism.

The ***Resources*** section features eight brief book reviews by Joshua Sinai, the Book Reviews Editor of our journal. This is followed by a longer review of a publication edited by Nina Käsehage on the (ab-)uses of the COVID-19 pandemic by religious fundamentalists. Information Resources Editor Judith Tinnes scopes the literature on hostage takings and extrajudicial executions in her extensive bibliography, while Berto Jongman presents his survey of recent online resources on terrorism and related subjects.

In ***Announcements***, Olivia Kearney presents her regular Conference Calendar which, due to COVID-19, is still dominated by online meetings. Then three new Associate Editors who have joined the Editorial Team are introduced by the principal editors. We are also pleased to announce that Dr. Laura Dugan, the Ralph D. Mershon Professor of Human Security and Professor of Sociology at The Ohio State University, has agree to join our Editorial Board. Finally, we also announce a "Call for Proposals" for a special issue of the journal on anti-government extremism, to be edited by Tore Bjørgo and Kurt Braddock and published December 2022.

The articles and other texts of the current issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* have been selected and edited by Alex Schmid and James Forest, the journal's principal editors. Editorial Assistant Jodi Moore handled proof-reading, while the technical online launch of the December 2021 issue of our journal has been in the hands of Associate Editor for IT Christine Boelema Robertus.

Articles

A New Wave of Terrorism? A Comparative Analysis of the Rise of Far-Right Terrorism

by Jonathan Collins

Abstract

Far-right terrorist incidents are proliferating throughout the Western world. There has been an exponential increase in such incidents in the past ten years. To better understand this phenomenon, the author uses David Rapoport's seminal theory on Modern Waves of Terrorism. Applying Rapoport's measurement criteria, this article seeks to determine whether the increase in far-right violence constitutes a new terrorist wave. The study provides an extensive analysis using the Global Terrorism Database, linking research dedicated to comprehending domestic occurrences of far-right extremism with patterns and themes across the affected regions. Based on mixed-methods empirical analysis, this article contends that the data's common themes and patterns fulfill Rapoport's distinctive wave conditions with regard to the phenomenon's international nature, the type of terrorist activity, its prompting cause, and its predominant energy.

Keywords: Far-right extremism, political extremism, wave of terrorism, violent extremism

Introduction

There has been a rise of far-right terrorism (FRT)[1] throughout the Western world. The Institute for Economics and Peace has highlighted the exponential increase (320%) in incidents connected to far-right assailants in the past ten years.[2] Multiple studies couple these findings to various themes, including the reemergence of far-right populist parties [3], the mainstreaming of hateful rhetoric [4], the scapegoating of targeted minorities and communities [5], as well as the idolization of far-right mass murderers.[6] The recent mass casualty incidents in Hanau (Germany), El Paso (United States) and Christchurch (New Zealand) related to far-right ideologies reaffirm the need to improve our understanding of why these attacks are on the rise. One proposed avenue of analysis is in utilizing David C. Rapoport's *Modern Waves of Terrorism* theorem. Rapoport argues that underlying political and ideological forces shape distinct patterns of terrorism.[7] These patterns form in cyclical waves, helping researchers to understand and identify the different themes precipitating the respective cycle. The article's central aim, using Rapoport's theory, is to determine whether FRT constitutes a new wave within terrorism. If so, highlighting FRT as the next wave of terrorism has repercussions for the field of study and the overall focus of scholarly research.

Traditionally, studies involving FRT have predominantly focused on single high-fatality occurrences rather than looking at general trends. Some exceptions to this tendency include the historical overview in Kristy Campion's "A 'Lunatic Fringe?' The Persistence of Right-Wing Extremism in Australia"[8] or Daniel Koehler's "Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What are the Contextual Factors behind 'Hive Terrorism'?"[9] However, these studies remain few and far between. Thus, this article aims to fill this literature gap by providing an extensive analysis, using the "most comprehensive database of terrorist incidents,"[10] and interlinking research dedicated to understanding domestic occurrences of FRT with the encompassing patterns and themes to be found across the affected regions. Moreover, it also seeks to challenge the current dichotomy between the importance placed on the religious wave of terrorism, and that placed on the under-research phenomenon of FRT. Among other developments, popular Western political language has presupposed new terrorism in the shape of 'Jihadism' as the polar opposite to old terrorism's 'secular extremism'.[11] Consequently, this Western characterization often depicts religious terrorism as international actors seeking extreme violence that threatens the current world order. Conversely, FRT or old terrorism has taken on the form of a less violent, domestic actor operating within the existing political order.

[12] Lost in the categorization and securitization of the religious wave, is the neglected research onto FRT. A recent study conducted by The Hague Institute for Security Studies suggests that Muslim perpetrators of terrorist attacks received 357% more press coverage than far-right individuals within the United States.[13] Such findings are not exclusive to public discourse. In a study conducted by Ahmed and Lynch between 2001 and 2018, they found that of 387 articles mentioning right-wing extremism, only 41 focused exclusively—instead of either briefly mentioning or comparatively using the term—on FRT.[14] The statistics belie the fact that there are twice as many incidents involving right-wing terrorists in the United States than from any other extremist base and also overlook an increasing number of comparable incidents in Western Europe.[15]

Therefore, this article aims to contribute two interlinked dimensions in terrorism research. The first is in establishing the existence of a new FRT wave of extremism, gradually replacing the longstanding religious wave. Readers may ask: why does establishing the next wave of terrorism as FRT matter? My answer is that it is not a symbolic representation with minor repercussions but a call for reorientation in understanding the changing extremist landscape. Most importantly, with the current fixation of Jihadism in the academic sphere, the far right has mobilized with few impediments while using the discourse surrounding the religious wave as an existential threat in their ideological narratives. However, this article is not attempting to undermine studies dedicated to Jihadi terrorism. Instead, it aims to close the gap, imploring more academics to focus on FRT. This reorientation of the field strives to better represent the ongoing extremism concerns in the Western world. Secondly, the typological production of themes and patterns spanning the selected cases should emphasize the underlying mechanisms fueling the growing wave of FRT. Identifying the varying motivations, targets, weapon types, group belongings, ideologies, and reoccurring patterns should provide future avenues for exploration.

Rapoport's Modern Waves of Terrorism Theory

David Rapoport defines a *wave* as a "cycle of activity in a given period—a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases."[16] In his historical analysis, the four modern waves take the form of [17]:

Anarchism (1880s–1920s) – The first wave started in Russia, with students calling for rebellion against the Czarist regime. The movement utilized assassinations and terrorism as a stratagem, including suicidal bombings which were portrayed as noble acts of martyrdom. A series of plots against establishment figures amounted to a "golden age" of assassinations, culminating in the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914.

Nationalism & Anti-Colonialism (1920s–1960s) – The aftermath of WWI triggered the next wave, with many countries calling for self-determination following the breakup of colonial empires. Instead of the regional focus in the previous cycle, acts of terrorism took place across much of the globe, including in Pakistan, the Philippines, in much of Africa, but also in Cyprus and Palestine. Moreover, the tactics shifted from high-impact acts of terrorism to more hit-and-run-style acts of guerrilla warfare.

New Left Extremism (1960s–1980s) – The Cold War and the effectiveness of guerrilla tactics demonstrated in Korea and Vietnam fostered the third wave of nationalist fighters. Many organizations created during this wave, such as the RAF, the Italian Red Brigades, and the IRA, utilized spectacular acts of terrorism. This type of terrorism included dozens of plane hijackings, the assassinations of prominent political figures, international kidnappings, and other acts such as foreign embassy occupations.

Religious Extremism (1980s–current times) – Political Islam or Islamism rests at the heart of the current religious wave. Multiple interconnected events triggered the religious wave, including the Iranian revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the rise of a Jihad movement in the Arab and Muslim world. The most outstanding act of terrorism characterizing the religious wave was the coordinated suicidal hijacking attack of 9/11.

However, with each wave of terrorism's life cycle averaging around forty years, researchers have presupposed

an ensuing novel phenomenon to arrive.[18] This assertion includes Vincent Auger's similar contestation that FRT is the next wave of terrorism, and Rapoport's assumption that by 2025 there will be a novel cycle.[19] His seminal article provides distinguishable criteria to establish the arrival of a new cycle of terrorism. The first—the global character—examines the transnational nature of terrorist activities. Secondly, an expansion of activity measures, number of individuals involved and characteristics of attacks over an identified period. A prompting or inciting cause depicts an "unanticipated international political transformation" that produces extremist and radical reactions.[20] Finally, the presence of a common predominant energy is part of Rapoport's theory. This article also draws inspiration from Vincent Auger's study on the wave phenomenon. Expounding on the upward trend of far-right violence, this Western Illinois professor holds that FRT could fulfill Rapoport's criteria for a wave. However, Auger's arguments are anecdotal and lack the qualitative and quantitative data necessary to fully back up his claim. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap through the operationalization of Rapoport's criteria with empirical findings.

Far-right terrorism is not a recent phenomenon, but previous upsurges in right-wing violence have not received much scholarly treatment. This article ascertains that, historically, FRT has largely been a local trend featuring sporadic violence within a given country or region. For example, Campion's historical analysis details the ebb and flow of RWE from the 1930s to the modern day.[21] With spurts of violence in the 1930s and 1980s stemming from issues related to the economy and immigration respectively, we could observe similar upward trends in extremism at the present time. However, this article argues that at no point has there been such a consolidated transnational effort from far-right terrorists to affect the Western world as in the past ten years. The study aims to prove the uniqueness of current far-right terrorist activity as it predicts the next wave of terrorism.

Research Design: Evaluating the Next Wave

This article interlinks the phenomenon of FRT within a multi-case study comparative framework—allowing for comparisons with both the qualitative and quantitative data available in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD)—to investigate the emergence of a new wave of terrorism. These cases include the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Scandinavia—excluding Iceland and the Faroe Islands. The regions were selected based on their respective upsurge in FRT, the scholarly literature written on the areas, and their geographic locations spread across the regions affected by FRT. Moreover, due to the availability of data on the GTD during the period of research, the study covers the period between 2009 and 2018. This provides a decade of data and could potentially represent the starting point for the far-right wave. The measuring criteria or operationalized mechanisms for this investigation are the wave characteristics outlined by David Rapoport, namely: international nature, type of terrorist activity, prompting cause, and common predominant energy. The conditions for success in identifying whether or not FRT constitutes a new wave of terrorism depends on whether Rapoport's criteria are statistically provable—using either descriptive statistics for the quantitative data or thematic inductive analysis for the qualitative. Thus, the guiding research questions for this investigation follow the multi-case study comparative conditions listed above:

> RQ1: What is the principal arrangement of characteristics of FRT incidents within Scandinavia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States?
>
> RQ2: Do these findings suggest a new wave of far-right terrorism when comparing the selected cases within the framework of David Rapoport's modern waves of terrorism theory?

Operationalization

The study operationalizes Rapoport's methods for defining a wave of terrorism. This operationalization process combines the theories' criteria in conjunction with data available in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Thus, the article outlines the following four measurement tools:

1. International Nature – The general trends of FRT incidents for the selected cases. Determining whether

the increase in FRT is a global phenomenon, or whether only a select region is experiencing the change.

2. Type of Terrorist Activity – Number of incidents per selected case study, including the target type, the method of violence, the type of weaponry used and the frequency of events. Showcasing the unique characteristics of the new wave, setting it apart from the previous cycles.
3. Prompting Cause – The motives behind each incident. Includes the ideologies or triggers used to justify the assailant's actions and measures the lethality per ideological grouping. Examining certain international triggers or events which have precipitated the movement's increased use of violence.
4. Common Predominant Energy – The interlinkages of common themes spanning the selected cases. Finding the transnationally unifying factors that bring the violent movement together in a popular cause.

Defining Far-Right Terrorism & Case Selection within the Global Terrorism Database (GTD)

This article utilizes Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Ravndal's (2019) examination of the recent dominating narratives within FRT as a working definition for case selection. According to the study, current right-wing signaling factors can differ from cultural, ethnic and/or racist nationalism but share inherent commonalities.[22] Cultural nationalism is rhetoric often used to combat and protect against the allegedly "repressive and backward" culture of Muslims. Conversely, ethnic nationalism refers to the perceived threat of mixing different ethnicities into a homogenous community. Instead, this type of nationalists believes that these groups should be kept separate to preserve the "uniqueness" of each community. Finally, racial nationalism makes claims for White superiority, often combined with a belief that all other races must be "subjugated, deported or exterminated." The movement embraces a narrative of racial purity and adopts a wide array of conspiracy theories against Jews, immigrants, and mixed-race individuals. Elements of these three nationalist subgroupings may include fascism, anti-immigration, nativism, chauvinism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism.[23] Therefore, FRT represents a multifaceted, adapting and overlapping group of individuals adopting interrelated ideologies which seek to protect their communities from perceived threats.

Case selection within the GTD depended on the above working definition and START's sorting mechanisms: whether an act of violence is considered terrorism, extremism, or a hate crime. The GTD uses a set of attributes to determine the type of violence, and this includes subnational actors, a political, economic, religious, or social motivation, and the assailant's intentions to coerce an opponent or to relay a message to the broader public.[24] If all attributes are accounted for, the event appears as a unique terrorism incident in the GTD database. Once an act of violence was determined to meet the criteria for terrorism, the author inductively sorted out relevant incidents for the selected countries, using Bjørgo and Ravndal's framing of FRT. This process varied between the data available per event, but most often used a combination of variables including the assailant's group name, target type, motives (if provided), and summary.

Methodology & Data

The research methodology used here is comparative cross-national analysis. This practice examines a particular phenomenon to compare its "manifestations in different socio-national settings."[25] Using the small-N cross-national comparative method allows for the collection of predominant terrorism cases within the international system.[26] In developing functional equivalents of terrorism incidents and classifying these cases into groupings with identifiable and shared characteristics, the article seeks to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the multifaceted problem. In addition, this method is useful for evaluation since it allows for both qualitative and quantitative comparisons. Thus, the GTD's extensive catalog of data in combination with the cross-national comparison method provides the essential mixed-method approach between "variable-based logic and case-based interpretation."[27]

The primary source for the detailed breakdown of each event of far-right extremism is the open-source database created by START. The usefulness of the GTD for academics pertains to its extensive records of greater than 190,000 terrorist attacks since the 1970s.[28] START uses an open-source method for collecting

media articles which feeds their massive accumulation of data. This process involves using a Metabase Application Programming Interface which isolates close to 400,000 potentially relevant articles per month. [29] Refining the data is done by removing duplicates and irrelevant material. Only articles acquired from trusted primary high-quality sources are used to ensure validity. The data set comprises greater than 100 variables, characterizing each attack in detail, listing its tactics, targets, weapons, and casualties while also offering short descriptions of the assailants and their motives. Therefore, START provides the most comprehensive open-source database for incidents of terrorism.

Necessary for this study was the selection of relevant GTD variables. Each categorical variable used in the analysis was deductively selected to best represent the operationalized characteristics detailed by Rapoport. The following section includes a list of this investigation's defining features [30]:

Table 1. GTD variables used to measure Rapoport's Indicators

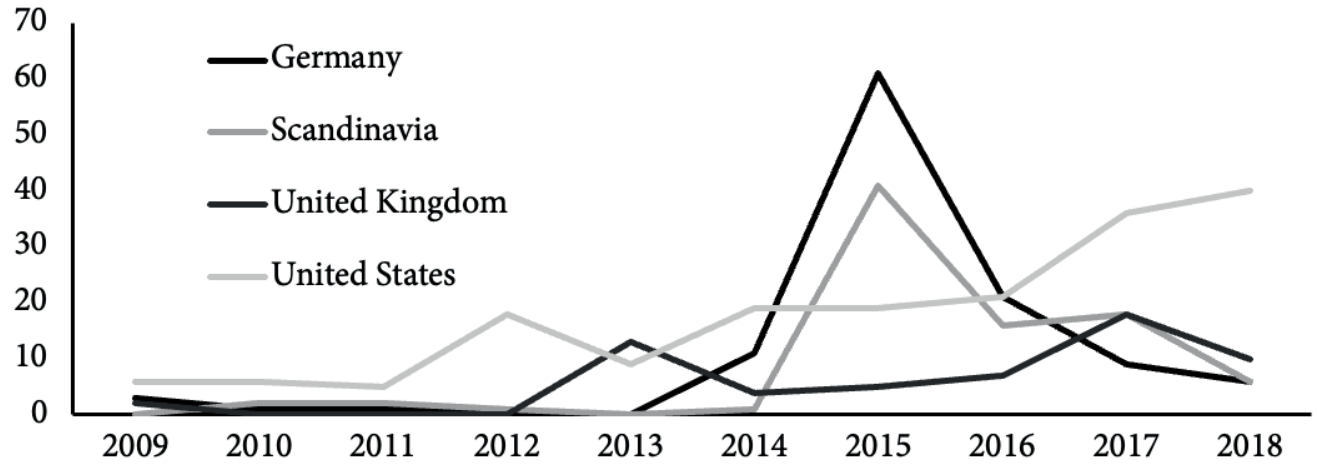
Variable Type	Summary
Summary	A brief narrative of the essential elements of the terrorist attack.
Attacktype1	The general method of attack which reflects a broad class of different tactics in terrorism.
Facility/Infrastructure Attack	The primary intention is to cause harm to nonhuman targets (buildings, monuments, vehicles).
Armed Assault	The objective is to cause physical harm or death against a target using firearms, incendiaries, or sharp instruments (lethal).
Bombing/Explosion	A device which, upon activation, creates an intense pressure wave causing physical damage to the surrounding environment.
Targtype1	The general type of target/victim for terrorists. The variable consists of 22 different categories, reflecting the broadness of target types.
Weapontype1	The general type of weaponry used for each incident.
Gname	Lists the name of the group that carried out the attack. Often, this was standardized labeling for the assailant's general ideological grouping.
Gsubname	When available, provides the specific faction to which the assailant belongs.
Motive	When available, provides the specific motive for the assailant's actions. May also include the relevant ideology used to justify the attack (Social, Economic, Political, and or Religious).
White Supremacy	Assailants are described as White supremacy when the GTD source confirms their involvement in a White supremacist organization.
Anti-Islamic	Includes all attacks on facilities, private property and individuals belonging to the Islamic faith.
Anti-Refugee	Includes all attacks on facilities, private property and individuals defined as refugees or asylum seekers.
Anti-Government	Includes all attacks on government personnel, property, and infrastructure. Also includes attacks on law enforcement.

International Nature

This element highlights the continuing rise of FRT in the individually selected cases and the overall trend. Figure 1 provides the initial representation of FRT activity in the data set between the selected range. Between 2009 and 2011, FRT activity for the nominated cases is relatively low. Only the United States exceeds five incidents per year in this time frame, with Germany registering five, Scandinavia two, and the United Kingdom two. From 2011 to 2014, extremist occurrences spike in three out of the four countries. The US jumps from five to seventeen cases and continues to climb after 2014, finishing this period with nineteen incidents. Both Germany and the United Kingdom see similar increases in activity, with incidents jumping

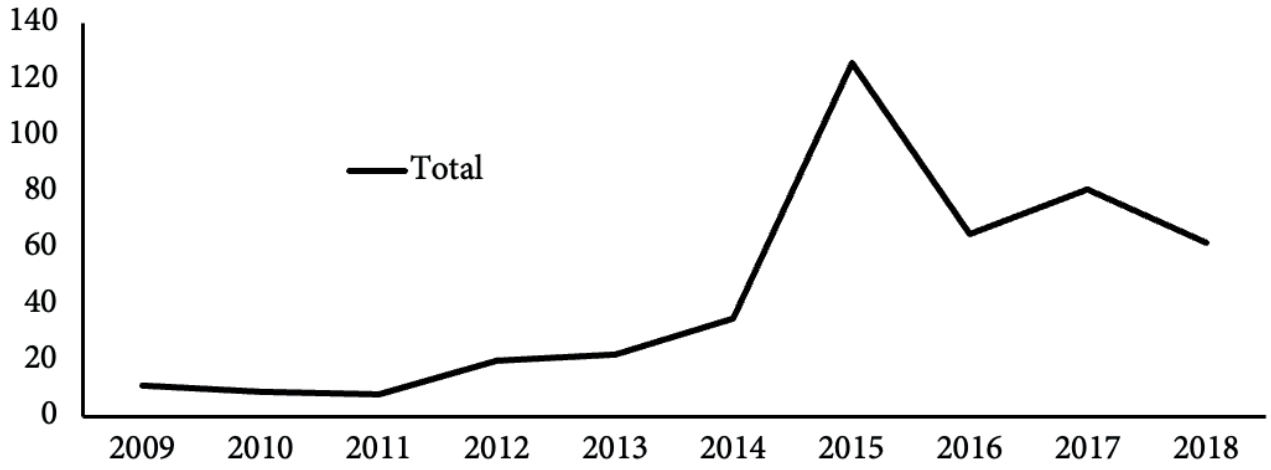
from one to eleven and zero to thirteen, respectively. The greatest increase in activity occurred in 2015. This year witnesses Germany (61) and Scandinavia (41) experiencing exponential growth in FRT activity. However, this growth is not consistent throughout the countries, with the US and the UK remaining relatively stable in terms of incidents per year. After the massive spike in 2015, extremist incidents in Scandinavia and Germany decline, and both finish at six each. Although case numbers are seeing a general decrease in the last year of the study, they surpass incidents at the start of the research period.

Figure 1. Summary of RWE incidents for the study's selected countries between 2009-2018



A summary of total FRT incidents within the selected four countries is depicted in Figure 2. The case numbers for the initial study period are generally small, ranging from eight to eleven between 2009 and 2011. Afterward, there is a gradual increase from 2012 (20), 2013 (22), to 2014 (35). The most significant upsurge in FRT events occurs in 2015, climaxing at a total of 126 unique incidents. These numbers are halved in the following year (65) but remain relatively stable through to 2018 (62). The inclusion of Figure 2 provides a different perspective on the current phenomenon. Whereas Figure 1 shows a general decline in case numbers in the selected countries, Figure 2 depicts the drastically higher number of cases between the end of the examination period in question.

Figure 2. Summary of total RWE incidents for the study's selected countries between 2009-2018



The data points evaluating the overall projections of FRT are consistent with findings detailing the same growth across the affected regions in the last decade.[31]

Type of Terrorist Activity

This element examines the number of incidents per selected case, including weapon type, fatality rates and targets for each country in the study. Each wave in Rapoport's theory displayed unique characteristics dependent on the terrorist group. To establish these novel traits for FRT, a general overview of the assailant's characteristics is provided. The tables which follow in each section provide a breakdown of far-right terrorist incidents and offer a means to cross-compare the individual cases' data sets. Presenting the number of cases and percentages per incident category within a data table illustrates the common recurrences of incidents and shared traits of FRT.

Germany:

Table 2 provides the breakdown of far-right terrorism incidents for Germany. Predominant in the analysis is the composition of attacks targeting physical infrastructure rather than a population group. Standout figures include the 61.3% of total incidents directed toward the facilities of targeted populaces—namely buildings associated with refugees and asylum seekers 37.8%, and places of Islamic worship 7.2%.

Table 2. Summary of methods and targets for expected FRT assailants, number of cases, percentage per target, weapon type, and percentage per method in Germany between 2009–2018

Methods of Violence & Specific Targets	# of Cases	%	Weapon type	%
Facility/Infrastructure Attack	**68**	**61.3%**	Incendiary	95.7%
Refugee (Camps/IDP/Asylum Seeker)	42	37.8%	Unknown	4.3%
Place of Worship (Islamic)	9	8.1%		
Private Property	6	5.4%		
Diplomatic	3	2.7%		
Government Building/Facility/Office	3	2.7%		
Political Party Member/Rally	2	1.8%		
Police	3	2.7%		**100%**
Armed Assault	**26**	**23.4%**	Incendiary	61.5%
Refugee (Camps/IDP/Asylum Seeker)	21	18.9%	Firearms	23.1%
Place of Worship (Islamic)	1	0.9%	Melee	11.5%
Political Party Member/Rally	1	0.9%	Explosives	3.8%
Head of State	1	0.9%		
Unnamed Civilian/Unspecified	2	1.8%		**100%**
Bombing/Explosion	**8**	**7.2%**	Explosives	100%
Refugee (Camps/IDP/Asylum Seeker)	3	2.7%		
Place of Worship (Islamic)	1	0.9%		
Other	3	2.7%		
Political Protest	1	0.9%		**100%**
Unarmed Assault	**5**	**4.5%**	Melee	80.0%
Refugee (Camps/IDP/Asylum Seeker)	4	3.6%	Unknown	20.0%
Political Party Member/Rally	1	0.9%		**100%**
Assassination	**4**	**3.6%**	Explosives	50%
Political Party Member/Rally	3	2.7%	Melee	50%
Head of State	1	0.9%		**100%**
Total	**111**	**100%**		

Moreover, assailants mostly take advantage of incendiary devices (95.7%) to set fire to these amenities and make a quick getaway before potential identification. This tactic of terrorism accounts for 73% of total weapon use within Germany. Additionally, the disproportionate number of attacks on individuals affiliated with or belonging to refugee or asylum-seeking status is evident throughout Germany's Table 2 data set. In total, 63% of the violent acts are targeting either refugees or asylum seekers.

Scandinavia:

Scandinavia provides a similar FRT experience pertaining to attacks on refugee-affiliated facilities, individuals, and others connected to the Islamic community. Out of the total of eighty-six incidents across Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, sixty-seven unique FRT cases were directed against refugee populations. These figures include 58.1% of attacks targeting refugee infrastructure or religious institutions affiliated with Islamic teachings. A further 7% of directed attacks focused on Jewish businesses and synagogues. Unique to the Scandinavian case is the wide range of targets related to immigration facilities. These include attacks on educational institutions (2.3%), cultural centers (2.3%) and social services offices (3.5%). The findings are also in line with attacks against government personnel who promote the pro-refugee institutions of Scandinavia (9.3%). In addition, the continued use of incendiary devices is evident from Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of methods and targets for expected FRT assailants, number of cases, percentage per target, weapon type, and percentage per method in Scandinavia between 2009–2018

Methods of Violence & Specific Targets	**# of Cases**	**%**	**Weapon Type**	**%**
Facility/Infrastructure Attack	**59**	**68.6%**	Incendiary	96.6%
Refugee (Camps/IDP/Asylum Seeker)	40	46.5%	Unknown	3.4%
Political Party Member/Rally	5	5.8%		
Memorial/Cemetery/Monument	1	1.2%		
Religious Figures/Institutions	10	11.6%		
Educational Institution	1	1.2%		
Government	2	2.3%		**100%**
Armed Assault	**15**	**17.4%**	Incendiary	53.3%
Refugee (Camps/IDP/Asylum Seeker)	10	11.6%	Firearms	26.7%
Procession/Gathering	1	1.2%	Melee	20.0%
Religion Identified	1	1.2%		
Unnamed Civilian/Unspecified	1	1.2%		
Religious Figures/Institutions	1	1.2%		
Educational Institution	1	1.2%		
Terrorists/Non-State Militia	1	1.2%		**100%**
Bombing/Explosion	**9**	**10.5%**	Explosives	100%
Refugee (Camps/IDP/Asylum Seeker)	2	2.3%		
Laborer/Occupation Identified	1	1.2%		
Museum/Cultural Center	2	2.3%		
Religious Figures/Institutions	1	1.2%		
Business	1	1.2%		
Government	2	1.2%		**100%**
Unarmed Assault	**2**	**2.3%**	Vehicle	100%
Political Protest	2	2.3%		**100%**
Total	**86**	**100%**		

United Kingdom:

Whereas the previous two cases predominantly targeted the refugee population, the UK's FRT activity is distributed differently, targeting the local Muslim community. Incidents involving the targeting of ethnic Muslims or Islamic institutions amounted to thirty-three out of the fifty-nine total cases. Violence against immigrants or visibly non-White minorities (71.2%) is the most apparent feature standing out from within the data set. In addition to the clear predominance of assaults against the Muslim population, other ethnic and religious minorities were also targeted. Incidents involving Jewish facilities, individuals and private property accounted for 10.2% of all cases. Additionally, non-British businesses were a focal point for FRT in the UK, with Indians and Eastern Europeans being victimized for a combined 8.5%. A continued commonality in the weapon type is the primary use of incendiaries (41).

Table 4. Summary of methods and targets for FRT assailants, number of cases, percentage per target, weapon type, and percentage per method in the United Kingdom between 2009–2018

Methods of Violence & Specific Targets	**# of Cases**	**%**	**Weapon Type**	**%**
Facility/Infrastructure Attack	**37**	**62.7%**	Incendiary	97.3%
Jewish Facilities	4	6.8%	Melee	2.7%
Churches	4	6.8%		
Islamic Facilities and Property	17	28.8%		
Indian Facilities	2	3.4%		
Residence of a Syrian Family	1	1.7%		
Shed of Polish Civilians	1	1.7%		
Business (Immigrant Owned)	6	10.2%		
Government	2	3.4%		**100%**
Armed Assault	**8**	**13.6%**	Incendiary	62.5%
Religious Figures/Institutions	2	3.4%	Melee	37.5%
Indian Civilians	1	1.7%		
Muslim Identity	2	3.4%		
Residence of Refugees	1	1.7%		
Business (Immigrant Owned)	1	1.7%		
Educational Institution	1	1.7%		**100%**
Unarmed Assault	**7**	**11.9%**	Vehicle	42.9%
Islamic Facilities and Property	2	3.4%	Chemical	28.6%
Muslim Identity	5	8.5%	Other	28.6%
Bombing/Explosion	**5**	**8.5%**	Explosives	100%
Islamic Facilities and Property	5	8.5%		**100%**
Hostage Taking	**1**	**1.7%**	Melee	100%
Police	1	1.7%		**100%**
Assassination	**1**	**1.7%**	Firearms	100%
Government Personnel	1	1.7%		**100%**
Total	**59**	**100%**		

United States:

The methods, targets and weapon types for the United States are more diverse. Whereas attacks on various infrastructures related to immigrants or refugees dominate the result in the previous cases, armed assaults constitute the main attack type in the United States. Moreover, many of these incidents involve the use of firearms (33.3%) compared to the previously noted incendiaries (32.8%). Thus, modes of violence differ greatly amongst cases. Furthermore, FRT specific targets in the US include an array of victims. Target types include Muslims (25.9%), Jews (5.2%), immigrants (4.0%), educational institutions (5.7%), women (5.7%), abortion clinics and staff (8.1%), government personnel (13.8%) and a range of other unspecified individuals/property.

Table 5. Summary of methods and targets for expected FRT assailants, number of cases, percentage per target, weapon type, and percentage per method in America between 2009–2018

Methods of Violence & Specific Targets	# of Cases	%	Weapon Type	%
Armed Assault	**65**	**37.4%**	Firearms	80.0%
Religious Figures/Institutions	14	8.0%	Melee	16.9%
Private Citizens & Property	28	16.1%	Incendiary	3.1%
Government Property and Personnel	5	2.9%		
Educational Institution	3	1.7%		
Police	5	2.9%		
Business	7	4.0%		
Other	3	1.7%		**100%**
Facility/Infrastructure Attack	**60**	**34.5%**	Incendiary	91.7%
Religious Figures/Institutions	26	14.9%	Firearms	5.0%
Private Citizens & Property	9	5.2%	Chemical	1.7%
Government Property and Personnel	2	1.1%	Vehicle	1.7%
Educational Institution	4	2.3%		
Business	6	3.4%		
Other	13	7.5%		**100%**
Bombing/Explosion	**33**	**19.0%**	Explosives	93.9%
Religious Figures/Institutions	2	1.1%	Chemical	6.1%
Private Citizens & Property	7	4.0%		
Government Property and Personnel	14	8.0%		
Educational Institution	2	1.1%		
Journalists & Media	2	1.1%		
Police	1	0.6%		
Business	1	0.6%		
Other	4	2.3%		**100%**
Unarmed Assault	**12**	**6.9%**	Melee	58.3%
Religious Figures/Institutions	1	0.6%	Biological	25.0%
Private Citizens & Property	9	5.2%	Vehicle	16.7%
Government Property and Personnel	2	1.1%		**100%**
Hostage Taking (Barricade Incident)	**3**	**1.7%**	Firearms	100%
Educational Institution	1	0.6%		
Journalists & Media	1	0.6%		
Other	1	0.6%		**100%**
Assassination	**1**	**0.6%**	Other	100%
Journalists & Media	1	0.6%		**100%**
Total	**174**	**100.0%**		

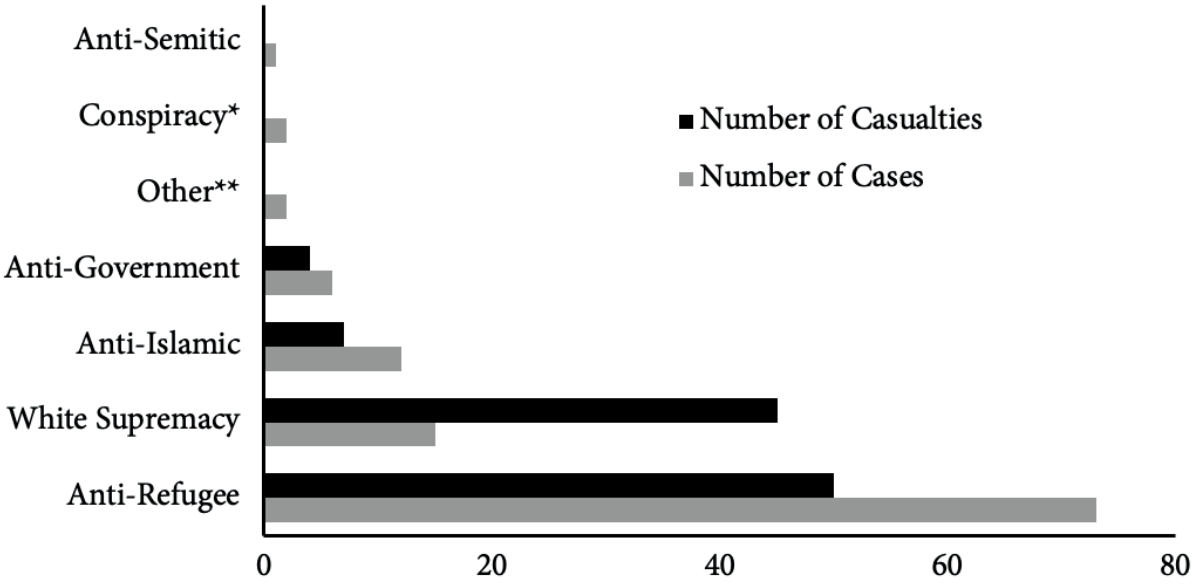
Prompting Cause

The prompting cause in this study examines the different ideological factors, triggers, and motives behind each incident. The following questions informed this section: what are the motivations behind each incident; what ideologies or FRT organizations are the assailants linked to; and how dangerous are these motives? To provide the answers for each query, the prompting cause section utilizes the quantitative findings for FRT motives found in the GTD (See Figures 3–6). Then individual cases are highlighted to exhibit the prominent ideologies and their risk to Western society.

Germany:

A characteristic of FRT cases involving attacks on refugee, asylum seekers and Islamic infrastructure are the linkages with ideologically far-right organizations (33%). One group listed by the GTD is the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA)(9.6%). This grouping accounted for 11.3% of all casualties within Germany. Playing on society's anxieties about globalization, the organization uses a broad array of tools to spread paranoia and fear amongst the population.[32] Common mechanisms include the labeling of Muslims as sexual predators, sending death threats to popular pro-refugee political figures, and encouraging violent street protests. Threats against politicians culminated when one PEGIDA-linked assailant, Frank S., attacked mayoral candidate Henriette Reker and four others. The database details the extremist's motivations as, "I had to do it. I am protecting you all."[33] The perpetrator justified his attack by saying, "she betrayed our country", referring to Reker's stance on immigration.[34] A similar incident occurred on November 27, 2017, when Werner S. attacked Mayor Hollstein and injured another individual, exclaiming, "you're letting me die of thirst, but you bring 200 refuges to Altena."[35] Other attacks by German far-right groups include those perpetrated by the Freital Group (2.6%), Neo-Nazis (4.4%), and the Atomwaffen Division (1.8%).

Figure 3. Summary of motivations, and number of casualties for FRT incidents in Germany between 2009 – 2018



*Groups central ideology based on conspiracy theories.
**Incidents that do not fall under any of the labelling categories due to difficulty establishing the motive.

The assailants whose acts produced the highest fatality rates (95%) within Germany are those connected to White supremacy groups. An exceptional incident in the data set involves an attack in a Munich shopping mall which killed nine and injured twenty-seven people (32.1% of all casualties). During the attacks the assailant, Ali David Sonboly, yelled, "I am German" in reference to his racially driven assault while he was a second-generation Iranian.[36] Taking inspiration from Anders Behring Breivik, Sonboly carried out the

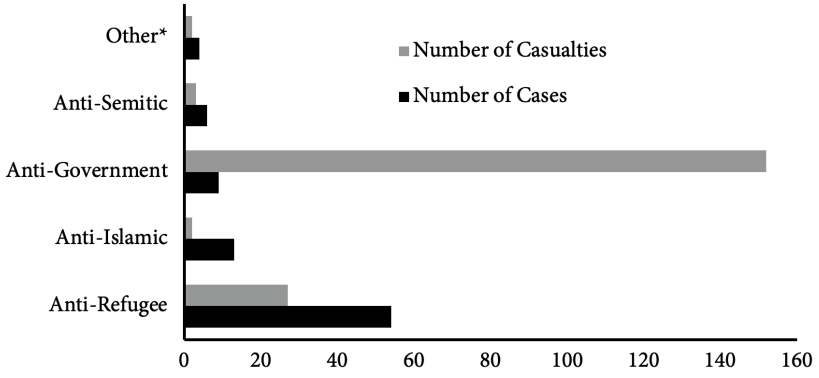
terrorist attack on the fifth anniversary of the 2011 massacre perpetrated by Breivik in Norway.[37] His manifesto revealed his admiration for Adolf Hitler and his belonging to the Aryan race which stood in contrast to his family background.[38]

According to the GTD data set, and in line with Koehler's study on hive terrorism—the phenomenon of unaffiliated citizens participating in attacks on refugees and migrants—most incidents (67%) occurred without any indication of membership to a specific FRT group.[39] Whereas far-right groups tended to claim the attacks on refugees, many of the incidents continue to remain unconnected to such groups. These acts of terrorism by unaffiliated individuals amounted to 42% of the total casualties in Germany. Rather than directly stating their motives, many of the unaffiliated individuals' social media activity displayed far-right narratives targeting immigrants and refugees.[40]. These findings are consistent with Koehler's analysis which noted an increasing duality between affiliated far-right members and a second group of mobilizing "ordinaries" previously unknown to security services.[41]

Scandinavia:

Scandinavia follows a similar line as Germany. The grouping's data set charts recurring attacks on refugee and Islamic infrastructure by assailants linked (18.5%) and unlinked (81.5%) to a particular FRT organization. Incidents which are connected to FRT groups are oftentimes attributed to the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) (5.8%). The NRM is a far-right organization with branches in Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland.[42] The group focuses its operations in preparation of a future race war, procuring weapons and conducting street fights to train for this foretold event. Moreover, the NRM stood at the origin of the establishment of other related organizations in Scandinavia.

Figure 4. Summary of motivations, and the number of casualties for FRT incidents within Scandinavia between 2009 - 2018



*Incidents that do not fall under any of the labelling categories due to the difficulty of establishing the motive.

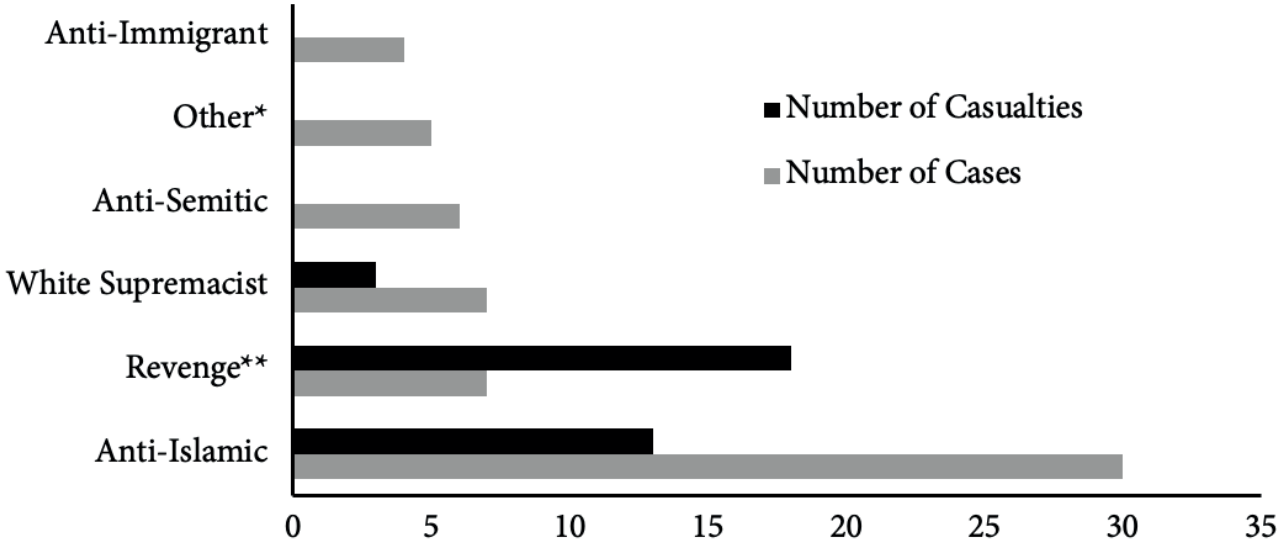
The infamous attack committed by Anders Breivik in Oslo and Utoya in 2011 is the most important incident, accounting for 93.9% of the total killed and 72.1% of the total wounded within Scandinavia's cases. Breivik's bombing followed by a massacre of young people on an island of Norway the same day remains a prime example of the threat posed by FRT to Western society; it has inspired several copycat incidents. A number of in-depth investigations into Breivik's motives [43], thought processes [44], and manifesto [45] have been conducted. Crucial was his belief that the Western world was undergoing an Islamification process, and that the Christian West was consequently under threat. Hemmingby and Bjørgo noted that his motivations were based on a double enemy image.[46] Breivik opposed the arrival of Muslims but attacked young people linked to the governing party because in his view they were linked to an inner enemy—an alleged Cultural Marxist political elite—who accepted and justified refugees coming to Norway. This resulted in one of the worst far-right extremist massacres recorded in recent years in the Western world. In comparison, other far-right attacks in Scandinavia were relatively minor, with the second largest injuring 15 in an arson attack on refugee dormitories by an unaffiliated perpetrator. Interestingly, when removing Breivik's case from the data,

unaffiliated perpetrators accounted for causing 73.5% of all casualties.

United Kingdom:

One theme repeatedly found in the United Kingdom relates to single-issue terrorism (11.9%) motivated by feelings of revenge. Lee and Knott studied this phenomenon within the UK FRT movement against the backdrop of IS-inspired terrorist incidents—Westminster 2017, Manchester Arena 2017, and London Bridge 2017—and discovered that the IS-related incidents incited hate amongst far-right communities against the Muslim community in general rather than focusing on Salafi-Jihadists.[47] Their finding is consistent with the cases included here. For instance, reciprocal violence occurred after the murder of British soldier Lee Rigby. Three related events involving attacks on Islamic mosques and businesses involved assailants whose sole motive was to avenge the soldier's death. In one case the perpetrator, John Parkin, asked police after the incident whether "[they] like Muslims."[48] In the London Bridge attack, assailant Darren Osborne caused the highest injury rate (55.0%) after ramming his vehicle into pedestrians.

Figure 5. Summary of motivations, and number of casualties for RWE incidents within the United Kingdom between 2009 - 2018



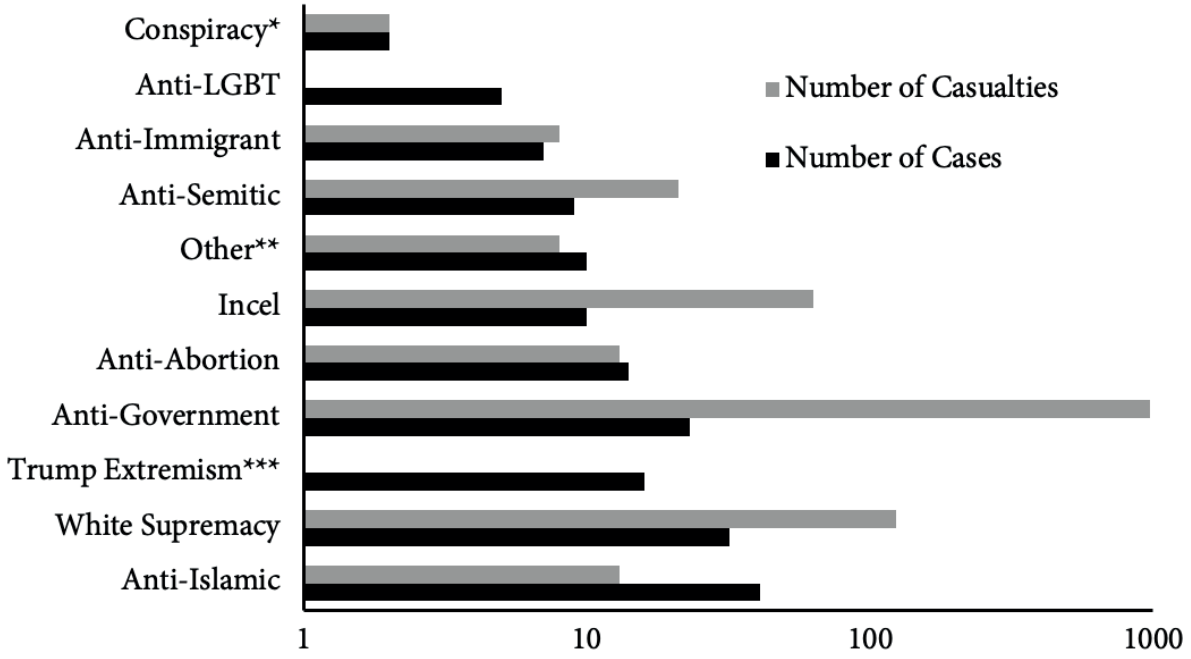
*Incidents that do not fall under any of the labelling categories due to difficulty of establishing the motive.
**Incidents described as reciprocal reactions from assailants predominantly motivated by IS-related attacks.

As was the case in other countries in this study (see Figures 3 and 4), many FRT events within the UK have connections with larger extremist organizations (11.9%)—with the English Defense League being the most common affiliation. The group's motives are to "counter the Jihad" movement in Europe. It exploits the same fears of Islamization as those that drove Anders Breivik.[49] A typical incident by an EDL member in the data set was perpetrated by Marek Zakrocki. Echoing his compatriot Osborne's act, he had attempted to run over a curry shop owner in London. After the attack, he told police, "I'm going to kill a Muslim. I'm doing this for Britain. I am going to do it my way because that is what I think is right."[50] In sum, unaffiliated assailants continue to be prevalent, accounting for 38.2% of all casualties and 55.9% of total cases.

United States:

The United States presents the broadest diversity in terms of incidents, ideological affiliation and lethality compared to this study's other cases. For Scandinavia, Germany, and the United Kingdom, most motivations are interlinked with anti-Islamic or anti-refugee ideologies. In contrast, the US exhibits a wide range of targets for hatred, ranging from anti-Islam (23.6%), White supremacism (18.4%), anti-government (13.2%), anti-abortion (8%), involuntary celibates (5.7%), anti-Semitism (5.7%), anti-immigrant (4%), and anti-LGBT (2.9%). Unique to the US cases is the relatively small number of unaffiliated perpetrators (17.1%), with most assailants being linked to a broadly defined extremist group.

Figure 6. Summary of motivations, and number of casualties for RWE incidents in the United States between 2009 – 2018



*Assailants justified attacks based on conspiracy theories.
**Incidents that do not fall under any of the labelling categories due to difficulty establishing the motive.
***Assailants were inspired to attack persons critical of then President Trump.

For the United States, the general trend of far-right hatred directed against refugees was replaced by one opposing Islam. Specific target types vary from attacks on infrastructure to assaults on private citizens. Most descriptions of incidents within the data set mention one or another form of Islamophobia (23.6%) as the leading cause of terrorism. This includes multiple attacks on what assailants called "Punish a Muslim Day", and the murder of three Muslims at their place of residence by Craig Stephen Hicks and Richard Lloyd who wanted to "run Arabs out of the country."[51] A common theme in the anti-Islamic narrative is the association of Muslims with extremist movements in the Middle East. On several occasions, the assailants justified their actions by claiming the victim was affiliated with Jihadi terrorist groups. This rationale lay behind an attack on an Islamic Centre, a Muslim food vendor in New York, and a Bangladeshi migrant. Interestingly, these attacks often focused on a single target, thus the number of casualties (14) was relatively small in comparison to other targeted groups.

Centered around this culture of distrust amongst right-wing extremists in the United States is the adaptation of various conspiracy theories that center on an alleged Islamization of the world, perceptions of a "White genocide", and anti-Semitic discourse. Intriguingly, fatal attacks against the Jewish population were 157% higher than those targeting Muslims in the US. An example of how hateful rhetoric directed against the Jewish population shapes perpetrator motives is the case of Robert Bowers, who attacked a Pittsburgh Synagogue killing eleven and injuring seven. Portraying Jews as a threat to society on the social media platform Gab, Bowers stated, "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."[52] Entries in his online account suggested that Bowers felt compelled to engage in violence to defend an alleged threat against Whites. He also subscribed to Jewish conspiracy theories.[53]

Consistent with the other cases in the study are White supremacy groups' activities in spreading hatred and engaging in acts of terrorism. Accounting for 26% of the total killed and 7.5% of the total injured within the US data set, the proliferation of these groups in different sub-movements signals a more diversified threat for US policy makers and security services to tackle. Significant incidents include Wade Page's attack on a Sikh place of worship, killing six and injuring four. Page, with connection to the transnational neo-Nazi group

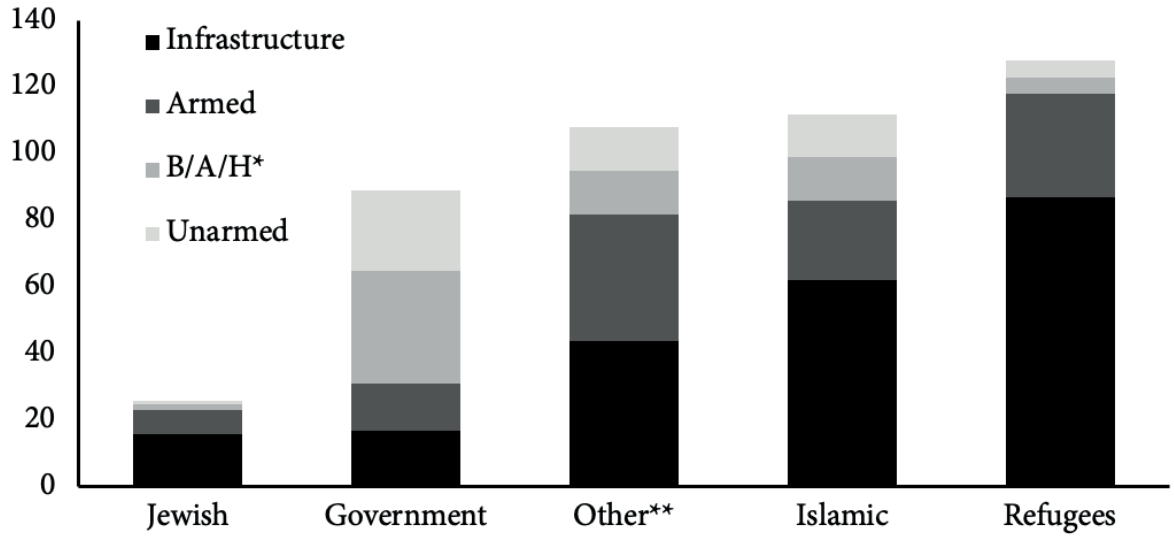
Volksfront, was radicalized during his time in the army.[54] However, the targets for White supremacist groups varied greatly. For example, when counter-protestors showed up at a Unite the Right rally, assailant James Fields rammed his vehicle into them, injuring 28 people and killing one person. Another case involved a school shooting at Santa Fe High School perpetrated by Dimitrios Pagourtzis, a self-identified admirer of Nazism, who killed ten persons and injured another 14.

Common Predominant Energy

The purpose of producing a quantitative and qualitative analysis is to examine the existence of comparable patterns that span the national cases of Germany, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Therefore, the final measurement tool of common predominant energy should compound the results from the previous three operationalized mechanisms into discernible themes. The following thematic findings do indeed support the argument that there is a perceptible wave of FRT.

Combining the findings regarding the international nature of FRT and the type of terrorist activity provides us with an overview of the type of FRT activity occurring over the past ten years. The exponential growth of cases after 2014 (a 360% increase) seems to correlate with Europe's sudden influx of mainly Syrian refugees during the height of the migration crisis. The cross-national comparison supports this finding for Germany (63%), Scandinavia (77.9%), and the United Kingdom (55.9%); they are mainly related to attacks against Muslim individuals, Islamic facilities, or refugee centers. In the case of the United States (25.9%) the targeting of Muslims in general can be seen as a more muted response to the migration crisis, with a larger focus on Islamic terrorism. Thus, there exists a commonality in target types for FRT. Moreover, many of these incidents targeted infrastructure (48.8%) as opposed to the next most frequent type, namely armed assaults (24.6%). Similar results concerning the assailant's method of attack can be observed, where the average across cases in the use of incendiary devices amounts to 68.4%.

Figure 7. Aggregate of target types, and attack types for the study's selected countries, 2009 - 2018

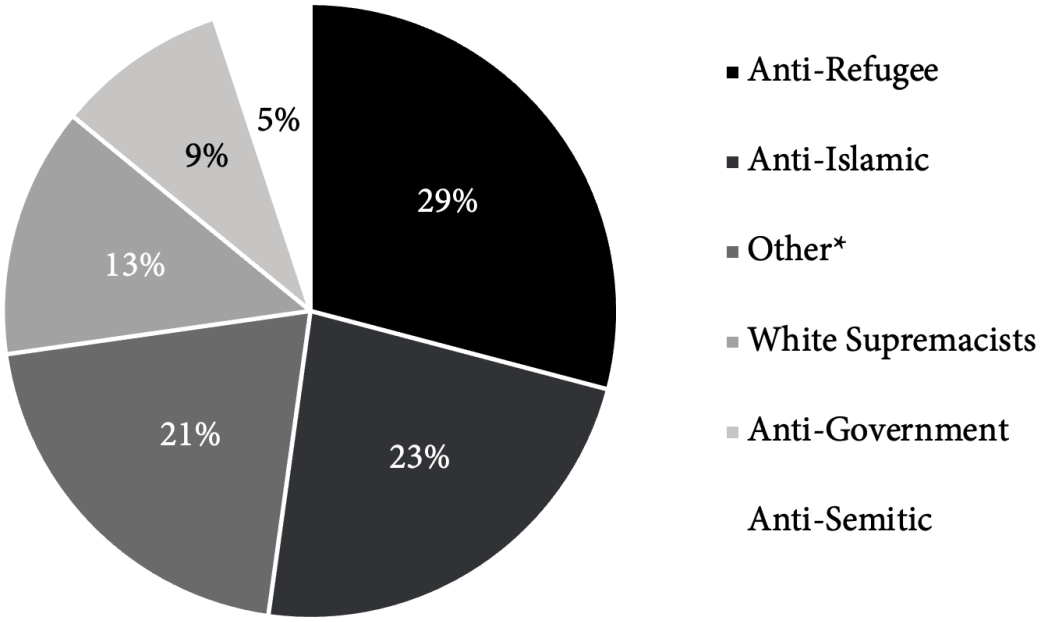


*Bombings/Explosions, Assasinations, Hostage Situations
**Includes attacks on abortion facilities, immigrants, private businesses, religious facilities (non-Islamic, non-Jewish), the LGBT community and schools.

Comparing these results to the qualitative case study of individual assailants provides a complementary but complex picture of extremist motives. Bridging the outlined cases is the recurrent narrative that outsiders—according to the data set, predominantly Muslim individuals—threaten the ideological core ideas and safety of right-wing extremist communities and the wider ethno-European populaces in general. On multiple occasions, assailants either targeted Muslim persons, asylum complexes, or government officials who promoted pro-refugee policies. These grievances are showcased in the motives of Anders Breivik, Frank S.,

Werner S., Ali David Sonboly, Anton Pettersson, Darren Osborne, Marek Zakrocki, Thomas Mair, Hicks and Lloyd, and KC Tard.[55] Perhaps the most alarming finding is the copying of ideological interpretations that have followed Breivik's massacre and manifesto in 2011. Using Breivik as a martyr, part of the FRT community continues to justify and inspire others to conduct similar large-scale attacks on society.[56] Moreover, this syndrome of mimicking extremist events also transcends to the ideologically connected school shooting and involuntary celibate movement that can be found mainly in the United States.

Figure 8. Aggregate of motives for the study's selected countries, 2009 - 2018



*Includes anti-abortion, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBT, conspiracy inspired, involuntary celibates, revenge, trump inspired and undefined.

The transnational character of various organizations' networks links many FRT incidents. White supremacist associations share across national borders similar ideological themes, based on fears of foreign infiltration and the alleged Islamization of the Western world. PEGIDA in Germany, Britain First, the English Defense League and NRM (and subcommunities) use similar framings of a perceived existential threat as justification for targeting refugees and Muslims. Moreover, these organizations share ongoing communications, propaganda, racist content, and violent tactics to prevent the alleged Islamization of the West.[57]

Conclusion

This article aimed to answer the question whether the recent rise of FRT amounts to a new wave of terrorism. Proposing FRT as the next wave of terrorism requires the demonstration that all of Rapoport's criteria are present when evaluating the available evidence. Through the operationalization of the theory's descriptive elements for evaluating the existence of a new wave, the present study was able to analyze the phenomenon with the help of a number of variables existing in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The examination revealed the presence of the four key elements and their common characteristics. As a result, this article agrees with Auger's assessment that far-right terrorism can indeed be classified as an observable emerging new wave of terrorism. Such a conclusion is justified since a cross-national comparison managed to identify common themes and patterns occurring throughout the data set.

The ideological basis for the justification of right-wing extremism is the fear of an Islamization of the Western "Christian" world, with the White race losing its privileges. This alleged threat to the ethno-

European culture permeates far-right extremist discourse across the four cases examined.[58] The slogan of an impending "White genocide" has become a tool for enemy image creation and for fostering hatred against Muslim communities. Multiple studies have documented the existence of Islamophobia [59], and hatred directed toward refugees and asylum seekers [60], as well as the presence of paranoia in extreme right-wing circles with regard to the Muslim community in the selected countries.[61] For example, Acim's research documented the surge in Islamophobia linked to the events of 9/11, the subsequent war on terror, and the more recent refugee influx into Western Europe.[62]

Capitalizing on the more widespread concerns about the growing presence of refugees, asylum seekers and Muslim diasporas, right-wing extremists have created provocative narratives in efforts to persuade larger sectors of mainstream society that their vision is correct.[63] By securitizing Muslims and Islam they seek to convince 'ordinary' citizens of the validity of their far-right beliefs. The phenomenon of attacks on members of Muslim minority communities by seemingly ordinary civilians without direct links to known far-right organizations is generating an entirely new field of study within political extremism research, called "unaffiliated terrorism." [64] The concept of "unaffiliated terrorism", refers to more or less spontaneous hate crimes by individuals acting out a psychological impulse.[65] The source of such acts of violence is often fear from the ostensible "other".[66] For example, Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office discloses that only 33% of incidents involving attacks against refugees (individuals or infrastructure) could be linked to existing far-right organizations.[67] This finding is comparable to the 64% of cases demonstrated in Figure 3—cases reflecting anti-refugee motives without direct connection to White supremacy groups.

White supremacist organizations present a clear example of weaponizing insecurities and portraying these as existential problems of race and culture. Many individuals (13%) within the four case studies associated themselves with such organizations, although many of these incidents within GTD do not make a direct reference to a specific supremacist group. An inherent sign of their collectiveness are the frequent references to a "White genocide". Neo-Nazi groups capture the "White thymos"(mood) of rage, resentment and anger associated with losing the perceived Caucasian entitlement in the world.[68] These views have resulted in a series of violent events, including numerous attacks against refugees and asylum seekers in Europe, assassination attempts against pro-immigrant politicians and mass shootings in Europe and the United States.[69]

The recurrent theme of a "White genocide" is also a significant motivator in the many copycat incidents of FRT which can be found in the GTD data set. Assailants that cite previous right-wing-inspired terrorist attacks as their motivation include Sonboly, Pettersson, Osborne, Mair, Pagourtzis, Bowers, and Harper-Mercer. Langman defines this mimicking as radicalized individuals looking for "infamous" role models.[70] Many follow-up perpetrators seem to revere the "god-like" stature of previous attackers, having conducted extensive research on these assailants. This has sometimes led to an imitation of previous assaults and even to selecting the anniversary of a previous attack as time for their own, as in the case of David Sonboly on the fifth anniversary of Breivik's attack.[71] As noted earlier, the copying of language is also a common feature of some of these attacks. Examples include the repeated phrases of protecting the country against "foreign infiltration", the "want to kill Muslims", and the need of putting the native population "first."[72] The phenomenon of copycat crimes deserves significantly more research than it has received so far.

Moreover, findings based on data from the GTD suggest that incidents related to Islamic terrorism have often created a reciprocal reaction by right-wing extremists. In the case of the United Kingdom, multiple Islamist-inspired terrorist events triggered extremist responses from right-wing individuals. There were, for instance, four revenge incidents after the killing of the British soldier Lee Rigby. For example, in retaliation, Pavlo Lapshyn detonated a pipe bomb outside a mosque in Tipton. In June 2017, Darren Osborne drove his vehicle into Muslim pedestrians outside a Welfare House, calling this a retaliatory attack for the London Bridge incident. There have been similar cases in the United States often stemming from paranoia against Muslims. Such occurrences include a group of assailants shouting "ISIS, ISIS" while attacking a person from Bangladesh, multiple attacks referencing the color of an individual's skin or their Islamic religion as a sign of being a "terrorist," and the "Punish a Muslim Day" campaign.[73]

The importance of establishing the existence of a new wave of terrorism is not to be understated. The current fixation of many researchers on Jihadist terrorism fails to account for the changing dynamics of extremism both in Europe and in North America. Therefore, the findings presented here aim to promote a reorientation of the field while also providing a basis for comparing the new FRT wave with the previous (and still ongoing) religious one. Moreover, based on some of the recurring patterns discussed above, more research in general needs to be directed at FRT, for instance regarding unaffiliated terrorism, reciprocal radicalization, and copycat terrorism. In addition, with COVID-19's effects on the world's political, economic, and social functioning, there is a clear need to improve our understanding of the radicalization mechanisms that can influence ordinary citizens during times of insecurity. Ultimately, FRT presents a multidimensional challenge for researchers to unpack, with several avenues to explore. By having outlined various trends emerging from this exploration of the GTD data set in the light of Rapoport's wave theory, the author of this article hopes to inspire further research along these lines.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

[1] Far-Right Extremism is defined based on Bjørgo and Ravndal's (2019) study on signaling factors of right-wing extremism. These elements include cultural, ethnic, or racial nationalism and therefore represent a broad scope of application to cases of extremism. A larger working definition is provided further in the text. For more information see: Bjørgo, T. and Ravndal, J. (2019) *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19624.

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Extremist Exploitation of the Context Created by COVID-19 and the Implications for Australian Security

by Kristy Campion, Jamie Ferrill, and Kristy Milligan

Abstract

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, extremists around the world have to all appearances sought to exploit the disruption to serve their own strategic or ideological means and ends. In order to understand the threat posed by such extremists in the Australian national security context, this study investigates how extremists incorporated contemporary events in Australia and beyond its borders into their COVID-19-related narratives. This article traverses three ideological milieus and examines violent Salafi-Jihadism, the extreme right, and the extreme left. By studying how ideological milieus interact with the current pandemic context, it is possible to observe the fluctuation of ideological constructs through the identified narratives. These narratives were not solely propagated online as may have been expected: instead, there was observable offline dissemination as well. While little was found on the extreme left, this study found that violent Salafi-Jihadist and extreme-right milieus interpreted COVID-19 in ideologically self-serving ways. In some cases, COVID-19 was used to buttress existing narratives, while there was also evidence of narrative diversification, with seemingly ideologically contradictory positions adopted. These impact national security in Australia in three ways: first, buttressing may reinforce extremist distrust of authorities and cement positions; second, diversification complicates the threatscape by challenging efficient identification; third, the co-optation of idiosyncratic conspiracies has exposed the vulnerability of democratic societies to misinformation.

Keywords: Australia, COVID-19, pandemic, terrorism, extremism, ideology, narratives

Introduction

Since the end of 2019, the emergence of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in China's Wuhan province has had a devastating impact around the world. By 25 November 2021, more than 258,164,425 people had contracted the virus and another 5,166,192 people had died as a result of the virus.[1] The impact of COVID-19, however, extends beyond the loss of human lives expressed in casualty statistics. Since early 2020, it has been possible to observe that the pandemic has been incorporated into extremist narratives, and exploited to further extremist objectives. This study examines how extremist milieus in Australia integrated COVID-19 into their narratives and ideologies. We drew on domestic incidents, reporting and online chatter foremost; this was supplemented with international data which provided greater situational awareness. We examined the three main extremist milieus in the Australian threatscape: violent Salafi-Jihadist (VSJ), extreme right-wing (XRW), and extreme left-wing (XLW). To better contextualize engagement with the COVID-19 context, we also reviewed the pre-COVID-19 engagement of extremists with Australian political affairs.

Initially, this study was a response to observations of how the environment created by COVID-19 could be exploited by extremists to achieve strategic goals. Among these goals can be the intention to stoke or enhance community fears, rupture community cohesion, and erode community resilience. In times of uncertainty and fear, extremists tend to believe they will flourish, being desirous of harnessing unrest to achieve their own strategic ends—normally through some form of violent revolution. There were discussions in the media that extremists were undermining community confidence in governments through the online propagation of conspiracy theories and misinformation.[2] These campaigns were also suggested to provide a platform for extremist recruitment and mobilization.[3]

In the Australian context, the two main movements likely to engage in such activity come from VSJ and XRW, as indicated by Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) Director-General Mike Burgess

in February 2020.[4] While we were collecting data, ASIO reported that XRW threats had increased, consuming between 30–40% of their priority counter-terrorism caseload, flagging social media as a contributing factor.[5] By October 2020, Deputy Commissioner Ian McCartney of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) told a Senate estimates committee that XRW threats were growing, and increasingly targeting young people online—while also acknowledging that VSJ terrorism remained a substantial threat.[6] A push by the Australian Labour Party (ALP) ultimately led to a bipartisan effort to understand the national security implications of the COVID-19 environment via the Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia—the final report of which remains undisclosed despite a 30 April 2021 deadline.[7] The present study therefore seeks to expand upon this knowledge from an academic perspective by analyzing ideological fluctuations of extremist milieus and assessing the implications for Australian national security.

Our study found that COVID-19 has complicated the national security threatscape due to extremists' ideological buttressing, diversification, and idiosyncratic co-optation. The two primary threats we noted in the Australian context are VSJ and XRW (echoing official statements), while insufficient data were found on XLW to establish it as a major threat. All three milieus interpreted COVID-19 in ideologically self-serving ways, most clearly in the case of VSJ, due to their single text authority (the Quran). XRW and XLW were more diversified, but also interpreted COVID-19 in ways which buttressed their pre-COVID-19 belief systems. Buttressing narratives may serve to deepen the distrust between extremists and authorities by cementing ideological positions. Diversified narratives pose a different challenge, as some have adopted seemingly contradictory beliefs or idiosyncratic conspiracies which can thwart efficient identification. This ideological fluctuation was enabled by information networks, both online and offline, which have connected extremists despite countermeasures. This has exposed the vulnerability of Western democracies such as Australia to misinformation originating from both international and domestic sources.

Approach and Methods

The research for this article employed a constructivist approach, which holds ideology as a central explanation for the beliefs, ideas, behaviors and identities which regulate human behavior.[8] This framework was further informed by Corbin and Strauss and their list of pragmatist and interactionist assumptions which was applied as a paradigm for understanding how extremists interact with each other.[9] To briefly touch on relevant assumptions, Corbin and Strauss suggested these pragmatic and interactionist assumptions: a) actions are the result of interactions across time, past, present, and an imagined future; b) actions may be preceded or succeeded by reflexive interactions and evaluations with oneself and others; c) actions are not always driven by rationality, and are often accompanied by emotion; d) the perspectives of actors are often influenced by their environment, or what Strauss calls "social worlds and subworlds"—which are often overlapping and potentially conflicting.

The approach recognizes the duality of knowing and doing, which, when orientated toward understanding extremists, would suggest symbiosis between knowledge and action, and by extension, ideology, and behavior. Significantly, Corbin and Strauss note that experience cannot be divorced from a multiplicity of overlapping and interacting contexts, spanning ethnicity, gender, society, politics, culture, and the way information is communicated.[10] In turn, this incorporates some measure of naturalistic inquiry, in which we can observe and interpret the activities of particular extremist subcultures and their subjective realities.[11] Naturalistic inquiry, moreover, allowed for a flexible approach to the investigation of the extremist milieus. The approach faces critiques for its limitations, which are routed in understanding issues within contexts based on interactions between material and ideational factors.[12] To overcome this, we aim to explore the interactions between the 'why' and the 'how' within Australia. This is, by itself, a further limitation as we seek to illuminate past and present engagement with stimuli relevant to this national context—while drawing on international evidence only where related.

With this approach in mind, the milieu selection was guided by findings from official reports on contemporary threats.[13] Then, data were identified and selected by the evidence of ideological alignment with existing

definitions on the nature of each threat over the course of one single year: 2020.[14] Data collection had four dimensions. First, information from the SITE Intelligence Group was examined for primary source material, with its data tagged as VSJ, XRW and XLW. Second, media reporting was canvassed for activities, attacks, artifacts and statements related to the three milieus. Third, data were harvested from Australian websites that were flagged by the media. Fourth, scholarly literature and reports were consulted where relevant to understanding the three milieus or COVID-19's relevance to national security. The use of specific encrypted social media or communication applications was beyond the scope of this study. Qualitative content analysis was then undertaken to highlight and distinguish key features or themes which demonstrated engagement with, or exploitation of, the context created by COVID-19. These key features were then contrasted against extremist engagement with context pre-COVID-19 in order to identify change or continuity. These were then analyzed with respect to the implications for Australian national security.

Emerging Perspectives

Across the literature we consulted, there is some consensus about the impact of COVID-19 on terrorism and national security. The first most dominant theme was the threat of such actors exploiting conspiracies and fear. The second theme was concerns that the virus would be weaponized against ideological targets. The third theme was the expansion of targeting to soft targets, including hospitals and Asians. The Australian far right has long targeted the Asian Australian community, motivated by ethno-nationalism, xenophobia, and the quest for White hegemony.[15] Attention must therefore turn to the specific Australian context, but to do this, we must first explore the critical convergence between national security, terrorism, and COVID-19. At the center of this convergence is ideology, which allows for the interaction between extremists and reality.

The first globally focused national security paper with specific COVID-19 relevance was written by Ackerman and Peterson.[16] They acknowledged that the pandemic would affect terrorism operations and listed ten possible effects of the pandemic. These ranged from the likelihood that some terrorist organizations would engage in social welfare to build legitimacy, to the possibility that COVID-19-related dislocation and disruption could lead to increased susceptibility to radicalization, especially via online networks, as terrorists prey on uncertainty. There may be a pause of mass casualty attacks for lack of populated spaces, or alternatively, hospitals burdened with the COVID-19 response may prove attractive targets. Targets such as shrines, memorials, prisons, and facilities may be selected, as social distancing may leave these areas under-protected. Lockdown measures could lead to a rise in anti-government sentiment due to containment politics and conspiratorial explanations of events. Terrorists may weaponize and deliberately spread the virus, become motivated to engage in bioterrorism, or apocalyptic or millenarian terrorists may simply be inspired by it. Finally, Ackerman and Peterson warn the counter-terrorism community against distraction, as terrorists may use it as an opportunity to launch attacks.

Similar themes were noted in a roundtable on COVID-19 and counterterrorism on an international scale held by Cruickshank and Rassler.[17] Their discussions touched on Salafi-jihadists framing COVID-19 as divine intervention. Meanwhile, the far right sought to exploit uncertainty, propagate anti-Semitic narratives, and champion state collapse and disorder. The roundtable also touched on the degradation of trust and on some disinformation campaigns which at times were leveraged by hostile state actors. While these authors also discussed bioterrorism in general, Cronin flagged that the weaponization of COVID-19 would perhaps kill a limited number of people a few weeks later, but "with hard-to-prove attrition" and limited publicity outcomes.[18] This is a key observation that was not emphasized in other emerging literature.

Some of these concerns were also present in Pantucci's work, such as the increased targeting of Asians as arguably influenced by senior American politicians blaming the "China virus".[19] Pantucci expanded further to discuss the likelihood of increased anti-government activity, the creation of extremist Luddites, and COVID-19 exploitation by fringe actors seeking to exacerbate niche fears. Another author, Basit, suggests that COVID-19 countermeasures have increased the chances of radicalization as people spend more time online, "looking for answers amid uncertainties" which could lead to an increase of lone-actor attacks.[20]

He highlights the propagation of conspiracies by extremists, with Islamic State (IS) incorporating COVID-19 in apocalyptic narratives, while the far right incorporates it as a way to accelerate disorder. Basit warns of terrorists exploiting drone technology, as it may be repurposed from deliveries to attack vehicles.

The weaponization concern is also evident in Stern, Ware and Harrington's research. They examine push and pull factors and the impact on targeting during COVID-19.[21] They argue that conspiracy theories have been exploited by the far right in the United States to control and capitalize on fear. This has resulted in skepticism about COVID-19's origins and the role of science, widespread protests against perceived government infringements on liberty, a repurposing of anti-Semitic tropes and theories, and expansion into anti-5G rhetoric and targeting. They argue that three new targets have emerged: Asian Americans, medical facilities, and 5G infrastructure. Such infrastructure is perceived to be capable of firing radiation beams that cause the respiratory distress of COVID-19 patients: a conspiracy perpetuated by Russian broadcasters since 2016.[22] They suggest target hardening and vigilance against Trojan horse attackers in medical or police uniforms, responsible media reporting, and improved counternarrative and counterconspiracy campaigns.

Kruglanski et al. examined the narratives of VSJ and the far right using the 'Grievance, Culprit, and Method' model to understand justifications of violence.[23] They found that VSJ advanced two theories; one claimed that COVID-19 was created by the West, while the other considered COVID-19 a soldier of Allah. In response, VSJ encouraged using COVID-19 as a bioweapon, or capitalizing on the disorder to launch attacks against the West. By contrast, they argue that the far right attributed COVID-19 to a Jewish or Chinese conspiracy and sought to deliberately spread the virus, that they used COVID-19 control mechanisms like masks to obscure their identities during violent actions, and finally capitalized on it to generally promote chaos. The solution proposed by Kruglanski et al. was increased vigilance and a call to governments to provide "an alternative coherence, one based on science and rationality" as well as "disavow their own supporters who promote bigoted conspiracy theories under the guise of liberty".[24] Ong and Azman also examined XRW and VSJ calls for violence, finding that while IS messaging has focused on encouraging attacks amidst health warnings, the far right promotes conspiracy theories and attacks aimed at weaponizing the virus.[25]

When Daymon and Criezis examined 442 items of IS-supporter content, they found eleven key narratives which exposed IS's COVID-19 framing attempts.[26] Among these were claims that the West or Jews created the virus in a laboratory, that it was divine punishment, and framing COVID-19 as payback against their enemies. Other content, however, was more about mocking enemies. The most prominent of the themes identified by Daymon and Criezis were counting the number of deceased, COVID-19 as divine punishment and payback, and references to holy scripture. Norlen, however, emphasized that jihadi messaging is rarely unified, and often conflicting, which could impact the overall mission and the survivability of the group.[27] Significantly, Norlen also demonstrated how even absolutist and narrow doctrines could become subject to interpretation on the basis of contemporary events such as pandemics, highlighting both theological and operational agility of jihadi terrorism.

State-specific studies are also emerging. Arianti and Taufiqurrohman examined the impact in Indonesia and suggest that pro-IS groups are using the COVID-19 context to call for attacks, portraying the government as having been weakened.[28] Anti-Chinese rhetoric is prominent on Indonesian VSJ channels (although it is not reflected in targeting). Beyond this, Alexander considered the potential impacts in northern Syria detention camps holding members of IS and suggested that COVID-19 would complicate an already complex humanitarian and security challenge.[29] Notably, she flagged that defiance of COVID-19 countermeasures is a way in which detainees seek to change their circumstances, as many also subscribe to the IS interpretation for the virus as the wrath of Allah.

Shire examined terrorist and insurgent activity in Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia throughout the pandemic, based on the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) data set.[30] They found that the Taliban, Ha-at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and Al Shabaab have been forced to step into humanitarian vacuums and deliver health services, set up quarantine facilities, and engage in COVID-19 awareness campaigns, while concomitantly launching attacks and destabilizing activities. Whilst the Taliban and HTS initially framed

COVID-19 as an act of God, Al Shabaab maintained it was a crusader-driven conspiracy. Despite this, all three groups initially leveraged the pandemic to attack hard targets on the one hand, whilst delivering health interventions on the other. Hockey and Jones also examined Al Shabaab's response and noted that neither the group nor the government had sufficient responses to limit transmission and treat those infected.[31]

Other research specifically looks at far-right engagement with the pandemic. Perry, Grubbs and Whitehead examined Christian nationalists in the context of COVID-19 and found that the far right was not driven by religiosity, but instead, showed ideological disregard for scientific expertise.[32] Their control group demonstrated a distrust for mainstream media, a belief that Americans were God's chosen people, and sympathy for Trump-style nationalism, which in turn correlated with incautious behaviors. Vieten examined far-right expressions and mobilization during COVID-19 to suggest that pandemic populism is on the rise.[33] They argue that the COVID-19 has exposed the reterritorialization of governance, increasing fears of the mythic 'other', while driving a 'moral panic' cycle that combines antiestablishment sentiment with ethno-nationalist xenophobia.

Beyond scholarly literature, a substantial body of professional commentary has also emerged. Commentators on the far right have discussed the "conspiratorial cesspool" which rejects the "medical industrial complex" and has thus united Science Denial (SD) groups with anti-lockdown and alternative medicine movements and weaponized the science-denial position.[34] Others note that the pandemic has accelerated recruitment for the far right, buoyed by ethnically focused grievance narratives.[35] Commentary on VSJ terrorism has spanned the opportunity to sow division and distrust through disinformation, to fundraising during the pandemic by exploiting online sales of medical equipment, to making gains whilst government resources are diverted to COVID-19 countermeasures.[36] Byman and Ammunson highlighted that prior to COVID-19, VSJ terrorism during the pandemic tended to accelerate home-grown attacks.[37] Less commentary exists on the extreme left. One commentary piece by Henshaw suggested that COVID-19 has influenced a ceasefire between left-wing guerrilla groups while criminal syndicates step into humanitarian roles.[38] In sum, this brief literature review suggests that more research on ideological constructions of context by extreme milieus is needed.

Ideological Realities and Subjectivities

To reiterate, this study assumes a correlation of knowing and doing, or knowledge and action. Applied to terrorism studies, this approach can demonstrate the potential for ideology to lead to violence.[39] Generally, ideology explains the shortcomings of the existing order, imagines an ideal alternative, and proposes a way to achieve it.[40] Further, ideology organizes social representations and facilitates alignment between actions, interactions, and group goals. Extremist ideology takes these ideas, as its namesake implies, to an extreme: it explains the existing order as flawed beyond redemption, and proscribes a violent (and often purifying or cleansing) revolution to achieve a utopian future. This anchors ideological perspectives in the existing order. As suggested by Althusser, ideology exists in practice, and its existence is material and observable in what its adherents say and do.[41] In the COVID-19 context, it is possible to observe how extremists engaged with current events and context in their narratives. This occurs even where the link between the context and the group is tangential at best.

VSJ: Pre-COVID-19 Engagement with Context in Australia

The alignment between engagement with context and ideological narratives is present in VSJ narratives related to the Australian context. For the purpose of this article, VSJ refers to the adoption of VSJ ideology in which violent action is mandated as both obligatory and necessary. It may be expected that Australian current affairs are hardly prominent for VSJ ideology, and yet they feature in VSJ narratives. By way of example, in 2018 a disgruntled former employee of a major strawberry producer began to insert needles into the produce, creating widespread warnings and recalls from Australian retailers, thereby damaging the Australian strawberry industry for a time. On 21 September, 24 September, and 26 September that same

year, IS supporters such as Muharir al-Ansar and Ansar ul-Haqq began to create and distribute material suggesting that IS was behind the needles. Among their communication were statements transposed upon images of strawberries, such as: 'Australia, harvest time has come into your homes', 'in your food you will find special flavors that we have prepared for you', and '[w]e will never allow you to enjoy the taste of what you desire'.[42]

Strawberries are not the only example of international VSJ engagement with domestic affairs; in 2019, VSJ in *Al Naba* urged violence against the "crusader soldiers" of Australia and New Zealand.[43] Again in 2020, during the Australian Black Summer bushfire crisis, an IS-aligned group interpreted the bushfires as divine retribution: Allah, according to the authors, sends these signs to the "unjust" so that they repent and return to Islam.[44] That Australian natural disasters could feature in VSJ narratives is significant because it demonstrates the incorporation of new—and often unrelated—context into ideological narratives. Obviously, there are strategic considerations beyond this incorporation, as with any propaganda product, but it nonetheless exposes the manner in which extremists ascribe to a certain reality, in this case bushfires as a sign from Allah. In such a way, international narratives show engagement with the domestic Australian context.

XRW: Pre-COVID-19 Engagement with Context in Australia

Interaction with context is also noticeable between domestic and international XRW prior to the COVID-19 context. For the purpose of this study, XRW is conceptualized as a heterogeneous grouping of organizations, individuals and subcultures whose political beliefs align with the core XRW precepts.[45] This definition includes neo-Nazis, fascists, nationalists, and the sovereign citizen/freeman movement. The Australian XRW may be fragmented, but its adherents commonly seek connection and validation with international peers and organizations.[46] In recent years, the international XRW milieus have lauded Australian XRW. In January 2019, by way of example, international Stormfront members feted the Australian XRW for scuffling with anti-fascist activists at a rally, invoking the Cronulla race riots as a combative and righteous tradition. The terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 March 2019 by Australian right-wing terrorist Brenton Tarrant was widely celebrated by XRW around the world—a clear demonstration of interaction between international and Australian XRW activities. Tarrant's international relevance was then observable in further attacks, such as those in El Paso and Baerum, where attackers cited Tarrant's ideology and manifesto—a further demonstration of ideological interaction. This interaction was also observable domestically: shortly after 15 March, a mosque in Brisbane was subject to vandalism and graffiti, with images of swastikas and phrases such as "remove kebab" and "St (sic) Tarrant".[47]

An indication of international-domestic engagement can also be found in the Sovereign Citizen Movement (SCM). The right-wing ideological overlap of anti-government, White-supremacist, anti-Semitic, and conspiracist themes has been evident within SCM since its inception. The SCM originated in the United States as an anti-government ideology in the early 1970s before expanding to develop a transnational presence in Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia, and Russia.[48] The SCM moniker is an umbrella term to numerous anti-government movements that share the core underpinning ideological belief that the government is a corrupt corporate entity that has no legitimate authority to impose taxes, enforce laws, or restrict their free movement.[49]

SCM activity prior to COVID-19 predominantly manifested itself as vexatious litigation to avoid legal and financial recourse by government entities.[50] The increasing presence of SCM proponents in Australia led to terrorism legislation being applied to SCM-adherent John Mathers (pseudonym) after he was found to possess prohibited weapons and instructional material relating to the production of 3D-printed firearms and improvised explosive devices.[51] Mathers sent a death threat to a member of parliament, accusing him of treason and threatening he would "be hung until he was dead" and "no mercy, no prisoners".[52] The seriousness of these threats and violent actions have resulted in SCMs being regarded as an extremist domestic terrorist threat by the FBI,[53] while in Australia they were noted as a potential terrorism threat

in a 2015 NSW Police report.[54] The international XRW milieus such as SCM therefore have a domestic anchorage prior to the COVID-19 context as was also the case with VSJ and, to a lesser extent, XLW.

XLW: Pre-COVID-19 Engagement with Context

For the purposes of this study, 'left-wing extremism' (XLW) refers to disaggregated groupings from milieus associated with hard and soft left-wing ideologies, who hold violence as being necessary and mandated to achieve their goals. Much like other Western democracies, Australia has its own anti-fascist (ANTIFA) movement. However, this movement catalyzes primarily as counter-protest activism, mobilizing against fascism and racism. They have been known to engage in street riots and dox members of the far right. This type of activity does not meet the threshold for violence required to constitute terrorism according to definitions like the Academic Consensus from Schmid.[55] While XLW violence remains a severe and ongoing threat in parts of Europe such as Italy [56], such levels have not been reached in Australia for decades.[57]

In most of the official submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Extremism and Radicalism in Australia in 2020, XLW was noted to be a low security threat. This was supported by submissions from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF). The Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), noted that "left-wing extremism is not currently prominent in Australia".[58] The Victorian Police (VICPOL) submission stated there was a "symbiotic relationship" between XLW and XRW—a finding not confirmed in open sources.[59] As we could not identify or collect sufficient information related to XLW in the Australian context, we subsequently redirected our efforts to the two major threat natures identified by authorities: XRW and VSJ.

Engagement with the COVID-19 Context

Based on this brief overview of the pre-pandemic situation, it is possible to identify how international narratives can engage with Australian milieus or contexts. Ideology is interactional, with adherents constantly engaging with and interpreting the current context, regardless of the retrograde nature of some of these interpretations. It was therefore assumed that extremists would engage with the COVID-19 context and interpret reality and events in ideologically meaningful ways. This highlights two things: the subjectivity of ideological realities, and ideological proclivity to adapt and change with context. It should be expected, therefore, that extremists will engage with current events, as exemplified by an IS-aligned media outfit describing the Australian Black Summer bushfire crisis as divine punishment in January 2020. From as early as January 2020, however, extremists also interacted with COVID-19 in their narratives, despite it not being formally recognized as a public health emergency by WHO until 1 February and ultimately labeled a pandemic on 11 March 2020. We now turn to these interactions, beginning with VSJ.

VSJ: Divine Will, Punishment, and Redemption

Internationally, VSJ has interpreted the COVID-19 context in a number of ways, some of which are already detailed above. By 17 March 2020, some VSJ had referred to COVID-19 as being the "soldier of Allah", while in *Naba* 226 they asked Allah to use it against the 'crusaders' in revenge for attacks like those in Mosul and Sirte.[60] Others, such as the second issue of the *Voice of Hind* suggested that COVID-19 was sent by Allah to distract nonbelievers and make them more opportune targets. Al Qaeda Central (AQC) specifically issued a communication advising followers that Allah required them to repent their sins, return to the bosom of Allah, care for the poor, and engage in jihad on behalf of Allah.[61] The *Al Haqq* publication shared similar interpretations, claiming that COVID-19 was a punishment sent by Allah, in which the only cure was to return to Allah.[62] This view was also propagated by leaders of Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and the Afghan Taliban in their communications. They positioned COVID-19 as punishment for transgressions. This was echoed by IS spokesman Abu Hamza Al-Qurashi in May 2020. The anchor for ideological interpretations

of COVID-19 amongst VSJ, then, became divine power and suggestions of divine will. COVID-19 was seen either as a punishment for transgressors (including both Muslims and the West), or a chance for redemption.

By June, this had pivoted slightly as VSJ began to comment on the toll of COVID-19 on Western economies and lives, such as in *Naba* 327 and in *One Ummah*.[63] COVID-19 was referred to as the "invisible soldier" of Allah, wreaking havoc amongst Western populations. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) joined this conversation in August, celebrating the impact of COVID-19 in the West, which was seen to have drunk from a "cup of torment" not seen by the "naked eye."[64] By September 2020 the messaging changed and groups such as AQAP began encouraging lone actor attacks in the West once more. This was reaffirmed in the *Wolves of Manhattan* Issue 1, associated with Al Qaeda, which suggested using face masks to conceal one's identity during attacks.[65] This aligns with pre-COVID-19 messaging, but also leverages COVID-19 to pivot to redemption narratives through violent jihad. This relatively coherent messaging is likely related to the singular authority of the Quran (with no single text shaping XRW and XLW milieus). This international context can be used as a comparison point for the domestic context.

In Australia specifically, there were two attacks related to VSJ ideology. In October 2020, incarcerated terrorist Momena Shoma stabbed a fellow inmate.[67] Shoma was charged with a terrorist offense, but it cannot be established if COVID-19 conditions impacted her prison experience. In December 2020, police shot and killed Raghe Abdi in Brisbane as he allegedly tried to attack them, yelling "Allahu Akbar".[66] He is believed to have been aligned to a VSJ ideology, and had been subject to previous monitoring by ASIO and Queensland police. As the inquest is still in progress, we were unable to ascertain the extent to which COVID-19 was a factor (if at all). Beyond this, a Canberra journalist who identified as a White, nationalist Muslim (and who made beheading threats after the Christchurch attacks in 2019) was arrested toward the end of 2020 in connection with terrorism act–related offenses in Brisbane. It was suggested in the media that he planned to obtain and train with firearms.[68] It is unknown at the time of this writing whether ideological interpretations of COVID-19 were a factor. Reports from ASIO and AFP officials maintained that VSJ remained a significant component of their work throughout 2020, although investigations do not always result in prosecution.

XRW: Blame, Oppose, and Destabilize

Timothy Wilson, an XRW-affiliated individual in the US, was an early exploiter of the COVID-19 context. He encouraged others to deliberately spread COVID-19 to politicians, police officers and those attending synagogues. He was later shot and killed by the FBI while attempting to construct a bomb to be planted at a hospital which was treating people affected by COVID-19. By 2 March, some XRW were encouraging followers to use COVID-19 in the service of accelerationist goals of bringing about the ultimate destruction of society through exacerbating ethnic tensions or destroying immigrant populations. COVID-19, then, was accepted as real and potentially lethal and an element of the contemporary context that could be weaponized against enemies. This included encouragement to catch COVID-19 and maliciously spread it to targets such as mosques, synagogues, ethnic neighborhoods, and public transport. Some, such as the Russian Imperial Legion, maintained COVID-19 was man-made, while others attributed its creation specifically to Jews or the Chinese. XRW narrative creation also incorporated COVID-19 to buttress existing narratives decrying globalism, immigration, and modern society in general. Where other narratives existed, such as those related to Science Denial groups with respect to 5G phone networks, XRW channels encouraged users to exploit them and escalate hysteria.[69]

Counter-lockdown rallies began to take place around the world, especially in the United States, and were attended by diverse XRW milieus. Some adopted other narratives, e.g., in the case of one rally held in Austin, Texas, on 26 April, with the crowd chanting "arrest Bill Gates", claiming he created the virus.[70] Rumors abounded that the COVID-19 vaccine would cause sterility, and that vaccinations would become mandatory. COVID-19 became a focal point for XRW protests in many countries. In the course of 2020, landscapes of XRW became more prominent as they opposed COVID-19 countermeasures. For instance, the

Nordic Resistance Movement claimed that the countermeasures were a manifestation of elite misconduct.[71] Cross sections of 3 Percenters, Oathkeepers, fundamentalist Christian groups, White supremacists, anti-government groups, and neo-Nazis could be found at various rallies and in demonstrations, identifiable by flags, tattoos, signs, and uniforms. This meant that many newcomers were exposed to their ideologies.

Such was also the case in the Australian context. By 15 March, Australian ethno-nationalists posted media content blaming the COVID-19 context on globalism, China, and elite deceit.[72] They incorporated anti-COVID-19 rhetoric into their long-standing racist and xenophobic agenda. As Australia initiated COVID-19 countermeasures, reports began to surface of violence against Australians of Asian descent, with women targeted in the majority of 178 recorded incidences.[73] Such reports indicate ideological alignment with existing anti-Asian narratives in the Australian extreme right.[74] This type of propaganda was subsequently shared by international XRW as reported by SITE Intelligence. Domestic XRW seemed positively disposed toward COVID-19, viewing it as an event they could exploit to keep foreigners out of Australia, in line with their racist and xenophobic beliefs. The attacks against Australia's Asian population also continued. In one notable event, a man cracked a whip outside the Chinese Consulate in Sydney in a threatening manner, with the act being shared to Stormfront.[75] COVID-19 also became a vehicle for anti-Semitism, with the Australian Hate Crime Network (AHCN) noting that that Jews were also being accused of creating the virus, aligning with preexisting anti-Semitism in Australia.[76] Australian XRW were also encouraged by US milieus to form small cells, go offline, and coordinate with the Nationalist Socialist Network (NSN) to disrupt Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests.[77] This aligned, again, with preexisting hostilities to left-wing politics. COVID-19 was used to buttress preexisting ideological beliefs, and further highlight the alleged peril posed by Asian immigration, globalism, left-wing opponents, and Jews.

Demonstrations against COVID-19 countermeasures (masks, lockdowns) began in May 2020, with some elements claiming that COVID-19 was a globalist conspiracy, and that the government was tyrannical. Videos of Australian protestors being arrested were shared in American XRW forums. Significant media attention soon focused on the Australian SCM, and the movement quickly gained prominence. Australian police reported an increased trend of people refusing to supply their identification at state border roadblocks, citing their SC status as a means to bypass laws and immunity from countermeasures.[78] The use of force by police to gain entry to vehicles was not limited to border controls, with police also having to smash the window of an SCM individual's vehicle in order to arrest them. The representations of these incidents in the media may have had an adverse effect, with more individuals accessing online forums seeking legal and illegal methods to avoid measures imposed by authorities. SCM ideology also featured in a website supposedly launched by a serving police officer who also disseminated SC material while being involved in frontline active duties.[79] As COVID-19 countermeasures increased, the SC rhetoric was joined by conspiracist and anti-vaccination expressions. This manifestation of the Australian SCM featured anti-government messaging, opposition to vaccines, and COVID-19 denial among others.

The confluence of anti-government, anti-law enforcement, civil rights uprisings, and conspiracist sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic was possibly exacerbated by countermeasures and by increased unemployment resulting from closures of businesses considered as offering only nonessential services. Factors driving the SCM adoption could be related to individuals or groups seeking to avoid financial and legal obligations or consequences, or result from increased negative attitudes toward government and law enforcement representatives. On numerous occasions, law enforcement officers were filmed engaging with SCM supporters or arresting them for a diverse array of breaches related to COVID-19 countermeasures. While traditional XRW sought to weaponize COVID-19 biologically or politically to serve ideological agendas, the SCM could be observed to reject COVID-19 countermeasures as 'evidence' of government oppression and tyranny. Here, engagement with context can highlight the ways through which narratives can become reactive and diversified.

This type of activity is not inconsequential. SC Juha Kiskonen was jailed in mid-2020 for charges associated with using a carriage service to menace or harass, and firearms offenses involving a gel-blaster pistol. He was also alleged to have encouraged the hanging of police as traitors. He had been monitored by the New

South Wales Fixated Persons Unit since October 2019.[80] Court records indicated that "the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to contribute to a sudden interest in conspiracy theories about the virus and concerns over quarantine restrictions. Many individuals searched for answers via social media and encountered sovereign citizen ideology, which appeared to offer an answer to these concerns. Many individuals appeared to draw upon the involvement of Mr. Kiskonen."[81] SC activity was, however, only part of XRW activism.

Throughout 2020, an influx of newcomers and reformers could be identified in the Australian milieus. The Order of Nine Angles (O9A) claimed to have an Australian presence called the "RapeWaffen Division".[82] During marches and protests, a variety of XRW flags could be seen among the broader anti-lockdown banners, including those from the Illuminating Army, conspiracists, anti-5Gers, White supremacists, Boogalooers, and SCM. Guy Fawkes masks were sold, popular radical-right commentators were sought, and Bill Gates was demonized (Australians chanted "arrest Bill Gates" only two weeks after such chants at the Austin, Texas rally). This demonstrates interconnectivity and contagion between domestic and transnational milieus and narratives.

There were also counterterrorism raids against XRW-aligned individuals in 2020. In March, two brothers were arrested by the NSW Joint Counter Terrorism Team in relation to terrorism act offenses. While there was no publicly identifiable link to COVID-19, it was nonetheless significant as these were the second XRW terrorism-related arrests in Australian history. Toward the end of 2020, a young man in Albury was arrested in relation to terrorism act offenses underpinned by XRW ideology, allegedly for inciting a mass casualty attack. It is not clear if COVID-19 played any role in this case as it has not yet gone to the courts. In both cases, no attack eventuated. In general, so far violence appears to be largely in the form of small-scale acts, often targeting Australians of Asian descent.

It appears that certain factors associated with COVID-19 have been summarily exploited in the service of a preexisting ideology. We refer to this as buttressing: when existing narratives are integrated with COVID-19 to reinforce narratives against existing targets (e.g., Jewish Australians, Australians of Asian descent, left-wing opponents) who are blamed for COVID-19 in a variety of ways. What also took place is co-optation *between* ideological systems, which we refer to as diversification. This takes place when narratives adopt positions seemingly new or at odds with existing positions. This explains why SCM systems included QAnon conspiracism, and why traditional XRW adopted some SCM positions on government oppression.

XLW: Righteousness, Disobedience, and Revolution

Much as with XRW, the diverse factions and milieus of XLW interpret reality in various ways, with subsequent distinctions in their final utopias. For example, Anarchists Worldwide called for ransomware attacks in lieu of robberies during lockdown, but this does not establish their engagement with COVID-19 specifically. Others may have subscribed to anti-5G conspiracy theories (such as the idea that 5G telecommunications towers caused COVID-19), as one XLW website championed attacks against 5G targets. This was echoed by the 325Nostate blog, arguing that "5G has a direct correlational relationship to the Coronavirus pandemic" by weakening the human immune system.[83] The situation was complicated on 25 May 2020 when an African American civilian, George Floyd, was killed by a White law enforcement officer in Minneapolis. This incident sparked months of Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism in the US and around the world, including in Australia, as anti-racism protestors converged with protesters positioned against police brutality, oppression, and other social issues. There was an observable increase in protest activities across Australia, with many of these events, attended by thousands of protesters, being coordinated across several major cities on the same date in each state.

This had little correlation with ideological interpretations of COVID-19. Elsewhere, XLW adherents were suspected of doxing politicians in Brazil for mishandling COVID-19, while Austrian XLW held that COVID-19 countermeasures unfairly impacted vulnerable societies. This was echoed by German and Argentinian XLW in June, who interpreted COVID-19 countermeasures as a mechanism for oppressing the poor and rebellious and as an excuse for enhancing government controls. In November, American XLW

claimed that politicians had encouraged COVID-19, and that US society was teetering toward civil war.[84] In sum, while international XLW largely accepted the reality of the devastating impacts resulting from COVID-19, it also circulated idiosyncratic narratives as exemplified by the anti-5G conspiracies. It also was deeply suspicious of enhanced government controls, aligning with preexisting ideological antipathy toward established authorities. In Australia, however, we were not able to gather sufficient information to draw substantiated conclusions reflecting this. Because of this and in conjunction with official statements, we instead focused on VSJ and XRW with respect to national security implications.

Implications for National Security

Extremist exploitation of the COVID-19 context has clear relevance to national security. Whenever ideologies proscribe violent action to accelerate the coming of a utopian system, it is imperative to consider the implications of that action. Terrorism is one method for extremists to approach their utopia, with violence being seen as purifying, cleansing, and restorative. As Fine and Sandstrom wrote, the "link between *is* and *ought*, as applied to a sphere of action, is at the heart of ideology."[85] That is, ideology enables a certain social vision to develop which is then deployed to articulate the gap between how things *are* and how things *ought* to be. That gap is sustained by the imagining of an oppressive or perverse power standing in the way to a golden future. Ideologies claim to provide actionable guidelines for how the problematic current order may be overturned in order to establish the utopian system; that is, measures to achieve how things *ought* to be. In mainstream ideologies, this change may be achieved through the ballot box, peaceful social activism, or by a change of habits. However, for extreme ideologies, violence is frequently considered essential for the new world order to come about. Violent narratives play a role in shaping ideological behavior: they can provide direction as well as a sense of urgency and purpose. This is how, and why, groups like Al Qaeda exalt terrorism tactics and martyrdom operations as legitimate tactics.[86] In the Australian national security context, this means that the threat of lone actors inspired by VSJ ideology endures. There are, of course, other implications for violent narratives found in the following key areas: narratives, truth and trust; and ideological diversification and idiosyncratization.

Narratives, Truth and Trust as Implications for National Security

Narratives are instruments through which ideology can be discursively brought to life, as these narratives usually construct perspectives on the current order. Halverson and Greenberg identified this dynamic in their examination of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) through a systemic analysis of AQIM texts.[87] They found that the embeddedness of myth in master narratives framed the current order in "the context of a discursive past in which the outcome is already known."[88] Al Qaeda's narratives for one are anchored in interpretations of Islamist purity and the vision of a Muslim utopia.[89] XRW narratives generally are rooted in dreams of a White ethno-state, while the SCM ideology enshrines noninterference from the state. These narratives serve to buttress ideology: to cement belief systems in which democracy, and democratically elected governments, are deemed illegitimate. Today such narratives are not only created by significant public figures: the Change Institute flagged an increasing democratization of narratives, and the migration of narratives through online and offline networks.[90]

The high volume of narratives constructed about COVID-19 have also highlighted the role of trust and distrust: for VSJ, it was trust in Allah, while both XRW and XLW demonstrated distrust in governments. In Australia, XRW narratives about government power and unjust oppression may have impacted the bond of trust between government and society. This, in turn, may influence some individuals on the margins of society to consider alternative ideologies, such as those associated with the XRW or XLW. Buttressing narratives may cement these positions, and challenge future disengagement efforts. This is impacted by social media portrayals, which can also influence how individuals understand and perceive the world around them. A number of experts have already highlighted the likelihood of increased online radicalization during COVID-19, due to the fact that countermeasures (such as lockdown) would increase user screen time and thereby the likelihood of exposure to radicalizing materials.[91]

However, online communication is not the sole information highway. In some parts of Australia, XRW (notably related to SCM) milieus met in gyms and other locations in person and often in defiance of COVID-19 countermeasures. Letter-drops also occurred in certain regions, with multiple letter disseminations in Canberra, the capital of Australia. One pamphlet dropped in Canberra letterboxes argued that COVID-19 would spread to water sources, eliminate 95% of the world's population as part of an alleged UN's eco-totalitarian Agenda 21, and enhance government control. It also claimed that vaccinations would contain tracking devices. While some such pamphlets may be mere hoaxes, it is still possible that some members of the public could accept such misinformation as truth.

Misinformation was and continues to be rife throughout the pandemic.[92] Traditionally, the media is considered the fourth estate, with an independent and trustworthy media viewed as an essential function in a democratic culture. Unfortunately, mass media sometimes fall short of the fourth-estate notion. In one case, a prominent Australian newspaper reported that COVID-19 had leaked from hotel quarantine due to an illicit love affair. This was proven to be unfounded, and was ultimately retracted, but only after it triggered an inquiry into the Victorian hotel quarantine scheme.[93] In the context of a global pandemic, such misinformation can spur mistrust in traditional media, creating yet another space for extreme ideological narratives to emerge and exploit. Beyond this, it could degrade the trust citizens hold in governments in the midst of a pandemic, and may lead to confusion about what information is trustworthy. This could lead citizens to turn elsewhere for answers, and potentially interact with narratives overtly or covertly disseminated by extremist actors. The way COVID-19 was portrayed and reported highlights the relevance of narratives, trust in institutions, and the dangers of misinformation in the context of national security.

Diversification as a National Security Challenge

COVID-19 countermeasures also became the impetus for demonstrations and rallies, which united diverse milieus in a common space (if not always for a common goal). This was especially relevant to traditional XRW milieus. While competing flags or standards were often seen at the same event, this did not necessarily imply that their ambitions aligned, only their grievances did. In the Australian case, this occurred back in 2013–15 with the protests at the Bendigo Mosque and at the Melton Housing Project, which provided the starting point from which numerous XRW groups emerged and subsequently evolved in various directions, adopting distinct narrative positions sometimes contrary to those formerly held. This means that milieus with ideological diversification may be harder to identify on the one hand, and manage on the other.

For example, the profile of the SCM in Australia during the pandemic is one of a largely reactionary movement, unsupported by the historical and social factors that sustain the SCM in the United States. The global impact of COVID-19 shifted the SCM ideological framework from its origins to another continent where it became a more diverse movement, spurred by the insecurity and economic uncertainty incurred by the Australian government's COVID-19 countermeasures. Limited capability to travel, to attend social events and vaccination mandates might have provided further impetus to turn to alternative authorities and non-mainstream interpretations, such as those offered by members from XRW milieus. While the adoption of SCM positions in the Australian context seems to be mainly informed by opposition to COVID-19 countermeasures, it remains to be seen if the SCM will survive when this pandemic comes to an end.

Beyond such buttressing and diversification, the final implication for national security is emergent idiosyncratic beliefs. COVID-19 exposed the susceptibility and vulnerability of democratic societies to conspiratorial beliefs in times of uncertainty—especially those which, arguably, are crowdsourced such as QAnon. Such beliefs are propagated both online and offline, but nonetheless demonstrate the propensity to insulate adherents from competing information and authorities. Such insulation is also common in extreme belief systems, which often claim exclusive explanatory powers regarding truth. While some idiosyncratic beliefs may align with XRW milieus, it remains to be seen if any will develop the required attributes to be classed as ideologies. Regardless of this, the presence of idiosyncratic co-optation may prove to complexify the threatscape for some time to come, challenging efficient identification, investigation, and prosecution

efforts.

Conclusion

The deployment of an ideological lens for this article has offered insights as to how extremists interpreted and understood the COVID-19 pandemic. This was reflected in extremist narratives and in strategic directions meant to serve ideological goals. In the case of VSJ, COVID-19 was generally seen as a reflection of divine will, offering an opportunity for supposed transgressors to seek redemption, whilst also punishing those beyond redemption, in particular 'crusaders.' Lone actor attacks in the West were still encouraged, with countermeasures such as masks seen as providing new strategic opportunities. In the case of XRW, COVID-19 was often accepted as a scientific fact but was construed as being the result of actions by enemies such as Asian immigrants, Jews and left-wing opponents. While some extremists speculated with the idea of weaponizing COVID-19 against their enemies, more realistically, it appears to have been an opportunity for many extremists to broaden and deepen their networks. Other extremists rejected the existence of COVID-19 entirely, and subscribed to conspiratorial and anti-scientific interpretations as propagated by idiosyncratic milieus. This impacted national security overall by complicating the threatscape and operating environment. Buttressing narratives may serve to deepen the divide between the governed and the government, while diversification narratives defy efficient identification and management. Idiosyncratic extremism is yet to be associated with terrorist violence in Australia, but may nonetheless prove problematic in future contexts. All of these outcomes were informed by a troubled information environment, in which trust in institutions such as government and the mass media is degraded. While the post-COVID-19 threatscape has yet to manifest, one thing is already clear: the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the susceptibility and vulnerability of democratic societies to conspiratorial beliefs in times of uncertainty. This creates distinct new challenges for those involved in protecting national security.

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CBRN Terrorism Interdictions (1990–2016) and Areas for Future Inquiry

by Wesley S. McCann

Abstract

The pursuit and use of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons has been examined by scholars for more than two decades. What has not been examined are the cases in which non-state actors were prevented from obtaining or using these weapons and agents and the corresponding reasons for successful interdiction. This article uses the Profiles of Incidents Involving CBRN and Non-State Actors (POICN) database to carry out an exploratory analysis of CBRN interdictions around the world from 1990–2016. Using basic descriptives and cross-tabulations, this study finds that successful interdictions often resulted from probable cause searches, surveillance operations, but also from other, unknown reasons. However, there is a tremendous amount of variation when it comes to modes of interdiction and actor motivation. The same goes for jurisdiction, whether international collaboration aided the interdiction, and weapon acquisition and delivery. This text is intended to serve as a foundation for the study of CBRN terrorism interdiction as it seeks to undercover why some law enforcement efforts fail while others succeed.

Keywords: CBRN, terrorism, interdiction, research, POICN

Introduction

The CBRN terrorism literature focuses almost exclusively on who is most likely to pursue or use chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) weapons, and the factors associated with said pursuit or use. However, little is known about terrorism-related CBRN interdictions, or the process by which individuals or groups are prevented from obtaining or using these weapons and agents. This study seeks to add to this scant literature.

To evaluate how non-state actors were interdicted when pursuing or attempting to use CBRN weapons, this study uses a novel data set—POICN—to assess cases of successful interdiction of CBRN terrorism by law enforcement officials. This data set includes cases of both pursuit and use of CBRN weapons and agents as well as filtering criteria to more accurately assess the validity of said events. The purpose of this analysis is to set forth a foundation for the future study of CBRN terrorism interdiction to improve prevention efforts by law enforcement.

As such, this exploratory analysis is driven by four research questions:

1) what types of interdictions are the most common and where;

2) whether interdictions are more common for certain types of actors, or weapons or agents pursued;

3) whether international collaboration plays a role in local interdictions; and

4) whether interdictions are more common for specific modes of actual or intended agent/weapon acquisition or target selection.

The Difficulties of Interdiction

There are a number of challenges in combating CBRN terrorism that make it unique in comparison with "ordinary" terrorism. The first is the knowledge about actor intent to pursue or use CBRN weapons or agents. Many times, law enforcement is unaware that an actor desires such weapons until after the agent is deployed or used in some manner. Second, it is often difficult to discern which groups have the technical expertise to obtain various weapons or agents, as the time, skill, and resources needed to obtain and use certain weapons vary immensely. For example, it is much easier for actors to obtain and use chlorine or hydrogen cyanide than it is to create a more virulent strain of clostridium botulinum. Nevertheless, the more technical expertise, resources, and tactical skill that is needed may presuppose a more deadly weapon; such as the weaponization of smallpox or even constructing a small nuclear weapon. This makes cruder forms of CBRN weapons such as chemicals and toxins the more likely culprits—something the literature bears out.[1] As such, law enforcement's ability to overcome the defensive measures imposed by malevolent actors in order to learn their intent is extremely important.[2] However, information sharing can suffer when jurisdictions and missions overlap.[3] The same is true when there is a breakdown in international collaboration for investigating transnational actors. Interdiction efforts have increased since the 1960s, with additional international measures such as extradition treaties, criminalization of various acts, informal enforcement arrangements, and formal legal instruments that concern everything from the regulation of dual-use technologies to export-import controls.

CBRN Terrorism Interdiction

1. *International Interdiction Measures*

Some of the most prominent CBRN terrorism prevention and interdiction policies include the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540, and the Nuclear Security Summits initiated by the Obama administration.[4]

The CTR—known as the Nunn-Lugar Act—was instituted after the end of the Cold War to ensure the safe dismantling of former Soviet weapons of mass destruction and their corresponding infrastructures. It provided hundreds of millions in funding for the decommission of CBRN weapons throughout the former Soviet Union and served as a starting point for the PSI, which is a voluntary arrangement between states that was initiated by President Bush in concert with Poland in 2003. States that want to participate agree to the Statement of Interdiction Principles, although this is not a legally binding document or international treaty. There are also various nonproliferation programs that operate across the US Departments of Defense, State, and Energy that have had great success within the category of bilateral cooperatives.[5] There is also the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.[6] This binding treaty provides for the criminalization as well as prosecution and extradition of individuals who commit, or attempt to commit, acts of nuclear terrorism. This convention was signed by most states in 2005; it was ratified by the United States in 2015.

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 requires member states to perform many of the same duties enunciated under the PSI to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).[7] This resolution is binding and requires member states to introduce legislative and regulatory tools to combat and prevent the spread of WMDs by non-state actors. This resolution also bridges the gaps between the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BTWC) by focusing more on the threat posed by non-state actors, as prior legal instruments were focused more on the behavior of states, and because there is no enforcement mechanism for the BTWC, despite there being the International Atomic Energy Agency (for the NPT) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (for the CWC). Resolution 1540 requires enforcement by member states in terms of weapons and delivery systems as well as import-export controls. More importantly, it called for the creation and maintenance of "law enforcement efforts to detect, deter, prevent and combat, including through

international cooperation, when necessary, the illicit trafficking and brokering in such items in accordance with their national legal authorities and legislation and consistent with international law."[8]

The lack of an enforcement mechanism for the BTWC is an issue that has been covered elsewhere, with many calling for such a tool.[9] In fact, a recent UN resolution (2325) reaffirmed the obligations of Resolution 1540 while asking states to strengthen their efforts to implement Resolution 1540.[10] All of this is important because the United States' most recent national report (2016) to the UN on its progress in implementing these obligations mentioned nothing specific about the progress of biological weapon counter-measures; it was primarily focused on nuclear weapons and related materials.[11] The 2013 report, however, examined the myriad policies, measures, and laws enacted under Obama to prevent, interdict, and prosecute the spread of CBRN materials and delivery systems.[12] Thus, interdiction priorities can be varied over time, and it's clear that even when there are binding initiatives or agreements, there is not always a strong or viable enforcement mechanism. This inhibits international oversight and transparency efforts that are designed to ensure nonproliferation amongst state and non-state actors. It is also not clear from existing treaties what happens in terms of enforcement or reporting requirements when a CBRN weapon is used by a non-state actor within the territorial jurisdiction of a CWC or BTWC party, since these treaties again are primarily focused on state behavior and state prevention regimes.

The Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) is a legally binding treaty which was put into force in 1987 and was amended in 2005 to promote the safe transportation and regulation of nuclear materials and facilities as well as a criminalization of illegal trafficking of nuclear materials. The CPPNM was a seminal step toward the promotion of nuclear security as it is the only internationally legally binding regime for the physical protection of nuclear facilities and materials which are used for "peaceful" purposes. It also stewards international collaboration, information sharing, and training on nuclear security, vis-à-vis the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Where treatises and resolutions are insufficient, there are bilateral and multilateral coalition agreements. The PSI has been instrumental in improving international communication, intelligence sharing, and collaboration interdiction efforts while fortifying international norms against WMD trafficking.[13] In fact, it played a role in the dissolution of Libya's nuclear weapons program after centrifuges were captured by Italian authorities with help from Germany, the US, and the UK.[14] Nevertheless, because it is nonbinding, it faces criticisms from nonparticipating states as being led by the US, considered not legally binding under international law, and too subjective. The Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (Global Partnership) was a G7-led collaboration initiated in the wake of 9/11 to provide vulnerable states with significant resources to engage in nonproliferation, and in weapons decommissioning activities, especially in states of the former Soviet Union. It has distributed tens of billions in funding for such efforts, although this is merely an international security partnership and not the result of a binding treaty.

Similarly, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism was a voluntary partnership established between Russia and the US during the Bush administration, with almost 90 countries signing onto the Statement of Principles in an effort to prevent and interdict the proliferation of radiological and nuclear weapons. Central to this nonbinding agreement was the call for better cooperation and information sharing between governments. The Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) led by the Bush administration has shown some success in reducing the overall amount of Russian and US enriched uranium stockpiles. The Obama Security Summits built on this success through continued negotiations which, however, stagnated under the Trump and Biden administrations with regard to the new START treaty. However, these were informally extended in 2021.

Other regional cooperatives that focus specifically on export controls include the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Australia Group, the Wassenaar Arrangement, and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). [15] These types of nonbinding agreements typically suffer from "inconsistent implementation, inadequate state-based capacity, a lack of universality, enforcement, and verification" mechanisms, however.

[16] For example, the NSG is an export control regime focused on preventing the spread of nuclear technologies and materials. It precludes the sharing of nuclear materials with non-NPT signatories; although a waiver was granted to India in 2008, allowing it to be a member of the group without having signed the NPT. The MTCR is similar but focuses on export control of missile technologies and unmanned aerial vehicles that can be used to deliver WMDs. This is a voluntary cooperative agreement that has no enforcement mechanism, and many countries (including some which are not members, but voluntarily adhere to the rule of the MTCR) have varied export control regimes (e.g., China) that have made admission to the group and oversight contentious. Nevertheless, there are some bigger unknowns that may undermine the efficacy of any of these prevention and interdiction instruments; especially those that are nonbinding and lack robust enforcement mechanisms.

2. Too Many Unknowns

Too many unknowns remain for there to be a concrete understanding of interdiction efficacy. One of these unknowns is the *why* behind actors' motivation to obtain CBRN weapons. A better grasp of these motivations and the push and pull factors behind them may shed light on which enforcement mechanism *will be* more effective in the future.[17] Furthermore, a stronger understanding of actor intent and motivation may elucidate better techniques law enforcement can use to interdict actors prior to agent obtainment or use. However, it is also unclear what prevention and interdiction efforts *have* worked thus far, as no empirical analysis has been provided in the extant open literature. There is some contemporary scholarship that suggests many of the foregoing cooperatives, treaties, and programs have produced viable interdictions—both locally and internationally—but much of this discourse is either anecdotal or lacks empirical rigor.[18] Put another way, the PSI and CTR may have produced substantial defense, strategic, and foreign policy gains for participating countries, but it is still impossible to determine the magnitude of the impact of these instruments in fostering more effective interdiction efforts without a more empirical assessment of actual interdictions. While the current study cannot measure the net impact of any of the foregoing interdiction instruments, it can provide an empirical foundation for the study of CBRN terrorism interdiction; which can hopefully influence future discussions on interdiction efforts.

Methods

This study draws on the Profiles of Incidents Involving CBRN and Non-State Actors (POICN) database.[19] This data set includes more than 500 cases involving the pursuit or use of CBRN weapons from 1990–2016. In the article discussing the rollout of the database, the authors provide basic descriptives of the "Interdiction" variable. They found that close to 69% of plots that did not progress were due to some form of interdiction.[20] While the categorical breakdowns (e.g., probable cause search, accidental discovery, and undercover investigation) for different types of interdictions are available in crosstab and graphical form, there is no underlying analysis as to geographic, motivational, tactical, or demographic variations across these forms of interdiction; hence the impetus for the present study.

As such, this article relies on descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and cross-tabulations to address each of the foregoing research questions. Each of the analyses will be presented within the context of each of the respective research questions.

1. Case Selection

This study only includes cases with: 1) strong source validity (1+); 2) no more than "some" (<2) inherent uncertainty about the attack; 3) no more than "some" (<2) inherent uncertainty about the event; and 4) no doubt about whether the case involves "terrorism".[21] This is consistent with what others have done before when using POICN.[22] From there, only cases with a "4" for *No Progression* are used, as this denotes whether an actor was interdicted. Once the data set is constrained on these measures, 134 cases remain.

2. *Variables*

2.1. *Interdiction.*

Interdiction classifies the method of interdiction. There are six different options for this measure: chance discovery ("1"), routine search ("2"), probable cause search ("3"), surveillance investigation ("4"), undercover investigation ("5"), and sting operation ("6").[23] *CBRN Specific* denotes whether the method of interdiction is CBRN specific. *International Law* articulates whether international law enforcement aided in the interdiction process ("1"). This can include aid from another nation's law enforcement, military, intelligence, or intergovernmental institution. The same is true of interdiction, in that a law enforcement agency, intelligence agency, or military (or branch thereof) can be the principal agent involved in the interdiction. Given that most cases involve law enforcement (and law enforcement-oriented terminologies), the term "law enforcement" should be understood as an umbrella term to include these other types of agents throughout this article.

2.2. *Attack.*

Attack Sophistication denotes whether the planned attack was "1" low, "2" medium, or "3" high in terms of the level of sophistication. An example of a low sophistication attack is one that uses a "relatively simple delivery method" (e.g., raw sewage in water) whereas a plan with high sophistication uses a sophisticated agent or delivery method (e.g., materials for nuclear attack or complex explosives). This means that a "medium" level plan includes something akin to the acquisition of an established CBR weapon that is sophisticated but easy to use or involves the mass production of a simple agent.[24] *Target* constitutes the type of target (e.g., Government; Military; Police) that the actor intended or planned to attack. The various types of targets are provided below. *Biological*, *Chemical*, *Nuclear*, and *Radiological* all denote whether the case in question involves biological, chemical, nuclear, or radiological weapons or agents, respectively. *Delivery* denotes the specific modes of planned delivery, whereas *acquisition* classifies how the actor acquired, planned to acquire or attempted to acquire the weapon or agent. The former includes numerous types of delivery that will be discussed below. The actor could have acquired the material or agent through a *facility*, in that it was held by a facility in an attack without changing the location of the material; via *production* by producing some level of the agent or weapon in house; through a *purchase* on the black or white market; through *theft*; or through *training*, in that at least one actor involved in the case participated in some "training specific to the production, handling, and/or delivery of the agent and/or delivery mechanism. Values of "1" for each of the modes of acquisition indicate an affirmative response.

Discovery Country was the country in which the plan was discovered. *Motivation* comprises several different categories as well: 1) personal or professional grudge, 2) individualized objective, 3) to establish ethno-nationalist sovereignty or strengthen ethno-nationalist rights; 4) to act in support of a collective religious theology; 5) to protest the treatment of animals or the environment; 6) to promote other single issues; 7) other/unknown.[25]. *Unsuccessful* denotes whether the actor was able to use or attempted to use the agent or weapons in question. This is coded based on whether *no progression* in POICN was coded as "0" (e.g., attempted use or actual use) and no interdiction occurred.

Results and Discussion

1. *Question #1: What types of interdictions are the most common and where?*

Results reveal that more than half of all successful interdictions were the result of probable cause searches (27.6%) and surveillance investigations (24.6%) (Table 1). This indicates that in most cases where an actor was interdicted, law enforcement had already taken substantial steps in pursuing them. The least likely modes of interdiction include sting and undercover operations as well as routine searches (combined less than 15%). It must be stated that almost 14% of all cases have an unknown form of interdiction, whereas almost one in five resulted from a chance discovery. Close to 30% of all interdictions were CBRN specific

as well, meaning close to 70% of interdictions were not because of some material fact related to CBRN weapons or agents. Future scholarship should try to unpack this relationship further as developed countries apparently had lower rates of CBRN-specific interdictions than developing countries (see Table 2).

Table 1: Modes of Interdiction (n=134)

Interdiction	n	%
Unknown	19	14.18%
Chance	25	18.66%
Routine	11	8.21%
Probable Cause	37	27.61%
Surveillance	33	24.63%
Undercover	7	5.22%
Sting	2	1.49%
CBRN Specific	40	29.85%
Total	134	

Most countries had very few successful interdictions; most likely because most countries do not experience many CBRN events. This is primarily because most CBRN cases occur in a handful of countries.[26] Nevertheless, the US, UK, and Russia constitute 49 of the 134 total cases (Table 2).[27] A large number of unknown methods of interdiction are evident for Russia, demonstrating a need for future inquiry. Chance and routine discoveries were more common in countries where probable cause searches and surveillance operations were *less commonly* the cause of interdiction. Furthermore, the UK and the US had amounts of successful interdiction due to probable cause searches and interdictions resulting from surveillance (almost 50%). All undercover operations resulting in an interdiction occurred in the US, and almost half of all interdictions in the US were CBRN specific; the only other country that comes close to these numbers is Japan. Surveillance investigations played the largest role in the UK, US, Germany, Australia, Iraq, and Turkey overall.

Table 2: Modes of Interdiction by Country (n=134)

Country	Unknown	Chance	Routine	Probable Cause	Surveillance	Undercover	Sting	CBRN Specific	Total	Unsuccessful
US	0	3	2	9	4	5	1	12	24	32
UK	0	3	1	3	8	0	0	3	15	2
Russia	7	2	0	1	0	0	0	4	10	4
Israel	2	3	1	3	0	0	0	3	9	4
India	1	2	0	3	1	0	0	1	7	2
Afghanistan	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	2	6	18
Japan	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	3	6	13
Australia	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	5	0
Germany	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	2	5	1
Iraq	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	5	8
Turkey	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	2	5	2
Saudi Arabia	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0
Morocco	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	0
Spain	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	1

One key takeaway is that most countries—except the US and UK—successfully interdicted non-state actors pursuing CBRN weapons 40–90% of the time due to chance, or routine inspection (or for unknown reasons); the US and UK figures are 21% and 27% respectively. Amongst the top five nations, probable cause searches and surveillance (and undercover operations for the US) were the most common reasons for interdiction. Reading Table 2 from left to right (omitting "unknown") allows for a crude representation of the amount of awareness of a potential CBRN terrorism threat (potentially influenced by stronger intelligence assessments)

as well as resources dedicated to interdicting them. Nevertheless, the United States, Japan, Afghanistan, and Iraq have significantly *more* cases that are not interdicted than interdicted. Countries like the UK, Australia, Germany, and India not only have more occurrences, but much higher rates of successful interdicted, relative to successful pursuits or attacks (e.g., unsuccessful cases). Unsuccessful cases here refer to the pursuit or use of CBRN weapons or agents that were *not* interdicted or abandoned. Put another way, the actor attempted to use or actually used the agent or weapon. Keep in mind that this "unsuccessful" measure would be higher for most countries had acquisition of agent been included here.

Taken together, these findings suggest that building strong criminal cases against non-state actors suspected of pursuing terrorism via probable cause searches (with or without warrants) and thereafter, enable states to not only interdict cases more often, but also the mode of interdiction is more likely to be CBRN specific. However, more inquiry is needed here to discern why these patterns emerge; especially in the case of the US which has a large portion of CBRN-specific interdictions alongside a strong portion of their cases in the investigative stage. However, many actors successfully acquire, develop, or end up using these materials, based on the foregoing data. This could be due to other factors such as international collaboration (see Table 7) or enforcement priorities.

2. *Question #2: Whether interdictions are more common for certain types of actors, or weapons or agents pursued?*

In looking at the breakdown of various actors, weapons, agents, delivery mechanisms and interdiction, there are a few things to note up front. First, an overwhelming majority of individuals included in this subset of POICN were found to be motivated by a religious ideology (80) or ethno-nationalist concerns (28) (Table 3). These two categories constitute 81% of all interdictions. Ethno-nationalist motivated actors were about as likely to be interdicted by chance as they were to be from a probable cause search of surveillance investigation. This was not the case with religious motivated actors, however, as they were much more likely to be interdicted via a probable cause search or surveillance operation than any other method. Nevertheless, about 14% of these cases involve unknown interdiction methods. Other actors were overwhelmingly more likely to be interdicted by probable cause searches.

Table 3: Modes of Interdiction by Actor Motivation (n=134)

	Grudge	Individual Objective	Ethno-nationalism	Religion	Animals or Environment	Single Issues	Other or Unknown	Total
Unknown	0	0	5	12	0	0	2	19
Chance	0	0	8	13	0	1	3	25
Routine	0	1	0	9	0	0	1	11
Probable Cause	3	2	4	21	2	1	4	37
Surveillance	0	4	7	21	0	0	1	33
Undercover	0	1	3	3	0	0	0	7
Sting	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
	3	8	28	80	2	2	11	134

Amongst these different forms of interdiction are varying levels of plot sophistication. A plurality of interdictions involved medium levels of sophistication, whereas high levels of sophistication occurred the least (Table 4). Here it seems probable cause searches were the leading cause for plots with high and low levels of sophistication but not medium levels. Across the board, surveillance investigations and chance discoveries were more evident with lower levels of sophistication.

When diving further into *who* is being interdicted for these varying levels of plot sophistication, it is clear that almost all high-level plots are motivated by religious actors; in fact, a disproportionate amount for both medium and high levels of sophistication (Table 5). About 25% percent of all cases motivated by ethno-nationalism and 16.3% for religious purposes involve unknown levels of sophistication. Even if all religious motivated cases with an unknown level of sophistication were in fact low levels, it still paints a disturbing

picture that law enforcement's interdiction of extremely sophisticated plots (e.g., obtaining nuclear material) are almost uniquely by religiously motivated actors. This is apparently a risk factor that intelligence agencies must consider in deploying resources to monitor non-state actors; especially if their organization or affiliates have a history of pursuing CBRN weapons and agents. These findings are further backed up when examining the CBRN distribution among different motivations. Here, religious motivated actors are 59.7% of the sample, yet constitute 62% of biological pursuits, 63% of nuclear pursuits, and 81% of radiological pursuits.

Table 4: Modes of Interdiction by Attack Sophistication (n=134)

Interdiction	Unknown	Low	Medium	High	Total
Unknown	5	3	8	3	19
Chance	4	8	11	2	25
Routine	3	1	6	1	11
Probable Cause	6	9	12	10	37
Surveillance	4	9	15	5	33
Undercover	0	2	3	2	7
Sting	1	1	0	0	2
Total	23	33	55	23	134

Table 5: Actor Sophistication and Weapons by Actor Motivation (n=134)

	Unknown	Low	Medium	High	Chemical	Biological	Nuclear	Radiological
Grudge	0	0	3	0	1	2	0	0
Individualized Objective	2	2	2	2	5	4	0	1
Ethno-nationalism	7	8	11	2	22	5	2	3
Religion	13	14	34	19	53	24	5	17
Animals or Environment	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
Single Issues	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
Other or Unknown	1	6	4	0	8	3	1	0
Total	23	33	55	23	92	39	8	21

The sophistication of the intended attack is a crude measure, however. For a more nuanced account, the various forms of interdictions need to compare for the different weapons and agents sought or obtained. In many cases, up to seven different agents were sought or obtained and in 24 cases, actors sought more than one type of weapon or agent (e.g., chemical and biological). Chemical and biological weapons or agents were sought or obtained in 68.7% and 29.1% of cases, respectively (Table 6). Chemical weapons were most likely to be interdicted by probable cause searches and surveillance investigations as were biological weapons. Nuclear weapons are mostly unknown in terms of their interdiction method, justifying a need for future research. Radiological weapons were more likely to be interdicted in a chance or routine search compared to other methods, but surveillance investigations again were the number-one reason for interdiction.

Table 6: Modes of Interdiction by Weapons (n=134)

Interdiction	Chemical	Biological	Nuclear	Radiological	Multiple
Unknown	12	4	5	1	3
Chance	16	7	0	5	3
Routine	8	2	1	5	3
Probable Cause	27	13	2	2	7
Surveillance	23	9	0	8	7
Undercover	4	3	0	0	0
Sting	2	1	0	0	1
Total	92	39	8	21	24

3. *Question #3: Whether international collaboration plays a role in local interdictions.*

Close to 18.9% of all interdictions involved international collaboration of some sort. This includes everything from information sharing to joint missions and again, can come from various institutions. Based on these results (Table 7), the US, Israel, India, Germany, and Russia relied the least on international collaboration when assessing the mode of interdiction, whereas the UK, Australia, Japan, Afghanistan, and Turkey relied on it the most. The reasons behind these discrepancies cannot be determined here, but the findings are somewhat worrying given that international collaboration occurred in only 12.3% of all successful interdictions for the top 5 countries that experienced almost half of all cases. However, 15 of the 20 cases involving individual actors occurred in the US and UK; thus likely reducing the need for international collaboration. Future researchers should examine the correlates of international collaboration in counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation cases more generally, and the correlates of successful interdiction vis-à-vis international collaboration more specifically.

Table 7: International Collaboration by Country (n=134)

Country	Unknown	No	Yes	Total	
US	0	21	3	24	12.50%
UK	0	11	4	15	26.67%
Russia	0	10	0	10	0.00%
Israel	0	9	0	9	0.00%
India	0	6	1	7	14.29%
Afghanistan	0	2	4	6	66.67%
Australia	0	4	2	6	33.33%
Japan	0	4	1	5	20.00%
Germany	0	5	0	5	0.00%
Turkey	1	3	1	5	20.00%
Iraq	0	5	0	5	0.00%
Morocco	0	3	1	4	25.00%
Saudi Arabia	0	2	1	3	33.33%
Spain	0	2	1	3	33.33%

When looking at international collaboration and the interdiction of specific weaponry, the former played a much larger role in interdicting radiological and nuclear weapons than it did for chemical and biological weapons (Table 8). Cases involving more than one type of weaponry were also interdicted via international collaboration at higher rates than cases involving only chemical or biological weapons and agents. This suggests that the improvement of existing export-import regimes may be warranted as well as the monitoring of dual-use technologies when taking into consideration the different delivery and acquisition mechanisms

(see Tables 12–13 below). As mentioned before, more scholarship is needed on the empirical efficacy of specific international interdiction instruments to discern their value too.

Table 8: International Collaboration by Weapon (n=134)

Collaboration	Chemical	Biological	Nuclear	Radiological	Multiple
Unknown	1	0	0	0	0
No	72	32	5	11	16
Yes	19	7	3	10	8
Total	92	39	8	21	24

Across the different types of actors, almost all of the interdictions involving international collaboration centered on religiously motivated actors (83%); with 13.7% focusing on actors motivated by ethno-nationalist concerns (see Table 9). This finding is likely due to the fact that religious actors are often transnational in scope, whereas ethno-nationalist actors are localized threats;[28] thus necessitating more communication between states in cases of the former. This is also likely justified given that religious groups were more likely to pursue more sophisticated plots (see Table 5).

Table 9: Actor Motivations by International Collaboration (n=134)

	Grudge	Individual Objective	Ethno-nationalism	Religion	Animals or Environ-ment	Single Issues	Other or Unknown	Total
Unknown	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
No	3	7	24	55	2	2	11	104
Yes	0	1	4	24	0	0	0	29
Total	3	8	28	80	2	2	11	134

Across the different agents pursued by the actors in the study, hydrogen cyanide, ricin, sarin, potassium cyanide, sodium cyanide, *bacillus anthracis*, *clostridium botulinum*, uranium-235, along with various gases, acids, and unknown substances being the most common agents pursued that were interdicted (Table 10).[29] Most of the interdictions for the more common agents were due to probable cause searches and surveillance investigations and not by chance or routine searches, except for potassium cyanide, uranium-235, uranium-238, arsenic, and mustard gas. These results are partially predictable and partially surprising. The most pursued agents that were interdicted include more easily accessible agents such as cyanides, gases, acids, and ricin (toxin derived from castor beans), yet some of the most difficult to obtain—and arguably more destructive once weaponized—were mostly discovered by chance or routine (e.g., uranium-235, uranium-238); the same occurs with the lone case involving thorium-232 as well.[30]

Furthermore, a higher level of international collaboration in the interdiction effort is witnessed for cases involving nuclear materials and various gases, but the same is not true for biological agents or for some of the various forms of cyanides, including the most popular form. This may reflect the more pronounced international focus on nuclear nonproliferation and the instruments that have been in place for decades that have strong enforcement mechanisms. More research is needed here to discern whether this pattern is coincidence or due to enforcement priorities.

Considering the fact that the US is the most targeted nation within this sample, and has a much higher proportion of plots that are not discovered there (compare with Table 2), more international collaboration is warranted. Recent scholarship from McCann demonstrates that the US is also not only the most likely location for CBRN pursuits and usage, but also the most likely to be targeted by transnational actors.[31] While counterfactuals are outside the scope of this article, it is safe to assume the US needs to improve its international collaboration efforts when these findings (Tables 2–7) are interpreted together. In light of the findings presented thus far, the US needs to improve its tracking and investigation of actors who pursue biological and nuclear materials as well; with more focus to be paid to religiously motivated actors.

Table 10: Modes of Interdiction by Agent/Weapons (n=217)

Agent	Unknown	Chance	Routine	Probable Cause	Surveillance	Undercover	Sting	Total	Collaborations
Hydrogen Cyanide	3	2	0	6	5	1	0	17	2
Ricin	0	2	1	6	5	1	1	16	3
Unknown Chemical	1	2	2	5	3	0	1	14	4
Unknown Poisons	2	2	0	5	3	0	0	12	2
Unknown Radiological	1	2	2	3	4	0	0	12	5
Sarin	0	1	0	4	4	0	1	10	6
Unknown Biological	1	1	1	4	0	3	0	10	3
Unknown Cyanide Salt	2	2	1	2	1	2	0	10	2
Potassium Cyanide	1	3	2	2	1	0	0	9	1
Sodium Cyanide	1	3	0	4	1	0	0	9	0
Bacillus Anthracis	1	2	0	4	1	0	0	8	1
C. Botulinum Toxin	0	1	0	2	4	0	0	7	1
Uranium-235	1	3	0	0	2	0	0	6	2
Unknown Nuclear	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	1
Arsenic	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	4	0
Chlorine	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	4	0
Mustard Gas	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	4	1
Hydrochloric Acid	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	1
Nitric Acid	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	1
Sulfuric Acid	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	0
Uranium-238	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	2

4. *Question #4: Whether interdictions are more common for specific modes of actual or intended agent/weapon acquisition, delivery, or target selection.*

Agent and weapon acquisition is more difficult to assess here given that many times the mode of acquisition is either unknown or does not fall into the categories given (Table 11). Nevertheless, production and purchase of various agents and weapons were the two most popular forms of acquisition across the sample. Across these two forms, probable cause searches and surveillance investigations were the most common causes for successful interdiction. Undercover operations showed some positive results as well, but almost 1 in 8 modes of acquisition is unknown and 16% of interdictions concerning production and purchase of agents were due to chance discovery. When looking at the interdiction of agents that were acquired via theft or training, surveillance investigations were the most common cause, with chance discovery not far behind. Here, probable cause searches and undercover operations play almost no role in successful interdictions; albeit the sample size for each is much smaller. Overall, successful interdiction based on mode of acquisition demonstrates that law enforcement is more often than not utilizing the tools it has to promote effective adjudication for CBRN weapons pursuit. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement here given that unknown modes of interdiction coupled with chance discoveries constitute the same proportion of total interdictions as probable cause searches.

Target selection constitutes a more diverse field of options, and thus correlations are more difficult to surmise here (see Table 12), largely because each target can have multiple attributes (e.g., can target both private property and private citizens). The most notable intended targets were private citizens, unknown targets,

government, military, business, transportation, and private property. Undercover operations and routine searches were the primary causes for successful interdiction for cases when private citizens were targets, and much more so than when other targets were involved. Again, probable cause searches and surveillance investigations were the leading causes of interdiction, and this is evident when business, government, and the military were targets as well as private citizens. However, there is a relatively high number of unknown causes of interdiction and chance discoveries when the military was a target. Future research is needed to discern why certain interdiction strategies were more effective for different targets; such as undercover operations when private citizens are the suspected or confirmed target. It could be the case that target selection plays no role in heightening law enforcement's allocation of resources, or, more likely, that agencies are unaware of such targets when pursuing these cases. More work is needed here to unpack this "chicken and the egg" situation, as it may just be the case that certain types of actors are more likely to pick these targets, which increases the risk of being detected.

Table 11: Modes of Interdiction by Modes of Acquisition (n=97)

Interdiction	Production	Purchase	Training	Theft	Total
Unknown	5	5	1	1	12
Chance	8	5	1	3	17
Routine	3	1	1	1	6
Probable Cause	17	11	0	1	29
Surveillance	14	7	4	2	27
Undercover	2	3	0	0	5
Sting	0	0	1	0	1
Total	49	32	8	8	97

Table 12: Modes of Interdiction by Target (n=232)

	Unknown	Chance	Routine	Probable Cause	Surveillance	Undercover	Sting	Total
Business	1	2	3	4	4	1	0	15
Energy Utilities	0	2	2	0	5	0	0	9
Government	4	3	2	8	7	3	1	28
Diplomatic	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	5
Medical Facility	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
Military	5	3	1	2	5	0	0	16
Monument	1	0	1	1	2	2	0	7
Police	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Private Citizen	7	13	3	12	15	4	1	55
Private Property	1	1	5	1	2	0	0	10
Religious Institution	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3
Special Event	0	1	0	0	3	1	0	5
Tourist	1	1	1	1	3	1	0	8
Transportation	0	2	1	3	2	2	0	10
Other	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	4
Unknown	10	8	4	17	10	1	1	51
Total	33	38	25	53	63	17	3	232

Intended delivery of agents is also important to assess (Table 13). Across the cases of successful interdictions, explosive devices, the use of the water supply, and the use of multiple delivery mechanisms were the top forms of intended agent delivery. A significant portion of agent delivery is unknown, however, as most of these were interdicted via probable cause searches and surveillance investigations. This is not the case with the interdiction of actors intending to use explosive devices, a majority of these cases were discovered by

chance or routine search. Those who wished to target water supply systems were often caught via chance discovery or through surveillance methods. Given the vast assortment of delivery mechanisms and modes of interdiction, it is difficult to discern any additional patterns here. Future scholarship should focus on group-specific modes of delivery and explore whether certain types of groups or actors pursuing specific goals are more likely to employ these specific modes of delivery. This, in turn, can influence enforcement priorities as well via improvement of risk assessments.

Table 13: Modes of Interdiction by Delivery Method (n=134)

Delivery Method	Unknown	Chance	Routine	Probable Cause	Surveillance	Undercover	Sting	Total
Unknown	2	4	3	15	12	1	0	37
Not intended for delivery	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Aerosol/Spray	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	5
Casual/Person/Direct Contact	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	4
Consumer Product Tampering	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	5
Explosive Device	7	7	5	1	8	2	2	32
Food/Drink	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Injection/Projectile	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Latent	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Mail/Letter/Package	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Reaction Device	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	6
Water Supply	2	4	1	1	6	1	0	15
Multiple	5	3	1	8	3	2	0	22
	19	25	11	37	33	7	2	134

Concluding Remarks

This study drew on 134 cases of successful interdiction of non-state actors pursuing or intending to use CBRN weapons from the POICN database. A disproportionate number of cases are discovered in the US and UK. The results show that the most common causes of successful interdiction are probable cause searches and surveillance investigations. However, many times the mode of interdiction is unknown, or varies depending on the type of actor, type of agent, or jurisdiction. Furthermore, the amount of international collaboration varies wildly depending on actor location, type of interdiction method used, and motivation of the actor. It seems religious motivated actors are interdicted more often and are subject to more international collaboration, but this could be more a product of the actors' transnational nature and scope than a peculiar enforcement priority. Based on the foregoing analysis, however, religious actors tend to pursue the most dangerous weapons and oftentimes are interdicted only by chance or routine searches. This suggests that law enforcement agencies should prioritize group investigations based on both motivation and goals as well as prior knowledge about weapons pursuit.

It is also worth noting that most cases *did not* end in interdiction. Many ended with the actor abandoning the plot entirely whereas other cases ended in successful use of the weapon or agent, or at least attempted use.[32] Furthermore, this study cannot throw light on why many actors were able to evade detection or interdiction, or why some interdiction efforts failed. This deals with counterfactuals that are beyond our current data capabilities. Put simply, many actors succeeded, but nothing can be said as to whether these same actors were the subject of investigations or surveillance. Once the original data set is filtered down, approximately 43% of cases result in an interdiction, and 42% of cases result in an attempted or actual use of CBRN agents. Access to additional data on whether pre-incident investigations or intelligence were underway would enable more conclusive statements as to what interdiction methods are more sustainable in confronting actors who wish to pursue and use CBRN weapons. Researchers would be wise to also empirically

study *why* certain actors pursue CBRN weapons whereas others do not. This should offer significant value to bolstering risk assessments. It must be noted, nevertheless, that most non-state actors who desire CBRN weapons are incapable of obtaining, developing, or disseminating them due knowledge and expertise gaps. The difficulties in weaponizing or dispersing CBRN agents have been discussed elsewhere,[33] but it should be noted that most groups will likely default to crude toxins and chemical weapons in lieu of the more apocalyptic C and B weaponry due to these capability gaps.[34]

As mentioned before, more analyses as to interdiction instrument efficacy are warranted as well to discern whether international collaborative efforts are failing. The same is true of assessing the role of international collaboration. Not every case necessitates international cooperation, as many cases concern local threats. In the US, most actors who are interdicted for CBRN weapon pursuit are individuals or unknown cells. This could also mean that groups are more likely to succeed in carrying out their plot given their better access to resources, ability to learn from prior endeavors, and varied hierarchies. More scholarship is needed here, but scholars should focus on specific groups or movements when making inferential claims, as there are a lot of moving parts that likely cannot be accounted for in assessing the correlates of interdiction. For example, 26 of 44 cases involving al Qaeda and its affiliates have been interdicted and this has been done across numerous countries. The only cases where interdiction was evaded were carried out by al-Qaeda in Iraq; not exactly an area with a strong and stable law enforcement presence. In fact, 12 of these interdictions involved international collaboration (almost half of all examples in the data set). On the other hand, almost none of the cases involving the Taliban were interdicted, while 3 of 7 cases involving ISIS were. These all focus specifically on Islamic groups, but the goals and strategic value of using CBRN weapons vary. Furthermore, the capacity of law enforcement to interdict is going to vary wildly by regime type and political stability. Future scholars should note this when examining interdiction regimes and efforts.

Across the board, almost two-thirds of all cases involving individual perpetrators and 75% of cases involving unnamed cells were interdicted. It would appear that larger organizations may have a greater chance of evading interdiction and more scholarship needs to be carried out on how and why—although one takeaway is that groups that have attracted a significant amount of counter-terrorism attention may not be as successful; al-Qaeda and ISIS as well as Aum Shinrikyo being examples here. The case of Aum signals the importance of persistent law enforcement efforts—despite minor missteps—while the case of al-Qaeda points to the importance of international collaborative efforts and the synergy between military, intelligence and law enforcement. Brief case examples of said phenomenon are provided in the Appendix.

Overall, this article asks more questions than it answers. It is clear that probable cause searches and surveillance are the most common reasons for successful interdiction of actors pursuing CBRN weapons, and that religious actors are not only the most likely to be interdicted, but also pursue the most dangerous of weapons and agents too. There is substantial geographic and actor-type variability in terms of the reasons for successful interdiction, whether international collaboration was central to interdiction, and the types of weapons and agents pursued as well as delivery modalities. Not many clear patterns can be discerned from this study, except that isolated individuals and unnamed cells are more likely to be interdicted (as well as religious actors), religious actors pose the biggest threats, and the reasons why states are successful in preventing CBRN terrorism needs significantly more inquiry. Future studies should use this article as a starting point by addressing the question outlined herein.

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Notes

[1] Wesley S. McCann, "The Siege: Religious-Inspired Actors and CBRN Weapons." *Journal of Applied Security Research* (2020). URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/19361610.2020.1860631.

[2] Randall S. Murch and Jeremy Tamsett, "Early Warning and Prevention of Jihadist WMD Terrorism". In: Gary Ackerman and Jeremy Tamsett, *Jihadists and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (241–258) (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2009).

[3] Ibid.

[4] For a robust discussion, also read Brian Finlay and Jeremy Tamsett, "Global and National Efforts to Prevent Jihadists Access to WMDs." In: Gary Ackerman and Jeremy Tamsett, *Jihadists and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (285–308) (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2009); Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Countering WMD Terrorism: Best Practices for Safeguarding the CBRN Material". In: Haldun Yalcinkaya, *Good Practices in Counterterrorism*. (Ankara: Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism) (2021).

[5] See Brian Finlay and Jeremy Tamsett, "Global and National Efforts to Prevent Jihadists Access to WMDs."

[6] A/RES/59/290.

[7] S/RES/1540.

[8] Article 3 (c).

[9] Deepak K. Bhalla and David B. Warheit, "Biological Agents with Potential for Misuse: A Historical Perspective and Defensive Measures."; Steven Block, "The Growing Threat of Biological Weapons," *American Scientist* 89, 1 (2001); Anshula Sharma et al., "Next Generation Agents (Synthetic Agents): Emerging Threats and Challenges in Detection, Protection, and Decontamination," *Handbook on Biological Warfare Preparedness* (2020), 217–56, URL: https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-812026-2.00012-8, 248.

[10] S/RES/2325 (2016).

[11] S/AC.44/2016/2.

[12] S/AC.44/2013/17.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Brian Finlay and Jeremy Tamsett, "Global and National Efforts to Prevent Jihadists Access to WMDs"; Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Countering WMD Terrorism: Best Practices for Safeguarding the CBRN Material."

[15] *See* Ioannis Galatas, "Prevention of CBRN Materials and Substances Getting into the Hands of Terrorists." In: Alex P. Schmid, (Ed.), *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness*, 1st ed. (555–587) (The Hague: ICCT Press, 2020). URL: https://icct.nl/handbook-of-terrorism-prevention-and-preparedness/.

[16] Ibid, p. 300.

[17] Ibid.

[18] *See* Gary Ackerman and Jeremy Tamsett, *Jihadists and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2009).

[19] Markus K. Binder and Gary A. Ackerman, "Pick Your POICN: Introducing the Profiles of Incidents Involving CBRN and Non-State Actors (POICN) Database. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2019). URL: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1577541.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Two cases are coded as "missing" on this but were still included.

[22] Wesley S. McCann, "The Siege: Religious-Inspired Actors and CBRN Weapons." *Journal of Applied Security Research* (2020); Wesley S. McCann "Islamic Extremism and CBRN Weapons." *Terrorism & Political Violence* (2021) https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1964964.

[23] For a more robust description of these measures, consult the POICN Codebook, Version 8.74 [hereinafter POICN Codebook]

[24] See POICN Codebook, 35–36.

[25] This differs slightly from the POICN Codebook in that there were no incidents motivated by anti-abortion sentiment or the extortion of money. Furthermore, acts coded as unknown were included in the "other" category for the purpose of simplicity.

[26] Wesley S. McCann, "The Siege: Religious-Inspired Actors and CBRN Weapons"; Wesley S. McCann "Islamic Extremism and

CBRN Weapons."

[27] Only countries with at least 3 interdictions over this period were presented. Four countries had 2 and nineteen countries had 1.

[28] *See* Victor H. Asal, Gary A. Ackerman, and R. K. Rethemeyer, "Connections Can Be Toxic: Terrorist Organizational Factors and the Pursuit of CBRN Weapons." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2012), 35 (3), 229–254; Kate Ivanova and Todd Sandler, "CBRN Attack Perpetrators: An Empirical Study." *Foreign Policy Analysis* (2007), 3 (4), 273–294.

[29] David C. Rapoport, "Terrorism and Weapons of the Apocalypse." *National Security Studies Quarterly* 5 (1999), 49–67; Wesley S. McCann, "The Siege: Religious-Inspired Actors and CBRN Weapons." *Journal of Applied Security Research* (2020); Wesley S. McCann "Islamic Extremism and CBRN Weapons." *Terrorism & Political Violence* (2021).

[30] Again, many cases involved more than 1 agent, so the various forms of interdiction are counted for each agent involved. Similar to previous tables, only agents with at least 3 reported interdictions were reported here; forty other agents were interdicted 1 or 2 times, but are not reported here due to space considerations.

[31] This was not reported in the table.

[32] Wesley S. McCann, "The Siege: Religious-Inspired Actors and CBRN Weapons"; Wesley S. McCann "Islamic Extremism and CBRN Weapons."

[33] Once the database is filtered down according to the parameters set forth in the Methods section, more than 60% of cases *do not* end in an interdiction.

[34] C. McIntosh, C. & I. Storey, "Between Acquisition and Use: Assessing the Likelihood of Nuclear Terrorism." *International Studies Quarterly* (2018), 62 (2), 289–300. URL: https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx087.

[35] Wesley S. McCann, "The Siege: Religious-Inspired Actors and CBRN Weapons."; Wesley S. McCann "Islamic Extremism and CBRN Weapons." URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1964964; Wesley S. McCann "Islamic Extremism and CBRN Weapons." *Terrorism & Political Violence* (2021).

[36] USA v. James Dalton Bell, United States Federal Court, Western District of Washington. Volume 1, Transcript of Trial, April 3, 2001. URL: https://cryptome.org/usa-v-jdb-01.htm.

[37] David E. Kaplan, "Terrorism's Next Wave," *U.S. News Online*, November 17, 1997. URL: https://cryptome.org/jdb/next-wave.htm.

[38] Richard Danzig et al., "Aum Shinrikyo Insights Into How Terrorists Develop Biological and Chemical Weapons," Center for a New American Security (2012).

[39] Ibid, 39.

[40] Richard Danzig, Marc Sageman, Terrance Leighton, Lloyd Hough, Hidemi Yuki, Rui Kotani & Zachary Hosford, *Aum Shinrikyo Insights Into How Terrorists Develop Biological and Chemical Weapons*. Center for a New American Security (2012). URL: https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/aum-shinrikyo-insights-into-how-terrorists-develop-biological-and-chemical-weapons.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 35.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Most of the information presented here is derived from the source notes within POICN as well as the additional textual variables.

[45] Jo Warrick, "Suspect and a Setback in al-Qaeda Anthrax Case," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2006. URL: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/30/AR2006103001250_pf.html.

[46] This is largely obtained from the Abdur Rauf correspondence to al-Zawahiri that was collected by investigators.

[47] Jo Warrick, "Suspect and a Setback in al-Qaeda Anthrax Case".

[48] This was discussed in the 9/11 Commission Report as well. T. H. Kean, L. Hamilton, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*. Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (2004), 490, fn. 23.

[49] R. Mowatt-Larssen, "Al Qaeda Weapons of Mass Destruction Threat: Hype or Reality?" Belfer Center for Science and

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[51] Ibid.

[52] R. Pita & R. Gunaratna. Revisiting Al-Qa`ida's Anthrax Program. *CTC Sentinel* (2009), 2 (5), 1–4.

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[54] Milton Leitenberg, "Biological Weapons and Bioterrorism in the First Years of the Twenty-First Century." *Politics and the Life Sciences* 21, 2 (2002): 3–27. URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4236667.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Salama, S. & Hansell, L. (2005). "Does Intent equal Capability? Al-Qaeda and Weapons of Mass Destruction". *The Nonproliferation Review* (2005), 12 (3), 615–653. URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700600601236

Appendix

Interdiction Examples

A routine case would be that of James Dalton Bell from Vancouver, Washington in the United States in 1997. Bell was initially tracked due to his posting of "Assassination Politics" online, which was an essay that proposed the creation of an anonymous online marketplace whereby assassinations could be ordered and predicted in order to tacitly hold government officials accountable. Bell was adamantly opposed to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), even going so far as to post IRS agents' names and addresses online. His online behavior led the IRS to put an undercover agent in the field to infiltrate the Multnomah County Common Law Court; a "court" with no real legal authority that was set up by members of the group to "enforce" judgments against government officials; namely IRS employees who had allegedly wronged them.[35] Eventually, the IRS docked his wages and seized his car over prior debts, and in so doing found bomb-making instructions. Bell later detonated a stink bomb at the IRS office in Portland, whereby an investigation led to the discovery that Bell had tried to purchase relevant chemical materials, which led to a probable cause search of Bell's home. At the home, agents found *The Terrorist Handbook*—a manual on making chemical weapons—on his computer, alongside the names and addresses of over 100 IRS agents.[36] Agents also found a range of chemical agents in his garage, including BZ, diisopropyl fluorophosphate, hydrochloric acid, nitric acid, sarin, sodium cyanide, and sulfuric acid; enough ingredients to make nerve gas. Information also revealed that he tried to obtain ricin and develop botulinum toxin. In fact, Bell had a degree in chemistry from MIT, and had experience working with these chemicals, and was seemingly motivated by a prior search warrant executed on his home in 1989 by the IRS, followed by the recent actions against his wages and property.

While this may seem more like a case of revenge than terrorism, Bell did advocate on the Internet the use of assassinations of government officials. His case was linked to the Multnomah County Common Law Court, which was an anti-government group, and the materials located on his computer were comparable to what other terrorists have been caught with, and he had far-right materials in his car when it was seized. His computer also described other plots, such as a desire to create sarin nerve agent (which he might have been capable of, given his background). He also wanted to attack an IRS center with carbon fiber strands to cause damage to their computer systems; amongst other more nefarious chemistry endeavors. This case signals the importance of CBRN-specific investigations by law enforcement, and illustrates how knowledge of a desire to acquire and use CBRN agents and weapons ultimately led investigators to arrest Bell (along with his known distaste for federal agents). It is unclear whether Bell would have ever become more violent in terms of his behavioral evolution, but given the sheer number of materials found by agents, it's plausible to assume that deadly chemical agents could have been used against government officials.

While Bell was unable to fully develop botulinum toxin, another group—Aum Shinrikyo—was dedicated to developing it. One lesson learned from the case of Aum Shinrikyo is the importance of law enforcement. While the Japanese police were quite careless early in the group's growth, police pressure led the group to make mistakes and carry out attacks earlier than originally planned—attacks that could have been deadlier otherwise.[37] Aum was ultimately successful in evading interdiction twelve times, despite being successfully interdicted eight times during their reign in the late 20th century. However, there are seven other cases for which they actively pursued weapons too (out of a total of 27 cases). Sixteen cases involved chemical weapons, and eleven cases involved biological weapons. Twelve of the eighteen cases for which we have data suggest they intended to use or did use these weapons in an indiscriminate manner; seeking mass casualties. Close to 70% of the time they tried to produce the materials themselves, whereas 60% of the time they also tried to purchase agents (some overlap here amongst cases). All in all, they sought or used hydrochloric acid, hydrogen cyanide, nitric acid, sarin, hydrogen fluoride, mustard agent, VX nerve agent, *bacillus anthracis*, *Clostridium botulinum*, *Coxiella burnetii,* and Ebola (and some of the agents they sought remain unknown).

Much of their eventual downfall boiled down to improved policing and intelligence sharing. Good police work is predicated on solid intelligence and cooperation. The former will likely yield an incomplete picture, however, given the unknown internal evolution and trajectory of non-state actors: both individuals and

groups. Writing in hindsight on the unknown threats posed by Aum Shinrikyo, scholars concluded that the 1995 Sarin attack on the Tokyo subway "would have been much more lethal if Aum had not destroyed its purer sarin when it feared discovery a few months earlier or disseminated the low-purity sarin more effectively".[38] Instead, only 13 died and several hundred needed medical care. One wonders whether more events could have been prevented had there been more international collaboration since Aum's international quest to find strains of virulent viruses such as Ebola went as far as Africa and Australia in the case of nuclear materials. Nevertheless, despite their intent, persistent law enforcement efforts eventually resulted in the group's demise and prosecution.

Another reason why Aum Shinrikyo's biological weapons program failed—among other factors—was that its lead scientist was a virologist, not a microbiologist.[39] Aside from biological weapons being harder to produce and disseminate than chemical weapons, they also require more hands-on experience; and that was something their lead biological scientist lacked.[40] However, much remains unknown in this case, especially whether they ever "possessed a fully virulent strain of *B. anthracis* and [were] unable to conserve it, or whether [they] conserved it but could not amplify it"—or never achieved it all.[41] Overall, various risks posed by biological weapons did not push the group to pursue chemical weapons instead (as they pursued both). They pursued these weapons irrespective of setbacks and health hazards.[42] This is a lesson policy makers have to grapple with moving forward; hence the diverse array of recommendations proffered.

Moving into the post-9/11 realm, much more focus has been paid to *jihadist* organizations and actors around the world. A specific case involving al-Qaeda demonstrates the importance of international collaboration and how a military-oriented interdiction effort can be effective in failed states. In one successful case of interdiction (resulting from a probable cause search) in December 2001, coalition forces were able to discover anthrax (*bacillus anthracis*) development efforts by al-Qaeda near the Kandahar Airport.[43] This was after coalition forces discovered documents indicating such a plot was underway.[44] Acting on this information, the interdiction effort resulted in the successful destruction of the al-Qaeda safe haven within Kandahar, Afghanistan. It was later revealed that al-Qaeda believed the destructive power of these types of weapons rivaled that of nuclear weapons; thereby possibly serving as a crude supplement for a nuclear weapon.[45] Nevertheless, it was Abdur Rauf who worked directly with Ayman al-Zawahiri (then the no. 2 person in al-Qaeda) to procure viable anthrax spores. Rauf was a Pakistani scientist who had an advanced degree in microbiology. He had traveled across Europe to map out his development plan. Yet it seems he did not have the necessary technical expertise and the initiative ended up stalling.[46]

Moving forward, al-Qaeda worked with *Jemaah Islamiah* (JI) in Southeast Asia, as they had expertise in chemical and biological weapon development, and Hambali—who was associated with the group—helped al-Qaeda pursue these weapons after 2000 by lending the expertise of Yazid Sufaat, a US-educated member of JI with a background in biological sciences and chemistry.[47] While the anthrax effort commenced in 1999, a raid on the makeshift lab in 2001 resulted in the destruction of the joint venture. The collaboration between both terrorist groups is probably the first established instance involving a joint venture in CBRN weapons development between Islamic groups that also involved senior leaders.[48] Even though the specific target remains unknown, sources postulate that the anthrax would have been used in the US via dispersal from crop dusters, which is equipment that Zacarias Moussaoui looked into learning how to operate.

Importantly, a 2005 presidential commission on intelligence failures in the United States concluded that, based on classified information, the intelligence community (IC) was aware al-Qaeda was pursuing these agents in the late 1990s, but was uncertain whether or not the group succeeded.[49] In hindsight, the IC underestimated the pre-9/11 efforts of the group since classified information suggested that they did in fact obtain some viable cultures of "agent x" (anthrax). However, too many questions remain as to how far along their development was or how close they got to weaponizing the agent.[50] It is also not clear how much international collaboration helped them in this case. In fact, cases involving the military or intelligence agencies are harder to assess in terms of the various factors that lead to interdiction success or failure, due to classified information and the lack of transparency.

The cases of Aum and al-Qaeda actually overlap somewhat as well, as there is some indication that the latter was inspired by the former's efforts.[51] Aum also tried to get anthrax, but was only capable of obtaining a nonpathogenic strain of *bacillus anthracis* used in the production of vaccines. They were ultimately unsuccessful in deploying this agent in 1993 (and a few other times) because the liquid preparation "had a very low concentration of spores and was too thick; therefore, drops tended to land on the ground right after they were disseminated."[52] While al-Qaeda was not likely as far along as Aum was, the totality of the source literature on this case reveals that but for the refusal of certain Pakistani scientists to provide them with viable cultures and expertise, and coalition forces' involvement and collaboration with partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan, they could have gotten much closer. It is, however, unlikely that such a program would have been viable to carry out a large-scale attack; especially if a crop duster was the preferred method of delivery.[53]

Al-Qaeda's thinking on bioweapons is the opposite of what is often assumed, which tends to correlate ease of access to materials with probability of use. Instead, carrying out a large-scale attack *is* the foundation of their drive for CBRN weapons, not deterrence value.[54] This means that the biggest threat posed by al-Qaeda is an approximation of the most effective yet simple means of mass casualties and destruction. While no measure of ease of access or use could be enjoined here, future scholars should consider the availability of certain agents in modeling non-state actors' efforts to acquire, produce, and use them as well as looking at law enforcement abilities to interdict preparations for CBRN attacks. Bioweapons need to be taken seriously, and this study indicates that much more is needed from scholars and practitioners moving forward.

Nevertheless, the two cases cited above also show how difficult it is for groups to weaponize (especially aerosolize) biological weapons, including anthrax.[55] Both cases involve the same agent (anthrax), and given the differences in context, mode of interdiction, and lessons learned by respective parties, each case points to the importance of maintaining a watchful eye on actors who knowingly seek out CBRN weapons, especially those who try to develop them for mass-casualty attacks.

Myanmar's Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA): An Analysis of a New Muslim Militant Group and its Strategic Communications

by Ronan Lee

Abstract

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) has been central to two major Myanmar military operations against Rohingya communities that have led to large-scale cross-border forced migrations to Bangladesh. This article describes the context for ARSA's emergence, examining the Rohingya's history in Myanmar, the nature of political violence in the country, and the history of Muslim militancy in Myanmar's Rakhine state. ARSA's emergence as a militant Muslim group is outlined and elements of ARSA's strategic communications, including its Twitter presence, are analysed, allowing the author to draw some conclusions about the nature of ARSA and its priorities.

Keywords: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, Rohingya, Southeast Asia, Twitter

Introduction

During late August 2017, the situation in Myanmar's [1] northern Rakhine state was chaotic. The country's military, known as the *Tatmadaw*, was undertaking a "clearance operation" claimed to root out members of a recently emerged Muslim militant group, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).[2] Frustrated that ARSA had initiated attacks on police posts and an army base, the *Tatmadaw's* approach involved indiscriminately brutalising civilian members of the local Rohingya Muslim population, prompting the largest forced migration in the region since the Second World War.[3] Within weeks, around 700,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar for Bangladesh.[4] United Nations (UN) investigators subsequently described the *Tatmadaw's* actions as characterised by war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocidal intent.[5]

While these events brought ARSA to international attention, this was not the first time ARSA's actions had prompted aggressive *Tatmadaw* retaliation. ARSA's first significant action, in October 2016, involved simultaneous attacks on three security posts, looting of weapons and ammunition and the killing of nine police, leading to a *Tatmadaw* crackdown on Rohingya communities that was described by Amnesty International as involving the "collective punishment" of Rohingya civilians and "widespread and systematic human rights violations against the group including by deliberately targeting the civilian populations with little, or no, regard for their connection to militants."[6] This operation forced around 90,000 Rohingya to flee Myanmar for Bangladesh.[7] Myanmar's authorities labelled ARSA an "extremist terrorist" group [8] and some officials quickly, and with seemingly little evidence, portrayed the group as being connected with a long dormant (and potentially defunct) Muslim militant outfit named the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation.[9] Myanmar's authorities subsequently described ARSA as being connected with Al Qaeda, and ISIS.[10] ARSA has since been routinely identified as a terrorist group by other influential regional actors, including the governments of Bangladesh, China, and India.[11]

Despite the centrality of the ARSA group to two major *Tatmadaw* operations against Rohingya communities and two large-scale cross-border forced migrations, the ARSA organisation remains little addressed by policy makers or scholars. This article aims to address this knowledge gap, describing the context for ARSA's emergence by briefly examining the Rohingya's history and situation in Myanmar (including the long history of rights abuses by Myanmar's authorities), the nature of political violence in Myanmar, and the history of Muslim militancy in Myanmar's Rakhine state area. ARSA's emergence as a Muslim militant group is briefly outlined and elements of ARSA's strategic communications, including its Twitter presence, are considered and analysed, allowing for some conclusions about the nature of ARSA and its priorities to be drawn.

This article will draw on the framework for analysis of terrorist messaging developed by Bockstette [12] as a useful tool for analysis of ARSA's public communications. A detailed discussion about whether ARSA ought to be considered to be a terrorist group (as Myanmar's government labels it) or as a legitimate response to oppression (as ARSA portrays itself) or differently identified as an ethnic armed group (EAG) with a legitimate claim to represent the oppressed Rohingya community - and so to be included in Myanmar's nationwide peace processes alongside other Myanmar EAGs - is beyond this article's scope. The question of whether ARSA represents a legitimate response to the Rohingya's well-documented and long-term victimhood is certainly a worthy subject for scholarship,. However such a discussion would risk distracting from the article's main aim of examining ARSA's strategic communications to enable some conclusions to be drawn about ARSA's nature and priorities. It is important to acknowledge that political violence is a mainstream tactic in Myanmar and has been since independence in 1948. The country is home to the world's longest running civil war, a conflict that has raged domestically since the early years of independence and once involved multiple communist insurgencies but now is largely a dispute between ethnic minorities and the national government and *Tatmadaw*.[13] In the Myanmar context, EAGs are often labelled terrorist by the government and *Tatmadaw* when they are in conflict, but might reluctantly be regarded as legitimate representatives of ethnic minority interests at times of détente with the central authorities.

The Rohingya's History and Circumstances in Myanmar

The Rohingya, a Muslim minority within the overwhelmingly Buddhist Myanmar, claim an indigenous connection to the Rakhine state area which borders Bangladesh.[14] Myanmar's government and its military do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the Rohingya identity. Because ethnicity and indigeneity are central to the country's 1982 Citizenship Law, the Rohingya have routinely been prevented from accessing citizenship rights.[15] The Rohingya have also been subjected to other serious rights restrictions, including severe limits on their freedom of movement, their access to healthcare and education, livelihood opportunities, and their ability to marry and have children. Decades of mistreatment of the Rohingya by Myanmar's authorities have been highlighted by human rights groups [16] and by scholars. [17] Amnesty International has described the Rohingya as victims of apartheid within Myanmar,[18] while researchers at the International State Crime Initiative consider the official mistreatment of the Rohingya meeting the threshold level where it can be considered genocide.[19] The Rohingya's 2017 forced deportation is subject of an ongoing International Criminal Court investigation.[20] The African state of Gambia has brought a case before the International Court of Justice accusing Myanmar of breaching its obligations under the Genocide Convention by committing genocide against the Rohingya.[21]

The 2016 and 2017 forced migrations were not the first instances of Myanmar's military precipitating large-scale expulsions of Rohingya to Bangladesh. Military operations claimed to be about addressing illegal immigration and to root out insurgents during 1978 (Operation *Nagamin*)[22] and 1991/92 (Operation *Pyi Thaya*)[23] caused hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee across the border into Bangladesh on each occasion. Ethnic and religious tensions between Rakhine's Buddhist population (mostly members of an ethnic group known as the Rakhine) and Rohingya Muslim communities remained mostly in check during the period of military rule. However, this changed when a well-documented rise of Buddhist nationalism accompanied Myanmar's transition towards quasi-civilian administration following the 2010 general election.[24] Despite clear evidence of rising ethnic and religious tensions in Rakhine state, the authorities made few preparations to pre-empt violence during 2012. The violence left almost 200 persons dead and displaced around 140,000 people, mostly from the Rohingya community.[25] The authorities' eventual response was to separate Buddhist and Muslim populations, a strategy that included confining Rohingya to displacement camps that have been described as concentration camps.[26] By 2021, these camps within Myanmar have become the permanent home to around 120,000 Rohingya who were originally displaced in 2012 and who now are prevented from leaving by armed guards.[27] Severely limited livelihood opportunities within Myanmar have also contributed to Rohingya leaving Myanmar by sea, becoming irregular maritime migrants.[28]

The perception that Rohingya Muslims are the victims of decades of rights abuses in Myanmar, of mass vio-

lence in 2012, and of incarceration in concentration camps contributed to calls by some Rohingya for their community to embrace political violence as a strategy to defend their people[29] These factors are explained in ARSA communications as key contributors to the formation of the ARSA group around this time.[30] Despite this, mainstream Rohingya leaders overwhelmingly adhered to their long-term strategy of rejecting political violence and instead focussed their advocacy efforts on international actors like the United Nations, and Western governments whom they hoped would prioritise human rights concerns and pressure Myanmar's authorities to recognise Rohingya rights.[31]

Political Violence in Myanmar

Violence is a mainstream tactic of political actors in Myanmar, and has been so since the early days of the country's independence in 1948.[32] Since then there has been near constant conflict between the central authorities (national government and military) and various ethnic minority groups. Conflict between the government and armed groups representing ethnic minorities, communists, *Mujahid* fighters, and at times even the remnants of the Republican Chinese *Kuomintang* contributed to the decision of the military to launch the 1962 *coup d'état* which precipitated five decades of military rule but did not end the country's internal armed conflicts.[33]

Insurgents in the Rakhine area during the immediate post-independence period included communists, ethnic Rakhine (mostly Buddhists), and Muslim *Mujahids*. While these groups' motivations and political claims varied greatly, a common claim among ethnic minority groups has been for the devolution of political power from the centre, along the lines of the federation. Many believe that this was central to the 1947 *Panglong Agreement* negotiated between ethnic minority leaders and the central authorities' leadership headed by independence hero Aung San prior to independence.[34] While Myanmar's government and *Tatmadaw* often resist minority claims for increased political influence, inclusion in the ongoing nationwide peace process does bestow a degree of political legitimacy on armed groups. However, it is important to note these groups have rarely made claims of separatism or independence. An exception were some short-lived *Mujahid* militants; they were briefly seeking incorporation of Muslim majority areas adjacent to Pakistan (East Bengal) into that Muslim-majority country during the earliest years of independence.[35]

When Myanmar's military handed control to a notionally civilian administration during 2011, political violence was not unusual in Myanmar where dozens of armed groups were active, and in some cases, controlled territory.[36] While communist insurgencies have ended [37]and *Kuomintang* groups mostly either evacuated, fled, or reformed into locally based militias [38], most armed groups in contemporary Myanmar represent ethnic minorities comprised of Buddhists or Christians.[39] In recent years, most civil war conflict in Myanmar has involved the *Tatmadaw* and EAGs from groups in Kachin and Shan states. However, by 2019 an ethnic Rakhine Buddhist armed group called the Arakan Army (AA) has been active in Rakhine state and in adjacent parts of Chin state.[40] Until 2012, Muslim groups, including the Rohingya, have not in recent decades embraced political violence as a tactic to advance their rights claims. They have not been party to any of the negotiations associated with Myanmar's nationwide peace process.[41]

History of Muslim Militancy in Myanmar

Myanmar's Rohingya have endured serious human rights abuses for decades, including a number of military operations targeting civilians and leading to large-scale forced deportations. Despite this, mainstream Rohingya leaders have, for decades, adhered to a strategy based on rejecting the kind of political violence that was routine for other ethnic minority groups making political or rights claims towards the Myanmar authorities. Many among the Rohingya's modern leadership believed that violence would run contrary to their groups' interests and would likely invite an aggressive military response as well as potentially hardening nation-wide public opinion against them in the majority Buddhist country.[42] Mainstream Rohingya leaders have instead appealed for the support of international actors like the UN, Western governments, and human rights organizations, hoping this could help progress Rohingya citizenship and rights claims. This

has been the approach of mainstream Rohingya leaders since the early 1960s when Muslim *Mujahid* insurgents surrendered to Burma's central authorities and the national government established the Mayu Frontier Administration (MFA).[43] With the insurgency ended, the 1961 creation of the MFA ensured Muslim-majority communities in the northern Arakan (Rakhine) area were governed centrally from Rangoon (Yangon) rather than by a mostly ethnic Rakhine administration based in Akyab (today's state capital, Sittwe).[44] This political concession to Muslim aspirations is noteworthy because it represented an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of these Muslims' political claims. However, shortly after Burma's 1962 military coup, the military-led authorities ended the special status of the MFA.

The *Mujahid* insurgency had operated during a time, following the end of the Second World War, when political instability in the Arakan (Rakhine) area often meant that Burma's authorities effectively controlled little outside of the major population centres with outlying areas being controlled by various armed groups including *Mujahids*, two separate communist armies, and ethnic Rakhine nationalist forces.[45] *Mujahid* militancy was not homogenous and while some supported the incorporation of Muslim-majority communities into the also recently independent state of Pakistan, others aimed for increased Muslim political control within Burma amid fears that a promised Arakan (Rakhine) statehood could lead to Buddhist political dominance of the Muslim population. Creating the MFA had taken political impetus away from the *Mujahid* militants, and its scrapping became a key motivation for some Rohingya to maintain a commitment to political violence.[46] These small groups (often numbering only in the dozens) had limited capacity to undertake violent actions. Mainstream Rohingya leaders mostly adopted a non-violent approach, advocating for Rohingya human rights and citizenship. Despite this, in recent decades Myanmar's authorities have often pointed to the existence of Rohingya groups (however small) who maintained a commitment to political violence throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond as an indication of unbroken Rohingya *Mujahid* militancy starting in the early years of independence.

Militant groups associated with the Rohingya post-1962 political situation included the Rohingya Independence Force (which objected to the military coup of 1962 and the subsequent banning of Rohingya civil society organisations), the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF).[47] The RSO may have been a precursor to the ARIF or the two groups may have allied during the mid-1990s to form the Rohingya Solidarity Alliance (RSA), a group which at its peak might have had up to 500 men under arms, but one that was "extremely limited and factionalised."[48] The RSO label came to be used as a brand by small militant groups regardless of their connection with the original group.[49] Alliances were usually short-lived, groups were based in Bangladesh, and their capacity for military action was extremely limited, often involving only small arms fire or the use of grenades – certainly not the markers of a popularly supported and well-resourced insurgency.[50] While one Rohingya group, the Rohingya Patriotic Front, has been described by scholars as inspired by the worldwide pan-Islamic movements of the 1970s, and as one which did advocate Muslim separatism, scholars have not linked Rohingya militancy of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s with trans-national jihadi groups.[51] These militant groups were never large and were effectively defunct by the 1990s, with a number of prominent leaders declaring their support for non-violence. In recent times, Myanmar's government and the *Tatmadaw* have exaggerated and deliberately misrepresented Muslim militancy. For instance, in 2014 the government surprisingly announced a search for RSO connected "Rohingya terrorists" in Mon and Pegu states far from Rakhine state and with apparently little evidence [52], and in 2016 ARSA's attacks were similarly labelled as the work of the RSO, despite a clear lack of evidence for RSO involvement.[53]

Rohingya militancy was functionally defunct by the 2000s, with mainstream Rohingya leaders advocating a non-violent approach to politics that involved appeals to international actors including human rights organisations, foreign governments, and the UN. However, persistent rights violations against the Rohingya community, sometimes described as genocide, undermined the credibility of this approach. During the decades of military-rule these crimes were often invisible to outside observers due to strict media censorship and bans on media and academic visits to Rohingya communities in Myanmar.[54] However, as Myanmar began a transition towards a quasi-civilian administration from 2011 onwards, there were changes to media rules

which meant the plight of Rohingya victims of rights abuses and in particular the mass internal displacement during 2012 and the confinement of Rohingya to concentration camps received far more international media attention than had been the case during the decades before.[55] International media exposure made the Rohingya a *cause célèbre* within the Muslim *Ummah* and a focus for charitable donations. The visibility of rights abuses against Rohingya motivated some among the Rohingya diaspora to consider a more militant strategy and to establish the ARSA group.[56]

ARSA: Formation, Leadership, Growth, and Action

Known first by the Arabic name *Harakah al-Yaqin* (meaning Faith Movement), and later as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, the newest Rohingya militant group is most commonly identified by the ARSA acronym (and often as Arsa).[57] ARSA claims as its leader Ataullah abu Ammar Jununi, known commonly as Ata Ullah, understood to be a Pakistan born Rohingya who lived for much of his life in Saudi Arabia .He was politicized by media reports of ongoing human rights violations against the Rohingya community and the large-scale incarceration of Rohingya in concentration camps following the 2012 violence.[58] Little is known about ARSA's early funders but the International Crisis Group believes financing comes from a committee of supporters in Mecca and Medina although their identity remains unclear. This has led some to question whether some ARSA actions might actually represent 'false flag' attacks by Myanmar's security forces with the objective of misdirecting blame for the attacks in order to discredit the Rohingya community and justify a disproportionately violent military response in the form of 'clearance operations'.[59]

That ARSA undertook military engagements in 2016 and 2017, and that these prompted immediate *Tatmadaw* responses resulting in large-scale forced deportations of Rohingya to Bangladesh, has been widely reported in international media, by UN investigators, and also noted by scholars.[60] However, their reports have tended to focus on the humanitarian and military consequences of ARSA's actions rather than the nature of the group. One of the first detailed international studies of ARSA was the International Crisis Group's report *Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State?*[61] While the title characterised ARSA similarly to jihadi secessionist groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front of the southern Philippines, the report's contents included a sobering warning that, "A heavy-handed security response that fails to respect fundamental principles of proportionality and distinction is not only in violation of international norms; it is also deeply counterproductive."[62] Similar arguments about the counter-productive nature of aggressive security responses have been made by scholars who have engaged with questions about ARSA's ideological perspective and origins.[63] This point is made strongly by Bashar who suggested that, "For long-lasting peace, Myanmar should take a comprehensive approach that incorporates inclusion, social cohesion and communal harmony, instead of a counter-insurgency focus only."[64]

ARSA has frequently portrayed itself publicly as defenders of Rohingya civilians against mistreatment by Myanmar's military, asserting it maintains no ties to trans-national jihadi groups. This perspective was often accepted by scholars as an accurate assessment of ARSA's situation during the 2017 – 2018 period.[65] However, by 2019 Bashar was comfortable suggesting stronger links might well exist between ARSA and trans-national jihadi groups.[66] In a country where political violence has been a mainstream tactic of ethnic minorities since the 1940s, ARSA commonly presented its actions in an ethno-nationalist context consistent with the approach of many other Myanmar non-state armed groups.[67] However, a noteworthy difference was that by 2015, while other ethnic minorities that might have maintained armed wings were still able to participate in Myanmar's democratic process, the Rohingya were not.

The Rohingya's last collective link with Myanmar's political mainstream was severed when the quasi-civilian government, under pressure from Buddhist nationalists, disenfranchised virtually all Rohingya a few months before the country's 2015 general election.[68] With the stroke of a pen, the Rohingya were made unique among the country's other ethnic minorities that maintained an armed wing, because they were denied any simultaneous participation in the country's democratic processes. Disenfranchising the Rohingya undermined the credibility of mainstream Rohingya leaders who had long pressed for the group to stick to

peaceful political strategies, and consequently strengthened ARSA's hand.

Advocates of peaceful political engagement were further undermined by the Myanmar authorities' reluctance to provide meaningful protection for moderate Rohingya village leaders during 2016 and 2017 when ARSA's presence in northern Rakhine state was certainly known to them. The murders of dozens of moderate Rohingya village leaders and those who spoke against ARSA went largely unaddressed by the authorities.[69] While some killings may have been attributable to local crime gangs using ARSA as a convenient cover to settle old scores, government authorities refused to intervene when Rohingya sought their help. This stands in contrast to the burdensome official regulation of virtually all other aspects of Rohingya life. When Rohingya asked for help, their claims about local militant recruitment and violence were treated as internal Rohingya community concerns. Myanmar's authorities could hardly have provided ARSA with any greater recruitment assistance as the group organised in northern Rakhine state. Official inaction certainly cost the lives of moderate Rohingya village leaders and contributed to a spiral of silence which ultimately strengthened ARSA's ability to recruit and organise ahead of its 2016 and 2017 attacks.

ARSA emerged as a military presence during October 2016 when the previously unknown group killed nine security personnel in northern Rakhine state, sparking fears among Myanmar officialdom of a possible return to the Mujahid militancy of the 1950s, or the emergence of an ISIS-style insurgency seeking exclusive Muslim control of territory.[70] ARSA's 2016 attacks precipitated a brutal crackdown from Myanmar's military that forcibly deported around 90,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh.[71] The *Tatmadaw's* aggressive and speedy response ought to have alerted ARSA that their future actions would bring a similar if not more aggressive response, particularly as ARSA's subsequent 2017 attacks occurred in the context of a major *Tatmadaw* troop build-up in northern Rakhine state.[72]

In August 2017, the Myanmar government was scheduled to receive the recommendations of Kofi Annan's Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which were widely expected to include a call for improvements to Rohingya rights.[73] There were fears among the Rohingya that the military would pre-empt the announcement by attacking Rohingya communities, regardless of the actions of ARSA. Many participants in ARSA's 2017 attacks on government security posts acted with the belief they were pre-empting an inevitable *Tatmadaw* onslaught. Some Rohingya the author of this article interviewed in Bangladesh refugee camps about the 2017 attacks claimed that ARSA encouraged them to attack government security installations (often armed with little more than farming tools) on the understanding that once the attack was underway, trained ARSA soldiers would join the fight, but ARSA's soldiers did not appear.[74] This situation understandably resulted in a great deal of anger among Rohingya and contributed to a perception that ARSA's decisions had precipitated the *Tatmadaw* crackdown that led to the massive scale of their forced deportation to Bangladesh and the associated human rights abuses.

The strong *Tatmadaw* crackdowns that followed ARSA's armed actions during 2016 and 2017 and the devastating consequences for Rohingya civilians (including large-scale forced deportations), certainly served the political interests of the *Tatmadaw* who long wished to deport Rohingya from Myanmar. In the aftermath of the 2017 forced deportation, *Tatmadaw* leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing left little doubt about the *Tatmadaw's* intentions by describing the Rohingya's continued presence in Myanmar as "unfinished business" from the Second World War.[75] Whether the 2017 violence was initiated by ARSA or instigated by the *Tatmadaw* who used ARSA's attacks as a pretext for a planned crackdown on Rohingya civilian communities, the outcome for ordinary Rohingya was tragic. It was described by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres as a "human rights nightmare". It was also a vindication of the mainstream Rohingya leadership's long-term political strategy of non-violence.[76] The implementation of the Annan Commission's recommendations – which included a call to re-examine the link between ethnicity and citizenship, a major impediment to Rohingya rights - would certainly have been a positive step for the Rohingya community.[77] The *Tatmadaw's* 2017 "clearance operation" and its consequences significantly altered the political landscape, shifting the attention away from the Annan Commission's recommendations and towards the Rohingya's humanitarian situation as refugees in Bangladesh and focusing on the security situation in northern Rakhine state. While the rights abuses associated with the *Tatmadaw's* response to ARSA's 2017 attacks cannot

be excused and are legitimately the subject of an International Criminal Court investigation [78], renewed Rohingya militancy, as envisaged by ARSA, did not provide any protection for Rohingya communities and likely encouraged a more brutal *Tatmadaw* crackdown than might otherwise have been the case.

ARSA's Strategic Communications

The liberalisation of media rules from 2012 onwards allowed militant groups operating in Myanmar to utilise, for the first time, communication tools already commonly used in other parts of the world.[79] ARSA used mobile phone text messages, and soon the encrypted WhatsApp, for its internal communications and recruitment while using Facebook and Twitter to communicate its message more widely. ARSA's Facebook presence effectively ended when the group was designated a "dangerous organisation" by Facebook in 2017.[80] ARSA continued to regularly post to its Twitter account (@ARSA_Official) which has not been removed from that platform.[81] The removal of ARSA's Facebook presence while it continued to Tweet is likely attributable to differences in the local usage of each platform. Facebook is overwhelmingly Myanmar's most popular domestic internet site and accounts for more than 90% of social media traffic [82] while Twitter mostly serves a small local English-speaking audience and the international community (although notably, the domestic popularity of Twitter increased in the aftermath of Myanmar's 2021 military coup). Myanmar's government and military would likely have been concerned that ARSA's Facebook presence risked providing the group with domestic legitimacy which might not have been the case with its Twitter presence. ARSA's Tweets are also in English, another indication they are aimed at a mostly foreign audience of diplomats, media, and human rights activists.

Many of ARSA's external communications can still be readily accessed either in their original locations, or in the form of reposts. Aside from ARSA's Twitter feed, the group has also made use of YouTube to post videos, usually statements by the group's leader Ata Ullah.[83] These statements are made in Arabic and in the Rohingya's own language, and frequently include English language subtitles. In these video clips Ata Ullah is usually flanked by ARSA recruits carrying guns. Ata Ullah has also given a small number of media interviews, including one to the Reuters news agency in March 2017.[84]

An examination of ARSA's (@ARSA_Official) Tweets during a two year period from when the group first Tweeted in April 2017 – the time ARSA was most active in Myanmar – provides useful insights into the messages ARSA wishes to communicate to the outside world. The quantity of these Tweets provide a suitable dataset for analysis, using Bockstette's analytical framework.[85] During that time (April 2017 to April 2019) ARSA Tweeted 134 times and by April 2019 had attracted 16,400 followers (this has risen to 20,300 by December 2021). In 2019, @ARSA_Official followed just 27 profiles, mostly related to government and politics (including President Trump, Prime Minister Modi, US Department of State), human rights groups (including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch), some leaders of mainstream Rohingya groups, and journalists. The profile also included the ARSA logo – a map outline of Rakhine state and two crossed assault rifles above the group's English language name.

ARSA's Tweets were for the purpose of this article categorised by drawing on the framework for analysis of jihadi communication strategies developed by Carsten Bockstette in the context of Al-Qaeda's ongoing communications war and published in 2008.[86] Bockstette's framework highlights the way jihadis aimed to use communication strategies to compensate for the asymmetry in their military might. Bockstette explained that "Jihadi terrorists placed a great deal of emphasis on developing comprehensive communication strategies in order to reach their desired short-, mid- and long-term goals and desired end states."[87] Bockstette divided these communication goals into three categories: "legitimizing" (recruitment, fundraising and ideological outreach), "propagating" (justifying the violence and situating this within an Islamic context) and "intimidating" (the coercion and intimidation of the group's opponents).[88] These were the three labels applied to each of ARSA's 2017 to 2019 Tweets. While there might be some overlap between the subjects of the Tweets examined – a Tweet classified as primarily seeking to legitimise ARSA might also include elements of propaganda - classifications were determined by each Tweet's principal objective or focus.

The overwhelming majority of ARSA's Tweets (106 from the 134 total) can be described as seeking to legitimize the group and its activities, for instance, correcting media reports that portrayed the group as unnecessarily violent, or having targeted civilians.[89] A small subset of ARSA's Tweets (nineteen) can be described as propaganda, seeking to justify the group's activities or place these in a broader Islamic context and often presenting ARSA as giving Rohingya a necessary political voice which was lacking before. Only nine Tweets fall into the "intimidating" category, although it can plausibly be argued that ARSA's presence in Myanmar as an armed group and its use of a logo which includes assault rifles diminishes its need for further intimidatory signals.

A similar desire to build the group's legitimacy can also be found in other ARSA communications, notably in its 2019 report *Reviving the Courageous Hearts,* a 69 page document outlining the group's history, motivations and objectives.[90] This report devotes considerable space to subjects that justify the group's formation and use of violence – "Precursor to Rohingya Genocide" (Chapter 2), "Final Stages of Genocide" (Chapter 4), and "Rohingya Resistances in Response to 2012 Violence" (Chapter 5) - and a chapter "Brief History: Rohingya Armed Resistances Against Burmese Tyrants" (Chapter 3) which links ARSA with previous Rohingya militant groups including the Mujahids, ARIF and RSO.[91] As with ARSA's approach to Twitter, projecting an intimidating posture was a secondary concern and mostly achieved through the use of full page colour photographs of armed ARSA soldiers to indicate the group's capacity for action rather than through written text.

Using Tweets, other communications like *Reviving the Courageous Hearts* and public statements by its leader Ata Ullah published on YouTube, ARSA consistently presented itself as an ethno-nationalist group with a localised focus and without links with transnational jihadi groups. Indeed, ARSA in July 2019 even Tweeted this specific claim: "It is, once again, reassured that #ARSA only legitimately and objectively operates as an #ETHNO NATIONALIST movement within its ancestral homeland (Arakan) in #Burma & its activities had not & will not transcend beyond its country."[92]

Ata Ullah's public statements, available on YouTube, have usually followed the same approach by presenting ARSA's violence as a necessary and justified response to the Rohingya's decades of mistreatment by Myanmar's government and military. However, one interview he provided to Reuters news agency in March 2017 significantly deviated from that script. Reuters reported on 31 March 2017 that, "The leader of a Rohingya Muslim insurgency against Myanmar's security forces said on Friday his group would keep fighting "even if a million die" unless the country's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, took action to protect the religious minority."[93] ARSA subsequently furiously denied the veracity of the Reuters interview, with a series of identical Tweets on April 5 directed at journalists and prominent human rights activists: "#ARSA Commander, Ata Ullah, denies quoting a figure '1 M or 1.5 M #Rohingya people' in his recent interview with @Reuters"[94] The speed and ferocity of ARSA's denial was strongly indicative of how the group prioritised building its legitimacy in the eyes of key international actors, including international media, human rights figures, and foreign governments. This provides a strong indication that ARSA regards building legitimacy as a key role of its strategic communications with intimidation and situating the group's work within an Islamic framework as secondary considerations.

The absence of ARSA communications that aim to intimidate (and the group's denial of Ata Ullah's statement to Reuters that did precisely that) strongly indicate ARSA regards the key role of its strategic communications through public avenues is to legitimize the existence of the group and its activities. However, while an analysis of ARSA's publicly available strategic communications might conclude ARSA has not heavily relied on intimidation as a communications tool, and neither does it use its strategic communications to situate its activities within an Islamic framework, this does not tell the whole story. Language, access to communications technology, and long-term restrictions on the ability of Rohingya to travel outside their home communities also play a role.

ARSA operates in an environment (Myanmar's northern Rakhine state and now Bangladesh refugee camps adjacent to the Myanmar frontier) where Rohingya mostly speak their own Rohingya language (which has

similarities with the Chittagonian dialect of Bengali) that is little known by foreigners. Decades of education restrictions also mean there are fewer English speakers in Rohingya communities than in other parts of Myanmar and the group's collective poverty means access to even cheap computer technology and internet services have been restricted. In this context, ARSA's local recruitment within Myanmar had been known to involve ARSA organisers including Ata Ullah making personal visits to individual Rohingya communities, asking the community to provide five to ten men for basic training.[95] Once basic training was completed, ARSA's new recruits returned to their home communities where they encouraged active religious observance, and undertook security duties including allegedly violently silencing Rohingya who opposed the group's activities or were regarded as too close to the authorities. ARSA's communication with recruits often takes place through voice messages using WhatsApp, with the encryption regarded as providing a degree of security.[96] It was through WhatsApp messages that ARSA made its calls to action in 2016 and 2017.

This indicates that ARSA, almost from its inception, has run a dual-track communications strategy. Publicly available communications aimed at legitimising the group in the eyes of outsiders, while private messages and face to face training were used to encourage Islamic religious observance and to project the group's capacity to undertake violence. ARSA clearly believed that legitimation of its actions in the eyes of outsiders served a valuable role, but ARSA's external messaging does not provide a complete picture of the nature of the group – only what ARSA desired to project to key outside audiences. ARSA's actions often do not appear to be consistent with their external messaging. ARSA's communication with the Rohingya themselves was markedly different, more personalised and for outsiders (including scholars) significantly more difficult to reliably access. The outcomes of ARSA's internal communication, if not the messages themselves, can be observed through ARSA's actions.

ARSA has frequently claimed that they are not connected with transnational jihadi groups and the adoption of the ARSA name would seem to attests to this. However, ARSA's original name *Harakah al-Yaqin* (Faith Movement) clearly indicated religious roots, as has the group's encouragement of religious observance and instances of mistreatment of non-Muslims among the Rohingya community or living in close proximity to Rohingya communities. Amnesty International published a 2018 report suggesting ARSA was responsible for two 2017 massacres in which up to 99 Hindus resident in northern Rakhine state were murdered, including children.[97] These killings do indicate a religious intolerance similar to that of groups like ISIS, although ARSA denied responsibility. However throughout 2019 and 2020 there were also reports of ARSA targeting the small Christian Rohingya community living in the Bangladesh refugee camps, as well as Rohingya civilians assisting international aid groups.[98] ARSA have also been criticised for their role in killing moderate Rohingya community leaders in Rakhine state during the 2016-2017 period, a practice that has allegedly continued in the Bangladesh camps.[99] During September 2021, the high profile murder of Mohib Ullah, a moderate Rohingya leader who was gunned down outside the refugee camp office of the organisation he headed, the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, was widely blamed on ARSA, although the group denied responsibility for the murder.[100] This prompted a strong response from Rohingya civil society groups, 21 of which issued a joint statement, declaring: "We, the undersigned Rohingya organizations, denounce the so-called "Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army – ARSA" (or Harakah Al Yakeen), a criminal group that self-proclaims to be fighting for the rights of the Rohingya people. The Rohingya community does not accept ARSA as a group that represents the ideals and interests of the Rohingya community in or outside of Burma. Thus, the group must not claim it represents the interests of the Rohingya nation."[101]

There are reports too that ARSA has pressured Rohingya refugees to pay "taxes" to the group [102] and urged camp residents to be more religiously observant which indicates these tendencies may have been present in the group from the beginning but were actively hidden.

Concluding Comments

By examining a few key elements of ARSA's strategic communications, including the group's Tweets, YouTube statements by its leader, and the *Reviving the Courageous Hearts* report, ARSA has been shown to

operate a dual-track communications strategy that prioritises seeking legitimacy from international actors but uses other elements of the framework for jihadi communications suggested by Bockstette (propaganda and intimidation) when engaging with Rohingya communities. Despite presenting itself to outsiders (using platforms like Twitter) within an ethno-nationalist framework much like mainstream Myanmar EAGs and without links to trans-national jihadi groups, this analysis strongly suggests ARSA presents itself using a much more religious framework within Rohingya communities. ARSA likely places a much greater value on the centrality of Islam and its observance by the Rohingya than the group might be comfortable to admit to outsiders.

ARSA's presence in the Rohingya's Bangladesh refugee camps means transnational jihadi groups and ARSA's leadership and members have much easier access to each other than would have been the case when most Rohingya lived in Myanmar prior to the forced deportation of 2017. If ARSA's leadership and transnational jihadi groups aspired to closer links, the likelihood that they would be able to achieve this aim is high. During the period for which ARSA's communications were examined for this article (2017-2019), there was little publicly available evidence of strong ARSA links with transnational jihadi groups. However, while finding no evidence of ARSA links with transnational jihadi organisations, the analysis in this article strongly indicates ARSA ought to be understood as an ethno-religious group rather than ethno-nationalist as it has claimed. This suggests ARSA may be more willing to engage with transnational jihadi groups than it has previously admitted.

Further complicating the security landscape for the Rohingya refugee community in Bangladesh is the virtually unregulated export of illicit drugs, principally amphetamines, from Myanmar since the time of the military coup of February 2021.[103] While poverty ensures that Rohingya refugees are far from a lucrative market for illicit drugs, the proximity of refugee camps to a porous international frontier means the Rohingya have found themselves living on a key transit corridor for contraband. There are credible reports that elements of the ARSA group have become involved with the drug trade as a means of revenue raising.[104] This means ARSA's demands for loyalty may now come with the expectation of support for ARSA's illicit drug trade activities as well as support for ARSA's approach to political violence and religious observance.

The Rohingya have collectively demonstrated themselves to be resistant to radical Islamic perspectives, and the mainstream Rohingya leadership continues to embrace peaceful political approaches. However, with more than one million Rohingya refugees confined, long-term, in Bangladesh camps and consequently more easily accessed by ARSA and by radical Islamic groups [105], there is a risk that this could change, particularly as these camps are increasingly securitised by Bangladesh's government with the erection of barbed wire fences [106], enforcement of strict curfews [107], internet shut downs [108], and with severely curtailed livelihood opportunities for camp residents.[109] Bangladesh's authorities may find a securitised approach towards the Rohingya refugee community has the unintended consequence of pushing an unwilling Rohingya population towards an ARSA with closer ties to transnational jihadis and narco-traffickers than the group's public face communications have previously indicated.

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Notes

[1] Myanmar is still often known as Burma. To avoid confusion, the name "Myanmar" is used to refer to the country since its name was officially changed by the military junta in 1989. When referring to the country's history prior to 1989, the name "Burma" is used.

[2] During British-rule and Burma's early years of independence, Rakhine state was named Arakan division, a name derived from the area's pre-colonial identity as the Arakan kingdom. In recent years, groups like ARSA use the Arakan name as a means of communicating their claim to local legitimacy by denoting their long-term connection with the land. It is also an implicit rejection of military-junta era naming practices and associated assertions about ethnicity and indigeneity.

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Linking the August 2017 Attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils to Islamic State's External Security Apparatus Through Foreign Fighters

by Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo

Abstract

The Ripoll cell, to which the jihadists who perpetrated the August 2017 attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils belonged, is best understood as a cell linked to the central structures of Islamic State (IS) through displaced or returned foreign fighters of Western European origin. This can be deduced, on the one hand, from a contextual and in-depth analysis of IS notifications and pronouncements in the aftermath of the attacks, unveiling the role played by the jihadist organization's "external security" apparatus in instigating and guiding the Ripoll cell in attack planning and preparations. On the other hand, this can also be deduced from a study of both direct and circumstantial evidence about the cross-border movements and international contacts of the main cell members, particularly in and out of Belgium in approximately the year and a half prior to the August 2017 attacks. In addition, information emerging from intelligence sources corroborates, or is consistent with, this perspective

Keywords: Islamic State, Ripoll cell, Barcelona and Cambrils attacks, Catalonia, Spain

Introduction

On 17 August 2017 in the city of Barcelona and on the following day in the town of Cambrils—both in Catalonia, Spain—six jihadists armed with vehicles and knives launched a series of terrorist attacks, killing 16 people and wounding 137.[1] These jihadists belonged to a 10-men cell that had initially planned to carry out far more ambitious and lethal attacks on 20 August in Barcelona using the explosive TATP. But they changed and accelerated the plans after an abandoned house in the municipality of Alcanar, southeast of Catalonia, that they used as a bomb factory blew up accidentally on the night of 16 August. Two cell members—including imam Abdelbaki Es Satty, the cell leader—died because of this explosion. Six others—actually, those who participated directly in the execution of the attacks—were shot dead by the police. The remaining two cell members were arrested and subsequently convicted of terrorism offences. Additionally, the cell benefited from the collaboration of an individual upon whom a prison sentence was also imposed.[2]

The cell started to form in 2015 in Ripoll, a small locality in northern Catalonia, after Es Satty arrived there and radicalized some young Muslims, a few of them already sympathetic to Salafism. Es Satty and eight of his followers in the cell were Moroccan nationals and one was a citizen of Spain. Nine were second-generation Muslims, born or raised in Spain but descendants of Moroccan immigrants. The one exception, the imam himself, migrated from Morocco to Spain in 2002. All were legal residents in Spain. Under the charismatic authority of the imam, kinship was an important factor for recruitment into the cell, since there were four pairs of brothers, with one set of brothers being cousins with another set of brothers. Aside from the 44-years old leader, the three other core cell members—Mohamed Hichamy, Youssef Aalla and Younes Abouyaaqoub—were aged 24, 22 and 22 at the time of the attacks, respectively. Secondary to them, five more cell members were between 18 and 24 year of age, whereas the youngest and only minor among them was aged 17.[3]

Although the Ripoll cell members were pro-Islamic State (IS), it was possible from the very beginning to rule out the possibility of the cell being integrated into IS's structures. IS directorate had introduced changes in its strategy in the West after the March 2016 attacks in Brussels, the last attacks in Western Europe involving IS-trained militants who were part of a centrally-directed operational network.[4] The modified strategy was

implemented in May 2016 and lasted until 2019, around the time when the caliphate that IS had proclaimed five years earlier across vast territories of Syria and Iraq lost most of its territorial base. In the framework of this modified strategy, IS continued using propaganda to instigate attacks by lone actors and inspired cells on their own but added the option of remotely guiding supporters willing to attack.[5] For this latter option, IS "external security" apparatus—part of the security *diwan* or central bureaucracy of the caliphate—was charged with selecting and designating activists, especially among foreign fighters of Western European origin in Syria and Iraq or returnees, to liaise with prospective attackers and to act as virtual planners or field supervisors.[6]

In that respect, our article offers a scholarly analysis, based on documented evidence, to concisely explain why the Ripoll cell behind the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils is best understood as a cell linked to the "external security" apparatus of IS. No other aspects of the cell and its members or other facets of the attacks are dealt with in this article. Our contribution is part of a larger research initiative on the case and draws basically from primary sources. These include: twelve long individual and group interviews as well as additional shorter communications with officials from Catalonia's autonomous police or Mossos d'Esquadra (ME), from the statewide law enforcement agencies Cuerpo Nacional de Policia (CNP, National Police) and Guardia Civil (GC, Civil Guard), from the Centro de Inteligencia sobre Terrorismo y Crimen Organizado (CITCO, Center for Intelligence on Terrorism and Organized Crime), from the Centro Nacional de Inteligencia (CNI, National Intelligence Center), and from the Prosecutor's Office or Fiscalía of the Audiencia Nacional (AN, National Court), all of them knowledgeable about the case;[7] and judicial documents and police reports related to the August 2017 attacks.[8] Occasionally we relied also on credible open and secondary sources.[9]

Imam Es Satty and his Followers Inside the Ripoll Cell: "We, the Soldiers of the Islamic State in the Usurped Land of Al Andalus"

Among the ruins of the house in Alcanar that the Ripoll cell members occupied and used as a bomb factory—the house where on the night of 16 August 2017 a good part of the between 200 and 500 kilograms of TATP produced by members of that terrorist cell during the preceding days had accidentally exploded—police investigators of ME found three Arabic-language manuscripts handwritten by Es Satty. These texts are of interest to learn how he defined himself and his followers as members of the jihadist cell that they formed in Ripoll. The first of these handwritten samples is a note that Es Satty wrote on the back of a passport-type photograph of himself. Its translation into English is the following:

> "Soldier of the soldiers of the Islamic State. The one who comes is more astute and ordered: Wait! I am also one of those who wait."[10]

This note makes it plain that Es Satty saw himself as a "soldier" of IS. But aside from that it is also worth observing, even at this early stage in our analysis on the links between the Ripoll cell and IS "external security" apparatus, how the more cryptic words of such a brief note seemed to insinuate that Es Satty's activities and movements with respect to the terrorist plot under way depended on orders given by someone who was above him and further afield. Es Satty was waiting on someone—either in person or virtually—before he and his followers in the Ripoll cell attempted to execute the plot. This would have been someone to whom Es Satty was subordinated and had better aptitudes or skills for guiding or supervising the intended purpose than the Moroccan imam, as this note acknowledged.

Referring now to the jihadists in the Ripoll cell who, like Es Satty himself, were ready to die while killing as many as possible in Barcelona, the cell leader used two expressions that appeared respectively on a sheet of paper and on a separate fragment of white paper, as fragments of an open letter or declaration that he was drafting the same day that he lost his life. The declaration was to be made public on 20 August or very shortly thereafter, since that is the date that appears on these fragments. Both expressions reiterated the denomination "soldiers of Islamic State" for the Ripoll cell members and included a mention of the Ripoll cell's setting when alluding to the medieval Islamic dominion over most of the Iberian Peninsula—or "Al

Andalus"—which holds a special meaning for the jihadists.

Moreover, the first expression remarks the situation that jihadists attribute to what they still consider to be a Muslim land, whereas the second uses five terms commonly used in the propaganda of IS to broadly identify the addressees of the declaration, a typical range of enemies designated commonly in IS rhetoric. Translated into English, these sentences read as follows:

> "[…] We the soldiers of the Islamic State in the usurped land of Al Andalus."[11]
>
> "In the name of Allah, the merciful, the beneficient. Brief letter from the soldiers of the Islamic State in the land of Al Andalus to the crusaders, the hateful, the sinners, the unjust, the corrupt."[12]

The Ripoll cell members were major consumers, through different electronic devices, of the propaganda that IS had been spreading online since 2014, when the organization was constituted as such, and when their leaders adopted its new name while proclaiming a caliphate over the territories of Syria and Iraq then under IS control. That propaganda included speeches by IS's emir at the time, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, and by Abu Mohamed al Adnani, its main strategist until his death in August 2016.[13] Members of the Ripoll cell also showed adherence to IS in many other ways, from carrying images with the jihadist organization's flag on their mobile phones to drawing the same banner on at least one of the many pillowcases they used to dry TATP in the house of Alcanar.[14]

Likewise, the cell members who launched the Cambrils attacks emulated hours before a behavior observed among young Muslims that IS had recruited in Western Europe mainly as foreign fighters: they met to burn their passports and other identity documents in a ceremony seen as a ritual of loyalty to IS and as an open renouncement of their nationalities in favor of the ummah or the nation of Islam.[15] In short, the Ripoll cell members considered themselves IS "soldiers" and saw IS as their go-to jihadist organization. But the foregoing does not yet make it possible to clarify whether Es Satty and his followers formed an IS-inspired cell or an IS-linked cell. To elucidate it we must continue by understanding what IS said about the members of the Ripoll cell and especially when and how IS disseminated statements on the matter.

What the Amaq News Agency and a Sequence of Notifications Afterwards Revealed about the Relationship between the Ripoll Cell and IS

On 17 August 2017, just four hours after the vehicle-ramming attack in La Rambla, Amaq News reported through the Telegram messaging application that IS was taking credit for what had happened. Since its creation in 2014, Amaq News agency was part of the IS central propaganda structures, and, as of 2016, became the preferred tool to claim as quickly as possible responsibility for attacks in the West, though only if authorized by the aforementioned "external security" apparatus. This formula created some distance between IS leadership and the attackers, placing on the latter the responsibility for the outcome of their attacks.[16] The notification issued by Amaq News, citing a "security source", included the following statement:

> "The perpetrators of the attack in Barcelona were Islamic State soldiers and the operation was carried out in response to calls for targeting the coalition countries."[17]

Hence, the Ripoll cell members' description of themselves as "soldiers of the Islamic State" coincided with the way Amaq News described them in this sentence.[18] This is relevant if only because in 2017 IS spread notifications of at least six terrorist incidents in Western countries without calling the perpetrators "Islamic State soldiers."[19] However, that does not sufficiently clarify whether the Ripoll cell was an IS-inspired cell or an IS-linked cell. Nor does it help clarify the real meaning of the second part of the sentence. Since September 2014, IS leaders had been making calls to their supporters living in countries that, like Spain, contributed to the international coalition created earlier that month to combat and defeat the jihadist organization, inciting them to attack from within as a form of retribution and deterrence.[20] But such calls, which became more frequent in 2015 and 2016, could have been answered in 2017 by IS-inspired cells as well as by IS-linked cells.

However, in the Amaq News notifications about the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils there was a detail which revealed the existence of a link between the Ripoll cell and IS. The detail was in the source cited in these notifications. In the case of the August 2017 attacks, as with regard to other terrorist attacks outside IS' core territory, the "security source" cited was an obvious reference to IS's clandestine "external security" apparatus.[21] Incidentally, this was not the only detail to be noted because the first of these Amaq News notifications—the one that appeared just four hours after the attack on La Rambla—referred in the plural to "the perpetrators". However, only one terrorist, namely Younes Abouyaaqoub, was involved in the attacks that had occurred up to that moment. But in IS's central propaganda organs it was known, from the information held beforehand by the "external security" apparatus, that he was not a lone actor and that others were involved.

Also, in addition to Amaq News communications, IS started in 2017 using its central and related propaganda outlets to claim responsibility for acts of terrorism in Western Europe. That happened notably for the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks. On 19 August Nashir News republished Amaq News' claim, with the required authorization from IS "external security" apparatus', calling the Ripoll cell members "soldiers of the caliphate".[22] On 24 August, IS's weekly newsletter Al Naba offered, also with the approval of IS "external security" apparatus, infographics on the attacks along with an image of Barcelona's Sagrada Familia church.[23] Yet is important to bear in mind that the communications from Amaq News, Nashir News and Al Naba were primarily addressed to audiences inside territories under IS control.[24] The same applies to the propaganda disseminated by IS's provinces media outlets. Two of them, the Wilayat al-Khayr and the Wilayat al-Furat, contributed content about the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils.[25]

To address audiences outside IS territory, particularly in Western Europe, IS's central media diwan or bureaucracy relied on the productions of Al Hayat Media Center, also under the supervision of the "external security" apparatus.[26] Al Hayat Media's main production since September 2016, and during the year of the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks, was the magazine *Rumiyah,* which appeared in up to eleven different languages, including English, French and German. Issue number 13 of this magazine, released online on 9 September 2017, devoted its cover page to these attacks as well as a good portion of its Foreword and a special page under the heading "The Spain Attacks". Ripoll cell members were described as "a group of Islamic State soldiers" divided in "two covert units comprised of several mujahidin." This is a description appropriate for members of an IS-linked cell, particularly considering the basic distinction made by IS between "military operations" taking place on caliphate territory and "covert operations" carried out in enemy lands. The attacks that six of them committed were justified by IS as punishment of Spain for its contribution to "the war against the Islamic State", i.e. training the Iraqi army and participating in the anti-IS coalition.[27]

IS's communications on terrorist attacks in Western Europe during 2016 and 2017 tended to exhibit a sequence. Al Amaq News published a notification first. Only then the central propaganda outlets would republish it through Nashir News and Al Naba. Finally, Al Hayat Media may expand the coverage.[28] When assessing the importance that IS leadership gave to the Ripoll cell and its activities, it is telling to notice that, of the 14 terrorist incidents in Western countries for which the jihadist organization claimed responsibility in 2017, the complete sequence of communications was found in only two cases: after the May attacks in Manchester and after the August attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils.[29] Because the "external security" apparatus had the prerogative to approve the diffusion of information and commentaries on attacks in Western Europe, the existence of a full communicative sequence best fits attacks conducted by IS-linked cells.

Explaining the Inaccuracies Observed in IS's Media Communications as well as the Lack of Video Recordings Made by the Terrorists

Two facts could lead to the wrong deduction that the Ripoll cell was just an IS-inspired cell having neither direct nor indirect contact with the jihadist organization's operational and propaganda structures which at that time were still based in Syria. On the one hand, the fact that the series of communiqués disseminated by a succession of IS's central media bureaucracy and related agencies in the aftermath of the Barcelona

and Cambrils attacks contained noticeable inaccuracies. On the other hand, the fact that none of these propaganda outlets, despite repeatedly describing the Ripoll cell members as IS "soldiers" or soldiers of the caliphate, were capable of airing any video recorded by the terrorists themselves.

Certainly, the first Amaq News statement after the attacks on La Rambla, like the second one issued after those which took place in Cambrils, contained many inaccuracies that other IS propaganda organs subsequently reproduced.[30] Most likely this was due to the speed with which the original statement announcing IS claim of responsibility was made public. Amaq News may have learned details of the attacks from mainstream media and, as in the case of reporting other terrorist incidents in Western Europe, got those details wrong, as the mainstream media also did initially. However, the claiming of credit typically flows from an Amaq-specific source.

It is also very likely that some inaccuracies were construed deliberately, meaning that Amaq News or Al Naba manipulated the information on the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks, as it had done in the case of other terrorism attack claims in Western countries, magnifying the incidents and their impact with the aim of enhancing the image of pro-IS actors and of their actions. These stories were primarily aimed at internal audiences within a caliphate at a time when the once vast territory of the caliphate extending across Syria and Iraq was diminishing due to international coalition airstrikes. The purpose was to stimulate IS fighters active within that territory and boost their morale, while simultaneously intimidating local populations by projecting the image of a jihadist organization still capable of carrying out spectacular mass-casualty attacks outside its own core territory and specifically in Western Europe.[31]

It is also true that, during the second half of 2016, IS claimed responsibility for several terrorist incidents in Western countries, through Amaq News and other propaganda channels, providing video images that portrayed the jihadists involved in their execution as they were preparing to carry them out, voicing their motivations, and pledging obedience to the then-caliph.[32] Amaq News' publication of such video images indicated the existence of some contact between the attacks' perpetrators and IS operatives.[33] But the fact that neither Amaq News nor any other IS media outlets offered pre-recorded video messages pertaining to Ripoll cell members does not imply that the latter were merely part of an IS-inspired cell. On the one hand, throughout 2017 Amaq News did not use these types of recordings when reporting attacks perpetrated in Western Europe. This may have been a precaution adopted to avoid the risk that the videos could be intercepted during their transfer, which would allow the police or the intelligence services to detect terrorist plans in progress.[34]

The fact is, however, that the members of the Ripoll cell did make video recordings to be broadcast on 20 August 2017 or very shortly thereafter. On the 14th of that month, cell member Mohamed Houli Chemlal was tasked with recording several videos inside the Alcanar house in which Youssef Aalla, Mohamed Hichamy and Youness Abouyaaqoub—the cell's senior members next to their leader—appear speaking in Castilian, Catalan, and Arabic while they insert TATP into metal cylinders to make explosive vests and hand grenades.[35] During the videotaping of the recording session, Houli Chemlal is heard pointing out to the three members of the cell's core that the recordings "could be cut down," alluding to a further selection of the takes, and saying that these were made "so that they can see how you work on that— a reference to the people expected to watch (after the planned attacks were carried out) how they had manufactured TATP and built the explosive devices utilized.[36]

It is unknown who was meant to receive these recordings or in what way. That was a matter probably handled personally by Es Satty. However, core members of the Ripoll cell also discussed such issues, using a dead mailbox when communicating by email or by using several secret phone numbers when communicating by mobile phones. What we know, however, is that the video recordings were to be delivered, most probably between 17 and 19 August, to "some people who would be coming", people "related" to Es Satty, because Houli Chemlal heard about this from Youssef Aalla, Mohamed Hichamy, and Youness Abouyaaqoub on the afternoon of 14 August, when the four were together in the bomb factory house of Alcanar.[37] Inevitably, all this is reminiscent of the handwritten note by Es Satty, reproduced earlier in this article, where he made

a reference to "the one who comes."[38]

The August 2017 Attacks as a Demonstration of the Potential Impact of Links between Europe-based Supporters and Foreign Fighters

The speed with which IS endorsed the killings in La Rambla through Amaq News, and other "clues compiled in the investigation," led the ME experts on terrorism who were officially working on this case to conclude that there was a prior link between the Ripoll cell and IS. It was not because of the complete sequence of IS communications on the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, or because of the extraordinary importance that *Rumiyah* attributed to these acts of terror, or because of the recorded videos, in one of which Mohamed Hichamy says about himself and his cellmates that "Allah has chosen us among millions of men to make you cry blood."[39] In their final report on the Ripoll cell members and their activities these experts used the following phrase to characterize the kind of linkage that existed for the Ripoll cell before August 2017:

> "A previous and direct connection with operational senior officials of the terrorist organization Islamic State-DAESH."[40]

In that same report, the same police experts further argued that:

> "It can't be ruled out that the cell leaders have had some direct contact with one or more members of the terrorist organization based in Syria or Iraq, possibly by telematic ways."[41]

The alluded "cell leaders" included Es Satty and three other core members of the Ripoll cell, namely Momahed Hichamy, Youssef Aalla and Younnes Abouyyaqoub. As the ME experts concluded, the "previous" and "direct" connection made it possible for the leader and the senior members of the Ripoll cell to receive "advice" and "strengthened the ideological decision of carrying out the terrorist action".[42]

Moreover, the existence of a "previous" and "direct" connection between key members of the Ripoll cell and IS operators is entirely consistent with another crucial piece of information on the subject matter. In January 2018, the sixth report of the United Nations Secretary-General on "the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat" includes the following words with respect to the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils:

> "Member States report continued links between Europe-based ISIL supporters (including Al-Qaida facilitators) and foreign terrorist fighters located in conflict zones and elsewhere. The attacks carried out in Spain in August 2017 demonstrated the potential impact of such transnational links."[43]

As it is, the intelligence services of at least one member state of the United Nations were in a position to share, within the framework of the UN Security Council, the critical information that behind the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils there were ample cross-border links between IS supporters residing in European countries—such as the IS supporters who constituted the Ripoll cell—and IS foreign fighters acting from Syria and Iraq or as returnees from one or more Western European countries. Interestingly, the point about Al Qaeda facilitators is also relevant, since the Ripoll cell leader Es Satty was embedded, during the previous decade, in jihadist circles based in the Catalonian localities of Vilanova i la Geltrú first and then Santa Coloma de Gramanet that were dedicated to facilitating the transfer of human and material resources, mainly from Spain and Morocco, to Al Qaeda's branch in Iraq (AQI) before this entity was disowned by Al Qaeda and evolved into IS.[44]

The UN report was prepared jointly by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, in collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism and with other UN agencies. In-person exchanges with a CTED-related senior official made it possible for us to reduce to four the list of member states whose intelligence services could have provided the most valuable information contained in the report: France, United States, United Kingdom and Russia.[45] Later on, we were told that the information had to have come from either France or the US.[46] This makes sense since, on the one hand, the foreign fighters who traveled from France to Syria acquired, together with

those from Belgium with whom they often intermingled in French-speaking groups, a remarkable status in IS operational structures and more specifically in its "external security" apparatus.[47] On the other hand, US intelligence agencies were the main Western intelligence services observing most closely the evolving threat posed by IS from Syria and Iraq.

This leads us to the question: who could have facilitated the set-forth link between the Ripoll cell core members and foreign fighters operating out of the Middle East or located inside Western Europe—or out of various countries from both geopolitical regions at the same time—under the coordination of the "external security" apparatus of IS?

Among the Unveiled Contacts of Core Ripoll Cell Members, Who was Related to Foreign Fighters and Able to Become an IS Facilitator?

A first answer to the question that closes the preceding section reasonably points to Es Satty himself, whose known record of relationships with foreign fighters can be traced back to 2003. Shortly after his arrival in Spain, he shared lodgings in the Andalusian province of Jaén with an Algerian who later that year blew himself up in an attack in Nasiriyya claimed by the organization which from September 2004 onwards became known as AQI.[48] When Es Satty moved to Catalonia he lived alongside militants of the now-extinct Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (MICG) who relied on connections first with Ansar al Islam and then also with AQI to funnel foreign fighters from Spain to Iraq, including members of the network behind the 2004 Madrid train bombings who escaped and became foreign fighters for AQI in Iraq.[49]

Between October 2015 and April 2016, Es Satty resided in Belgium, preaching radical Islamism in a mosque in Diegem. From there he had been moving across the Brussels-Antwerp axis, the area in Belgium where foreign fighters bound for Syria were predominantly recruited.[50] On 13 April 2016, Es Satty resettled in Ripoll, determined to lead his previously radicalized followers to perform acts of terrorism. In March 2017 he traveled back to Belgium for a few days. According to those who paid for his trip and provided lodging, he went there to purchase books on Islam. However, they never saw that he had bought any books.[51] On the other hand, his most senior followers in the Ripoll cell had also traveled together by car to France and Belgium from 26 to 28 December 2016.[52] With respect to France, a peripheral cell member, Driss Oukabir, one of the two survivors, had a relationship with a Moroccan living in the country named Mohamed Boumansour, who held a foreign identification number issued by Spanish authorities. He was a 'person of interest' to the French security services due to his extremism. He might have had previous knowledge of a plot under way in Spain as he met Oukabir around Ripoll in July 2017.[53] This could be related to a declaration made 15 September 2017 by the other survivor, Houli Chemlal, before the investigative judge in charge of the August attacks. On that occasion he said that there was a group of like-minded people in France, willing to coordinate with the Ripoll cell, or even to participate in an attack in Spain.[54]

However, these contacts in France were rather personal ones, and involved a latecomer and the less committed member in the Ripoll cell. They are therefore of limited interest for the purpose of assessing links between the Ripoll cell and the "external security" apparatus of IS when compared to the possible role of Mohamed Hichamy, Youssef Aalla and Younes Abouyaaqoub, who were senior members of the Ripoll cell who had gone to Belgium at the end of December 2016.[55] Their presence in Belgium coincided with the precise moment when Es Satty began to take an interest in manufacturing explosives. For the GC experts charged with investigating their travels, this is what that stay in Belgium was: "An important milestone in the subsequent evolution of the cell's terrorist plans."[56]

Those same police experts have also highlighted the similarities between the way the Brussels terrorists of March 2016 produced TATP explosives in the building in the Belgian town of Schaerbeek and the way in which the explosives were produced in 2017 in the Alcanar house.[57] These similarities included the precursor substances utilized, the way refrigerators and ventilators were employed, and even the type of shrapnel included in the improvised explosive devices manufactured with TATP.

Moreover, both the known telephone calls made by Es Satty and the three other core members of the Ripoll cell while in Belgium and the address book found in the mobile phone concretely used by Mohamed Hichamy, reveal contacts which are extremely important to assess the type of individuals who may have facilitated the linking with IS operational structures via foreign fighters who went from Western Europe to Syria or had returned from there. For instance, here is (translated) what the Belgian Federal Police conveyed to the judicial and police authorities of Spain about a particular phone number (ending with the digits 5208) identified by the CNP in the traffic of calls made or received in at least one of terminals used by Es Satty or any of the three core members among of the Ripoll cell:

> "The telephone number is known in the national databank and can be associated to ABRINI Hajar (14/02/1995)—known for money laundering, attitudes related to violent radicalism and infractions associated to terrorist group".[58]

Hajar Abrini, one of the contacts the main members of the Ripoll cell had in Belgium, was 22 years-old when the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks took place. She is the cousin of Mohammed Abrini, with Belgian and Moroccan nationalities, involved in the IS-directed operational network behind the November 2015 attacks in Paris and the March 2016 attacks in Brussels. His presence was confirmed alongside the two suicide bombers who blew themselves up at Brussels's Zaventem airport.[59] Hajar Abrini was arrested on the Greek island of Corfu, when attempting to travel to Syria, on 18 August 2017, determined to marry a foreign fighter one month after a criminal court in Liege imposed a prison sentence for jihadist-related terrorism offences on the man she was religiously married to.[60] She was related in person and online to a significant number of foreign fighters who traveled from Belgium to Syria to join the ranks of IS. She was also convicted in Belgium, in 2019, of participation in a terrorist organization.

Preacher Revered by Ripoll Cell Members, Two Months Before the Attacks: Muslims Should Take Up "Armed Punishments in the Secular Lands"

Much more relevant than the above is in our view the fact the mobile phone used by Mohamed Hichamy while in Belgium kept him connected to the phone number (ending in 4551), identified in an investigation of the GC, which happened to be the contact phone number of four extremists "all of them known in Salafi-Jihadist milieus", as literally stated by the Belgian Federal Judicial Police.[61] One of those four extremists listed by the Belgian police was Tarik Chadlioui, also known as Tarik Ibn Ali, a Moroccan-born Salafist preacher widely followed inside the Tamazigh or Berber diaspora in general and particularly inside the Moroccan diaspora in many Western European countries that he has visited regularly. The other three names in the list are closely related to him.

Chadlioui lived in Antwerpen, Belgium for more than a decade and had obtained a Belgian passport by the time he moved temporarily with his family to Cairo when the Belgian government banned Muslim women from wearing face veils in public. Later, in 2015, he settled in Birmingham, UK, where a main hub of Salafism in Western Europe exists.[62] Around the time Chadlioui left Antwerpen, he made clear his bellicose understanding of jihad as nothing else than "combat in the path of Allah" which has a "high place" and is of "great merit" according to the Quran. In a video posted on April 2010, he preached the following:

> "He who dies in jihad (combat in the path to Allah), Allah will forgive him all his sins since the first drop of blood. His soul, when leaving his body, goes directly on a bird to Paradise […] The day of the resurrection, he will bring in 70 people from his family who were heading to Hell because of too many disobediences, but the martyr will bring them back with him to Heaven."[63]

Chadlioui was an influential doctrinaire for several jihadist groups which are now dissolved or outlawed in Belgium and Germany—groups like Sharia4Belgium, Millatu Ibrahim and Dawa FFM, dozens of whose members went to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters.[64] His extremist sermons in a mosque in Luce, in the Paris suburb of Courcouronnes radicalized Omar Mostefai, one of the terrorists who also traveled to Syria and as returnee was among the terrorists who belonged to the above-mentioned IS-directed operational

network and participated in the attacks of 13 November 2015 in Paris. In short, Chadlioui, a talented fundraiser and speaker, was assessed over the past decade to be an important facilitator and financier of West European foreign fighters active in Syria. He himself had traveled at least in the fall of 2013 to Syria, personally transporting funds raised in Western Europe.[65]

Not surprisingly, the reports of Operation Gomero, carried out by the CNP in 2017, refer to at least one foreign fighter who had traveled to Syria to join the ranks of IS and who was a "close friend" of Chadlioui.[66] During this counter-terrorism operation, the CNP arrested four jihadist suspects in Spain, concretely on the island of Majorca, where Chadlioui had traveled repeatedly in 2014 and 2015 to meet with them. Instigated by the preacher, they jointly developed activities of jihadist radicalization and recruitment in and out of a mosque in Palma de Mallorca. This included the production of the video "Taoufiq went to Syria" based on the story of a foreign fighter who traveled from Spain to the conflict zone across Syria and Iraq. Chadlioui himself was arrested, in the framework of that same police operation in Birmingham in 2017, and handed over to the Spanish authorities in early 2018 for pre-trial detention.[67]

In this context, it is important to emphasize Chadlioui's long and lasting connections in Catalonia and his specific influence on the Ripoll cell members. On the one hand, the Muslim communities of Catalonia were not unknown to Chadlioui. Already in 2013, for example, he had visited several, such as the community in Salt, the location of one of the main Salafist mosques in Catalonia and Spain as a whole. In the summer of 2015, two years before the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks, he preached in Islamic places of worship in at least six other Catalan towns: Vic, Terrassa, Granollers, Tárrega, Mollet del Vallès, and Manlleu. Notably, the mobile phones of some members of the Ripoll cell had saved the image of the poster announcing a Chadlioui sermon scheduled for 6 July 2015 on the premises of the Muslim Community of Manlleu, 24 kilometers south of Ripoll.[68]

It was also found that the laptop used by Es Satty between February and August 2017 stored a vast amount of content created by Chadlioui.[69] It is telling as well that the youngest member of the Ripoll cell, Moussa Oukabir, did a specific search on his Tablet PC for information on Chadlioui's arrest in Birmingham just four days after it occurred.[70] Meanwhile, on 11 June 2017, slightly two months before the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, when the caliphate was collapsing mainly because of the frequency and intensity of the international coalition airstrikes, Chadlioui voiced in a YouTube video that Muslims should carry out "Armed punishments in the secular lands."[71] An admonition of this type provides a religious justification for terrorist attacks such as initially planned by the Ripoll cell in Barcelona on 20 August 2017 or the ones that they finally carried out a few days earlier in the same city and in Cambrils.

Making Sense of the Threat Stream Against Barcelona Detected by the NCTC Three Months Before the Barcelona and Cambrils Attacks

The existence of a link between the Ripoll cell and the "external security" apparatus of IS through operators who were foreign fighters allows for a proper understanding of other extraordinarily important pieces of evidence regarding the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils. This evidence consists of the fact that the US National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) detected, three months before these acts of terrorism took place, a threat stream against Barcelona. Further, on 25 May 2017 the NCTC urgently shared both with ME and with the two police agencies endowed with the counterterrorism mandate covering the whole of Spain (that is, CNP and GC) a threat bulletin stating, word for word, the following:

> "Unsubstantiated information of unknown veracity from late May 2017 indicated that the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) was planning to conduct unspecified terrorist attacks during the summer against crowded tourist sites in Barcelona, Spain, specifically La Rambla Street."[72]

To carefully appraise such a significant piece of counterterrorism intelligence, we sought the judgment, separately, of two American experts highly reputed in the U.S. intelligence community, within which the NCTC occupies a central position. Both are top experts with deep counterterrorism knowledge and

experience, including in the Middle East and focusing on jihadist terrorism. One of them is Bruce Riedel, director of the Intelligence Project at Brookings Institution, and the other is a senior Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer, an acquaintance of the first author of this article, who asked us not to disclose his name. The two experts both thought that the piece of information most likely came from "outside of Europe" and, as Riedel remarked, was "collected in the Levant or Iraq." It looked to this expert like "intercepted communications," which refers to a SIGINT source, because "if it was HUMINT we would be able to get more details." However, the senior CIA officer indicated that it could also be a HUMINT source, though "probably a relatively new asset without much of a reporting track record" or someone "who heard first-hand, or second hand, or maybe even third hand that IS elements were keen on launching an attack in Barcelona."[73]

Since the threat bulletin prepared by the NCTC was sent to CNP, GC, and ME on 25 May and referred to information obtained at the end of that same month, it is reasonable to assume that the NCTC got that information just a few days before it was relayed urgently, if not the day before or even the same day. Be that as it may, the exact moment is very revealing for two reasons. From the IS organizational perspective, the timing is very revealing because seven weeks before, on 4 April 2017, its then spokesperson, Abu Hassan al-Muhajir, issued a proclamation in which he called on the "supporters of the caliphate" in European and other countries to attack them from within.[74] From the perspective of the Ripoll cell, the moment is also very revealing because it was then, in any case shortly before the day on which the NCTC threat bulletin is dated, that ME experts situate the defining moment in the operational trajectory of Es Satty and his followers, which they describe in these terms: "Point of departure for the preparations to consummate the attacks."[75]

May 2017 was, in effect, the month in which Es Satty left his post as imam at an Islamic place of worship in Ripoll.[76] It was also the month when Mohamed Hichamy, Youssef Aalla, and Younnes Abouyyaqoub—acting as Es Satty's lieutenants—informed Mohamed Houli Chemlal, Omar Hichamy, El Houssaine Abouyyaqoub, Moussa Oukabir, and Said Aalla about the terrorist attacks they were planning, attacks that would entail the five men's participation for their preparation and execution.[77] It was also in that month of May when Younnes Abouyaaqoub recorded himself on video singing a nasheed whose chorus was this:"We are those who yearn for martyrdom."[78]

It was also in May 2017, the month in which the NCTC detected the threat stream against Barcelona, when members of the Ripoll cell began to distance themselves from family and friends.[79] That was also the exact same month when the terrorists began to acquire, under false identities and in locations far from Ripoll (so as not to arouse suspicion), prepaid cards for twelve or perhaps thirteen conspiratorial phone numbers, distinct from their personal numbers, which they acquired to communicate with each other safely while they prepared the attacks. These attacks were planned for 20 August but were finally perpetrated in a way quite different from what was planned on the 17th and 18th of August.

Conclusions

It can be concluded from the above that the Ripoll cell members did not belong to an IS-integrated cell. That was not the case because in 2017, due to the change in strategy that IS had adopted the year before, it was only possible for the Ripoll cell to be either IS-inspired or IS-linked. A recent descriptive and more limited study of the case has portrayed the Ripoll cell as a local *IS-inspired* cell.[80] A more analytical and more in-depth study, as the one we have sought to present in this article, substantiates the notion that the Ripoll cell was *IS-linked*. A careful study of the direct and circumstantial evidence about the transnational movements and connections of the main Ripoll cell members, particularly in and out of Belgium, over the approximately year and a half period leading to the August 2017 attacks, unveiled the operational role of foreign fighters in linking the cell with IS. Findings from intelligence sources corroborate, or are consistent with, our line of argumentation.

However, between IS's announcement of its caliphate in June 2014 and the formal ending of its territorial domination in March 2019, a pro-IS cell that was established in a European country and whose members

intended to carry out attacks could be related to a foreign fighter without this implying any link with IS. For example, on April 2015, also in Catalonia, ME agents arrested in the provinces of Barcelona and Tarragona members of a pro-IS cell similar in size to the Ripoll cell, composed of Moroccan nationals and converted Spaniards, when they were preparing terrorist attacks in Barcelona. Members of that cell had relationships with foreign fighters in Syria who had departed from their own radicalized milieus in Catalonia—but this did not develop into a link with IS central structures.[81]

However, in the case of the Ripoll cell, the connection of its leader and core members with foreign fighters, both outside Western Europe or with returnees—possibly both types at the same time—as well as with foreign fighters' facilitators, provided the right circumstances for an operational link with the central IS structures which at that time were still located in Syria, and more specifically with its "external security" apparatus. This is how IS played an important role in the Ripoll cell's failed plans to perpetrate a series of major attacks in Barcelona on 20 August 2017 using TATP explosives and, consequently, in the alternative acts of terrorism than six of its members carried out a few days before, on 17 and 18 that month, in Barcelona and in Cambrils as well. The case illustrates the threat from IS-linked cells in Western Europe as from middle of 2016—a time the caliphate was beginning to crumble as the anti-ISIS coalition strikes were escalating in Syria.

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Notes

[1] According to the Dirección General de Apoyo a Victimas del Terrorismo at Spain's Ministry of Interior, the victims of the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks included citizens of 34 different nationalities. Ten of those killed and 105 of those wounded were foreigners. Cf. URL: http://www.interior.gob.es/prensa/noticias/-/asset_publisher/GHU8Ap6ztgsg/content/id/9168091; adding persons which suffered psychological harm or sequelae derived from directly experiencing the August 2017 attacks, the total number of people affected is 345 - as estimated by the Barcelona-based Unidad de Atención y Valoración a Afectados por el Terrorismo; URL: https://www.uavat.es.

[2] Audiencia Nacional, Sala de lo Penal, Sección Tercera, *Sentencia 15/2021*.

[3] Ibid., pp. 1-2, p. 68, pp. 70-72.

[4] Jasmijn M. Remmers, "Temporal Dynamics in Covert Networks: A Case Study of the Structure behind the Paris and Brussels Attacks," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2019.1671373 (Published online: 18 November 2019).

[5] Staff member of the European Counter-Terrorism Centre at Europol, "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," The Hague: International Centre for Counter Terrorism, *ICCT Research Paper*, April 2019, p. 11.

[6] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," op. cit., pp. 4-6 and p. 23.

[7] The interviews were conducted by the authors between September and December 2017, in October 2020 and in June and July 2021, in Barcelona as well as in Madrid.

[8] Important background documents for this article are the following: "Audiencia Nacional, Juzgado Central de Instrucción" no. 4, *Diligencias Previas 60/2017* and *Sumario 5/2018*; Dirección General de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información, Unidad Central Especial 2, "Solicitud de Comisión Rogatoria Internacional a las autoridades judiciales de Bélgica," Madrid, 3 de mayo de 2018; *Sentencia 15/2021*, cited above; Mossos d'Esquadra, Comissaria General d'Informació, Área Central d'Informació Exterior, Unitat Operativa d'Informació Exterior 4, "Relación de indicios con vínculos con Francia. Caso Rambla," 14 August 2018; and Mossos d'Esquadra, Comissaria General d'Informació, "Oficio de integración en organización terrorista," Reference

680566/2017, 10 December 2018.

[9] Notably the analysis "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," op. cit.

[10] *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 474 and p. 731.

[11] *Diligencias Previas 60/2017*, *Auto* of 22 August, 2017, p. 4; *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 493 and pp. 731-732.

[12] *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 491, and pp. 732-733.

[13] Ibid., pp. 75, pp.223-224, pp.229-230, p.233, pp.496-497, p.500, pp. 502-503, p. 514, p. 522, p. 528, pp.549-550, 5p. 81, p. 711, pp. 738 and pp. 744-766.

[14] Ibid., pp. 404, p.492, pp. 730-731, p. 765.

[15] Ibid., pp. 369, p. 404, pp. 414-419, pp. 727-728, p. 730.

[16] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," pp. 5 and pp. 7-8 and p. 23.

[17] *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 618 and 723-724; Thomas Jocelyn, "Islamic State claims its 'soldiers' responsible for the Barcelona Attacks," *Long War Journal*, 17 August 2017; URL: https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/08/islamic-state-claims-its-soldiers-responsible-for-barcelona-attack.php

[18] The same applied to those who perpetrated the attacks in Cambrils. See URL: http://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=es/content/referencias-espa%C3%B1-en-la-propaganda-yihadista#seccion18.

[19] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," p. 12.

[20] Ibid., p. 3; Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, issue 6 (2016), p. 5; URL: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/553.

[21] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," p. 8.

[22] *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 618-619 and p. 724.

[23] Ibid., pp. 619 and p. 724.

[24] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," p. 8, p. 13 and p. 21.

[25] "The First Rain: The Raid of Barcelona. Wilāyat al-Khayr," *Jihadology.net*, 23 August 2017; URL: http://jihadology.net/2017/08/23/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-the-first-rain-the-raid-of-barcelona-wilayat-al-khayr; Wilayat al-Furat disseminated several documents praising the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks as an example to be imitated by other Muslims living in Western societies. *Sentencia 15/2021*, p. 592, pp. 621-623, 7pp. 25-727.

[26] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," pp. 8-9 and p. 23.

[27] *Rumiyah*, Issue 13 (September 2017), p. 5, p. 39 and p. 41.

[28] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," p. 13.

[29] Ibid., p. 16.

[30] On this and related anomalies, see Manuel Torres, "Jihadism in the Spanish Language after the Barcelona Attacks," Washington, DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, August 2017.

[31] "Caliphate Soldiers and Lone Actors: What to Make of IS Claims for Attacks in the West 2016-2018," p. 18.

[32] Ibid., p. 15.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 149-150.

[36] Ibid., p. 151.

[37] Ibid., pp. 868-869.

[38] Ibid., p. 474 and p. 731.

[39] Ibid., pp. 151, p. 736 and p. 839.

[40] "Oficio de integración en organización terrorista," p. 85.

[41] Ibid., p. 97.

[42] Ibid.

[43] United Nations Security Council, "Sixth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat", 31 January 2018, p. 6.

[44] Dirección General de la Policía, Comisaría General de Información, Unidad Central de Información Exterior, *Diligencia 466*, 9 January 2006, pp. 52-53 and p. 86; Audiencia Nacional, Sala de lo Penal, Sección Primera, *Sentencia 3/2010*, p. 70; Es Satty was the focus of counterterrorism investigations but, unlike others he was associated with, he was never arrested. However, he served a prison sentence between 2010 and 2014, after being convicted of drug smuggling.

[45] Interviews with CTED-related senior officials conducted by both authors in New York in June 2018.

[46] Comment received orally by the first author from a senior official of the CNI in Madrid in June 2021.

[47] Daniel Byman, *Road Warriors. Foreign Fighters in the Armies of Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 216-221.

[48] The Algerian man was Bellil Belgacem, who travelled to Iraq as a foreign fighter and blew himself up on 12 November 2003 in an attack against a base of Italian Carabineri in the city of Nasiriyya. See Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), p. 155.

[49] *Diligencia 466*, pp. 52-53 and p. 86; *Sentencia 3/2010*, p. 70. Fernando Reinares, *Al Qaeda's Revenge. The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), chapter 13.

[50] "Solicitud de Comisión Rogatoria Internacional a las autoridades judiciales de Bélgica," pp. 5-7; Guy Van Vlierden, "Molenbeek and Beyond. The Brussels-Antwerp Axis as Hotbed of Belgian Jihad", pp. 49-61, in Arturo Varvelli, (Ed.), *Jihadist Hotbeds. Understanding Local Radicalization Processes* (Milan: ISPI, 2016); Anna Teixidó, *Los Silencios del 17-A* (Barcelona: Diéresis, 2020), pp. 173-194.

[51] "Solicitud de Comisión Rogatoria Internacional a las autoridades judiciales de Bélgica," pp. 6-7.

[52] Ibid., pp. 7-9; "Oficio de integración en organización terrorista," p. 8.

[53] "Relación de indicios con vínculos con Francia. Caso Rambla," p. 6, p. 9, p. 14 and p. 22.

[54] Ibid., p. 14.

[55] "Solicitud de Comisión Rogatoria Internacional a las autoridades judiciales de Bélgica," pp. 7-9; "Oficio de integración en organización terrorista", p. 8.

[56] "Solicitud de Comisión Rogatoria Internacional a las autoridades judiciales de Bélgica," p. 11.

[57] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[58] [*Note from the authors:* capitals in the original]. This information was provided to the authorities of Spain, on 16 July 2018, by the Belgian Federal Police in the province of Antwerp, as part of the response to an International Rogatory Letter requesting information on phone numbers, SIM card numbers, persons, bank data and stays in hotels or similar places concerning Es Satty, Mohamed Hichamy, Youssef Aalla, Younes Abouyaaqoub and Houli Chemlal during their presence in Belgium.

[59] However, Mohamed Abrini deposited explosives in or next to a rubbish bin of the airport, escaped from the crime scene and was arrested in Brussels weeks later. His younger brother died in 2014 after joining IS in Syria, where Mohamed Abrini had also traveled.

[60] Curiously, Hajar Abrini traveled by air from Brussels to Barcelona in the evening of 15 August 2017 and apparently remained in a business center of Barcelona's El Prat airport until she took a plane to Istanbul shortly before noon on 16 August. However, the Turkish authorities expelled her on arrival and she had to fly back to Barcelona. Again, she remained overnight on the premises of the airport, as it seems alone, until the morning of 17 August, when she boarded a Milano-bound flight. However, no interaction was found between Hajar Abrini and Ripoll cell members during the former's stays at El Prat airport in the evening of 15 August, when the Alcanar house blew up, or during the two following days. *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 698-699.

[61] The data was offered to the Spanish authorities on 16 July 2018 by officials from the Belgian Judicial Federal Police based in the Province of Antwerp. Nevertheless, GC experts who investigated the contacts and connections that Ripoll cell members had

in Belgium complained, in a June 2021 meeting with the first author, of the cooperation provided by their Belgian counterparts, which they described as "imprecise and devoid of detail".

[62] Counter Extremism Project, "Tarik Chadlioui"; URL: https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/tarik-chadlioui.

[63] To date, the video can still be found here: "Ô toi qui délaisse ou retarde la prière! [2/8]," *YouTube* video, April 11, 2010, 9:22:00; URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7wlhqnVtPA.

[64] "Tarik Chadlioui"; URL: https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/tarik-chadlioui.

[65] See the article by former Dutch government counterterrorism analyst Ronald Sandee, "Tarik Ibn Ali: An Important Jihadi Facilitator Operating in Europe", Downrange, *Insights and Analysis 5229*, 16 September 2014.

[66] Information provided to the authors by the Unidad Central de Información Exterior (UCIE) of CNP's Comisaría General de Información on 5 August 2021.

[67] In the Westminster Magistrate's Court, Central Magistrates Court no. 1 of the Spanish Criminal Court v Tarik Chadlioui, *Judgement*, 3 October 2017. To the knowledge of the authors, Chadlioui is also investigated by The Netherlands's Financial Intelligence Unit for belonging to IS and financing the jihadist organization. He is currently subjected to terrorism-related monitoring requests or specific control orders within the framework of international police cooperation, not only by the Netherlands (2019-2022) but also by Germany (2021-2022), France (2016-2022) and Belgium (2019-2022).

[68] *Sentencia 15/2021*, pp. 578-579.

[69] Ibid., pp. 530-532.

[70] Ibid., p. 761.

[71] "92 Tarik Ibn Ali Home", YouTube video, 1:35:02, 11 June 2017; URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROfBOJnuzTI. Unfortunately, at some point in the past few years, the video ceased to be available on YouTube.

[72] A copy of the original document was reproduced in the pages of *El Periódico de Catalunya* on 31 August 2017 and on 1 September 2017; URL: http://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20170831/mossos-recibieron-alerta-atentado-cia-25-mayo-6255194; http://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20170831/eeuu-reafirma-atentado-rambla-barcelona-alerta-mossos-cia-6257463.

[73] The insight from Bruce Riedel was received by email on 21 July 2021; the one coming from the senior CIA officer, by means if an intermediary, on 8 August 2021.

[74] Abu Hassan Al-Muhajir, "So Be Patient. Indeed, The Promise of God is Truth." *Al Furqan Media, Audio Recording*, 4 April 2017; URL: http://jihadology.net/2017/04/04/new-audio-message-from-the-islamic-states-abu-al- %E1%B8%A5asan-al-muhajir-so-be-patient-indeed-the-promise-of-god-is-truth/.

[75] "Oficio de integración en organización terrorista", pp. 9-10.

[76] Ibid., p. 11.

[77] *Sentencia 15/2021*, p. 83.

[78] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[79] "Oficio de integración en organización terrorista," pp. 11-14.

[80] Cf. Carlos Igualada, "International Links and the Role of the Islamic State in the Barcelona and Cambrils Attacks in 2017," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. XV, Issue 4, pp. 65-75.

[81] Audiencia Nacional, Sala de lo Penal, Sección Cuarta, *Sentencia 1/2018*.

Rejoinders

Granting Efficacy to the Religious Motives of Terrorists

A Reply to Schuurman's Response to "Bringing Religiosity Back In, Parts I & II"

by Lorne L. Dawson

Abstract

In this reply to Bart Schuurman's response to my two-part article "Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism," I address how we are speaking at cross-purposes and this leads to misunderstandings. When it comes to discussions of the role of religiosity in motivating jihadist terrorism this situation is common, and hence it is instructive to reexamine how we agree and disagree. Relative to some other prominent scholars, we agree that religiosity can play a role in radicalization and that the level of someone's religious knowledge is a poor way of determining this on a case-by-case basis. Schuurman implies incorrectly, however, that I treat people's beliefs as a sufficient explanation for their violent actions. My critique focuses instead on his reliance (with his coauthor John Horgan) on a modern Western privatized conception of religion that reduces the religio-political commitments of Western jihadists to "personal" (i.e., largely psychological) motivations, when religious motivations, which are intrinsically social, play a more independent role in the social ecology of radicalization.

Keywords: Belief, extremism, Hofstad Group, ideology, religion, terrorism

Academic exchanges are often fraught with misunderstandings. Such seems to be the case with Bart Schuurman's response to my two-part article "Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Terrorism."[1] As Schuurman repeatedly states,[2] we actually agree on most aspects of the debate over the role of religiosity in motivating religious terrorism. His response seems to be driven, however, by a fear of being tainted by association, since the article he coauthored with John Horgan, "Rationales for Terrorist Violence in Homegrown Jihadist Groups,"[3] is included in my critique. In my article I criticize several scholars for their illogical and empirically unsound tendency to dismiss the relevance of religion, or even more broadly, ideology or beliefs, in the explanation of the radicalization of religious extremists and their violent behavior. I understand his concern on this front, and his desire to set the record straight by publishing a more extensive statement of his position. He argues that "rather than seeking to dismiss the role of extremist beliefs, Horgan and I sought to better understand their influence and relation to other motivational forces."[4] Overall, I would say this is true, but in terms of the criticism of their article, as I will argue below, it is somewhat beside the point.

Taking the time to understand what I mean in this regard is instructive. On the one hand, it adds to our appreciation of the complexity of the issues involved, while on the other hand, it illustrates the ongoing problems arising from talking at cross-purposes. In seeking to clarify his own position, moreover, Schuurman alternatively creates the false impression that I am just naïvely arguing, as Sageman puts it, that "bad ideas lead to bad actions."[5] He acknowledges that I am not, but the framing of his discussion would lead uninformed readers to think otherwise. A close reading of my article reveals there is, in fact, little real contrast in our views, beyond some tension in the emphasis we give to the relative possible significance of religiosity in motivating religious terrorism.

In fact, I have never discussed Schuurman's overall stance on the extent to which beliefs influence the actions of terrorists, either in the article under debate or elsewhere. Having read almost everything he has published,

including his dissertation, I am well aware of his views, as well as those of Horgan. I have benefitted from much they have written, and hold each of them in high regard. That is why I focused on their article to illustrate an aspect of my critique. I wish to demonstrate that the interpretive problems I am examining lie at the heart of the field of study, not its periphery.

My critique, it will be recalled, hinges on identifying and tracing the presence and consequences of three types of interpretive mistakes frequently used to justify minimizing of the role of religious motivations in religious terrorism. "First, there are arguments that treat the religious background and knowledge (or lack thereof) of homegrown jihadists as an accurate indicator of their religiosity. Second, there are arguments that implicitly apply a modern Western normative conception of religion to homegrown jihadists. Third, there are arguments that treat the relationship of social processes and ideology in the conceptualization of radicalization as dichotomist."[6] The critique of Schuurman and Horgan's article illustrates one of the two aspects of the second interpretive mistake, namely their implicit reliance on a privatized conception of religion, which provides the rationale for too readily conflating the personal and the religious motivations of religious terrorists. The second aspect, relating to the differentiation of religion and politics, and the subordination of the religious to the political, is the focus of my critique of an article by someone else.

As stipulated by Schuurman, we agree that religious beliefs do not just constitute "an ideological veneer that masks underlying grievances of an economic, social, political or personal nature."[7] We also agree that "the motivational potential" of religious beliefs should not be dismissed because terrorists may have only "a superficial understanding of [their] religion." The key consideration is the degree of their personal religious commitment and not the depth of their religious knowledge or the orthodoxy of their beliefs.[8] I would also argue we fundamentally agree that while religious beliefs can play an important originating and/or modifying role in fomenting terrorism, they constitute but one aspect of the motivations for religious terrorism. The last point of agreement is an essential part of countering those who claim religious terrorism has nothing to do with religion, and it seems quite straightforward. This gets lost, however, in Schuurman's response, where it seems what he gives with the right hand is taken away by the left hand.

Schuurman's view of the role of religious beliefs and convictions in determining the actions of terrorists is captured succinctly in the abstract for his response:

> Rather than dismiss the role of ideology, I have argued the need for its contextualization. Extremist beliefs certainly play an important role in motivation and justifying terrorist violence. But they are not sufficient as explanations for such violence because most people who hold extremist views will never act on them. Secondly, even fanatical adherents of extremist beliefs tend to be motivated by more than their convictions alone. Finally, the different degrees of ideological commitment found among terrorists further underline the need to remain critical of the explanatory power of extremist beliefs alone.

The abstract leaves the distinct impression that I do not agree with these very sensible claims. This is not the case, and thus I too feel the need to clarify my position further.

In Part I of my article, I carefully specified ten qualifications of my argument. I did so to forestall certain anticipated and unwarranted misunderstandings. Given the pervasive and almost taken-for-granted quality of the views I was criticizing, I realized critics would be tempted to dismiss my arguments by simply identifying me as a die-hard supporter of the outdated notion that terrorist actions are simply and solely the result of ideology. Apart from the fact that no serious social scientist studying terrorism holds such a view, it certainly is not mine. Let me review three of the ten qualifications of my argument to make this clear.

First, I specify my awareness of the sound distinction Horgan makes between "the processes of joining the jihadist movement and deciding to cross the boundary from talk to action—to engage in terrorism." In arguing for the evidentiary value of claims about religiosity made by terrorists, I note, "I am not challenging this differentiation." On the contrary, as I stipulate, it is important to determine the relative role played by religiosity in either joining terrorist movements and/or engaging in violence. It may be involved in both,

just one, or neither. But I am not aware of any reliable evidence allowing us to prejudge, as many seem to do, when and to what extent this happens.[9]

Second, as I state: "I am not arguing that religion causes religious terrorism. On the contrary, like many of the researchers whose work I criticize, I have sought to understand how persons become religious terrorists in terms of a larger set of psychological and social processes focused on identity formation and change, as influenced by a variety of context-specific social structural variables."[10] In this regard I referred readers (in an endnote) to my brief "Sketch of a Social Ecology Model for Explaining Homegrown Terrorist Radicalization" and the later elaboration of this model in a forthcoming book chapter.[11] This multifactorial model of the process of radicalization aligns with the approach I took many years ago to explain why some new religious movements become violent. Both explanations seek to integrate insights from multiple areas of study, disciplines, and levels of analysis (macro, meso, and micro). To help explain the mass murders and suicides perpetrated by several new religious movements, I synthesized insights on the potential role of apocalyptic beliefs, charismatic forms of authority and leadership, and the process of social encapsulation—in other words, the relative and variable contribution of the social-psychological consequences of specific beliefs, organizational factors, and group dynamics.[12] More fundamentally, as I state twice in "Bringing Religiosity Back In …. (Part I)": "The precise role of religious ideas and commitments in the radicalization of each individual and group may differ and must be determined on a case-by-case basis. In doing so, an array of data and contextual factors need to be considered."[13,14] Of course, with time, this approach may reveal patterns of importance.

It is rather misleading, then, when Schuurman twice states: "Dawson makes a case for taking [the religious motivational claims of terrorists] at *face value* [emphasis added]."[15] On the contrary, in my critique I simply argue there are no reliable grounds for making categorical or a priori judgments about the relevance of religious motivational claims. Yet, as I point out, many experts do. I have explained in some detail why I think there is evidentiary value in the accounts terrorists provide about their religious motivations,[16] and further I have examined the methodological reasons offered by scholars of terrorism for treating the religious motivational claims of terrorists with suspicion, if not outright skepticism. Advancing arguments from the sociological study of accounts and the psychology of attitudes and behaviors, I have sought to demonstrate why it is reasonable to grant more credibility to such claims.[17]

In the end, Schuurman argues that "rather than exemplifying a dismissive attitude to the role of extremist belief systems, the [article] that Dawson critiques [seeks] to highlight the shortcomings of explanations for terrorism that rely too heavily on beliefs alone." In some respects, this is indeed the case, and if my argument caused anyone to think otherwise, that was not my intent. Schuurman's claim, however, is a bit of a red herring, since it does not address the real issue at stake in my analysis of the article coauthored with Horgan.

Let me restate why, contrary to Schuurman's protestations, I did group their article with other works minimizing the role of religious motives. As stated in my article:

> Their study investigates the rationales for terrorist violence in European homegrown jihadist groups by critically examining the strategic and organizational motives of the Hofstad group in the Netherlands. "Finding that neither rationale adequately explains the group's planned or perpetrated acts of terrorism", the authors state, "the analysis concludes by arguing that the turn to violence was instead predicated on predominantly *personal* motives that, moreover, were not strongly tied to extremist religious convictions as is frequently thought".[18]

My critique of Schuurman and Horgan's article illustrates how studies of religious terrorism that discount the significance of religious claims often rely on certain modern Western normative conceptions of religion that are misleading. Simplifying a complex situation,[19] there are two ethnocentrically limited aspects of modern Western conceptions of religion that are problematic when applied to the study of jihadism (even in the West): (1) what sociologists call the "privatization" of religion, and (2) the separation of religion and politics. These two ideas are closely interrelated, conceptually and historically, but can and should be analytically distinguished. My critique of Schuurman and Horgan's article is limited to demonstrating their

implicit reliance on a privatized conception of religion, which provides the rationale for too readily conflating the personal and religious motivations of the terrorists they were studying. Distortions related to reliance on Western conceptions of the differentiation of religion and politics, and the consequent subordination of the religious to the political, are illustrated in my critique of another strong contribution to terrorism studies, Manni Crone's "Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics and the Skills of the Body".[20] Without fully reiterating my breakdown of the underlying logic of Schuurman and Horgan's article, I argued that by subsuming the many religious motivational claims made by members of the Hofstad group to the category of "personal motives", Schuurman and Horgan were robbing these claims of their full meaning—their social and political significance as understood by the terrorists. In the course of the secularization of Western societies, religion was normatively exiled from the public realm and confined to the private (and subjective) sphere. This normative state of affairs was later mistaken for the reality of religion, one which makes expressions of religiosity functional equivalents of other personal concerns such as romantic love or lifestyle preferences. However, the religiosity at the heart of Salafi-jihadism is founded on the categorical rejection of this privatization of religion, and the concomitant demotion of the religious relative to the political. Consequently, I argued, Schuurman and Horgan's repeated characterization of the religious justifications for violence of these jihadists as evidence of the primacy of "personal motives" for their actions was misleading. This characterization is technically inaccurate (or at least incomplete), and it belittles the real significance of the religious language used by the terrorists to explain their motivations. Readers steeped in the privatized conception of religion dominant in the modern Western context of this research are likely to reduce the religious rationales of the terrorists to the kinds of psychological issues implied by the term "personal motives," ones that are best countered with therapy. Therefore, in effect we are back to assuming that the real motives of the terrorists are hiding under a cloak of acquired religious rhetoric.

This means they were not accurately identifying the "rationales for terrorist violence" operative in the group they were studying, and by implication, their argument is a typical instance of the kind of problematic reductionism that has plagued the social scientific study of religion for decades.[21] In my original analysis of their article I did not mention this issue of reductionism directly, but it is addressed more generally in Part I of my article.[22] There I recognize that while reductionism is in some respects a cardinal principle of all science, some reductionist explanations are problematic because they imply a hierarchy of phenomena and explanatory theories. In the study of terrorism, for example, "while [it] is common … to note that the causes of terrorism are multiple, and that we need to take a multifactorial approach to explaining radicalization, there is a tendency to treat religious data as decidedly secondary, if not irrelevant, and treat other kinds of data as superior and capable of subsuming religious data."[23] I may have over-interpreted the intent of Schuurman and Horgan in this regard—but not without reason. The emphasis on "personal motives" lends itself readily to psychological reductionism in the contemporary context, unless carefully qualified.

Schuurman acknowledges there are several points in their article where the 'personal' and 'religious' were "unhelpfully … juxtaposed" and states that "our view of the relationship between the personal and the religious should have been stated less ambiguously."[24] He then states:

> Reformulating my position on this relationship now, I would argue that the desire to act violently did not just stem from the content of Hofstad group participants' beliefs … The adoption of these beliefs was predated by personal experiences, such as a loss-induced search for existential meaning, that functioned as 'cognitive openings' which, among a range of other factors, increased the likelihood that alternative worldviews would be found appealing. While the personal and the religious are thus not somehow different categories of individual-level motivations, it still makes sense to tease them apart.[25]

My concern, however, was never whether the religious choices made by the extremists may have been influenced by prior experiences and psychological factors. This influence goes without saying. Likewise, I agree that it is important to tease apart such individual-level motivations for action. But doing so does not mean, as Schuurman's and Horgan's analysis keeps implying, that the prior experiences and factors carry an explanatory import that overrides or sidelines the motivational significance of the meanings given to these

experiences by the religious commitments of the terrorists—a process which involves a near inextricable concertation of beliefs and practices, cognitions and emotions. Realistically and methodologically, I argued, the numerous explicit references made by the terrorists to the religious grounds for their actions have more explanatory credence, or evidentiary value, than the vague and unsubstantiated speculations of some ill-defined psychological troubles advanced by Schuurman and Horgan, such as the impact of the death of the mother of one of the terrorists.

As I state in my critique, Schuurman and Horgan introduce a grab-bag of motivational concerns that are rather broadly categorized as "personal": the influence of authority figures, the desire for revenge, identification with the victims of perceived injustice, fear of death, moral disengagement, and emulating jihadist role models. Grouping such diverse phenomena together so rudimentarily is itself analytically suspect, but what is more, as I commented,

> many of these factors may well have played a role in the radicalization of these individuals and further helped prompt them to act on their beliefs. The evidence keeps pivoting back, however, to the desire to become and act like a "true Muslim". In other words, it was about taking on a shared and public identity (as the perpetrators conceived it), more than the expression of unique personal considerations.[26]

Recognizing the constitutive nature of the intersubjective and sociopolitical aspect of many of the motivations espoused by and/or assigned to the terrorists in this case, is paramount to explaining their actions and countering them effectively. Simply identifying them as "personal" in nature will fall short on both counts.

The fact that the religious claims of terrorists are discounted in so many analyses of religious terrorism speaks to the implicit assumption that the religious claims prioritized by the actors are almost by definition epiphenomenal. By nature, they are not worthy of being granted greater explanatory significance. Whether this interpretive tendency reflects a secular bias in terrorism studies, as I have speculated,[27] is irrelevant—as I state in Part I of "Bringing Religiosity Back In." If we wish to address the specificity problem lurking throughout studies of radicalization, if we wish to better explain, that is, why people get involved in jihadism and then also why some may take the further step from talk to action, it is methodologically more sensible to start with the abundant religious motivational claims made by the jihadists that we have in hand than rely, at this point, on conjectures about some as yet undocumented psychological—or "personal"—needs and drives.

This does not mean that the religious commitments in question are not derived in part from some underlying "search for existential meaning." On the contrary, this is true in many cases, and for many other things that people do, so how is it pertinent? Moreover, not all such searches are instigated by unresolved psychological issues that could be better resolved by therapy. The history of religion reveals an abundance of positive and negative motivations for devotion, which have profoundly shaped the world in ways both good and bad.[28] Once initiated, religious motivations, which are intrinsically social in nature, take on a life and force of their own that cannot simply, completely, or categorically be reduced to either prior and other nonreligious factors involved in the process, and that applies to radicalization as well. The religious commitment, as an ideological and social phenomenon, has its own quasi-independent role to play in the social ecology of radicalization—at least in the case of jihadists, which is my sole focus of concern. The search for identity or belonging influences the adoption of an ideology, but the ideology influences which groups will become the relevant in-groups and out-groups. It is a dialectical situation. The importance of the religious commitment in this regard is indicated by the passionate persistence of the professions of the terrorists, and their willingness to die for what they profess. By the time the religious conviction, and accompanying identity, are in place it is fair to say those espousing this worldview are dying for it, and not the psychological needs *per se* that set the process in motion. We can choose to call those who blow themselves and others up "fanatics," to use Schuurman's preferred term,[29] but in doing so we need to guard against being seduced into reducing their dedication to a religious obligation, no matter how jarring to us, to underlying psychological considerations. This is especially the case if those considerations resemble the ones underlying other quite ordinary actions

in other contexts.

Much more could be said, but in the end, I find solace in all that Schuurman, Horgan and I agree on. Relative to the comments of others I cite, who dismiss the significance of religiosity in motivating jihadist terrorism, it is a sign of progress. I would recommend reading Schuurman and Horgan's article on the "Rationales for Terrorist Violence," despite my criticism, since it provides excellent insights into the analysis of the motivations for terrorism. I agree with most of their analysis, with the exception of their treatment of the religious rationales that figure so prominently in the discourse of the Hofstad group. In the study of religious terrorism, it is still too common, however, to see the religious talk of terrorists treated as little more than a witting or unwitting front for other real motives, even though these other motives are largely conjectural. The situation calls to mind the old new left notion of "false consciousness," but its application in this case is less controversial because those supposedly suffering from the false consciousness are so morally distant from us.

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Notes

[1] Lorne L. Dawson, "Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Terrorism, (Part I)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15(1), 2021, pp. 2–16; Lorne L. Dawson, "Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Terrorism, (Part II)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15(2), 2021, pp. 1–21.

[2] Bart Schuurman, "The Role of Beliefs in Motivating Involvement in Terrorism: A Response to Lorne L. Dawson's article "Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism (Parts I & II)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol. 15, nos. 1 & 2 (February & April 2021), *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15(5), 2021, pp. 85–92.

[3] Bart Schuurman and John G. Horgan, "Rationales for Terrorist Violence in Homegrown Jihadist Groups: A Case Study from the Netherlands," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 27 (2016), pp. 55–63.

[4] Schuurman, "The Role of Beliefs in Motivating Involvement in Terrorism," (2021), op. cit., p. 86.

[5] Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

[6] Dawson, "Bringing Religiosity Back In (Part II)", 2021, op. cit., p. 2.

[7] Schuurman, "The Role of Beliefs in Motivating Involvement in Terrorism," (2021), op. cit., p. 85.

[8] Ibid., pp. 85, 89.

[9] Dawson, "Bringing Religiosity Back In … Part I" (2021), op. cit., p. 5.

[10] Ibid., p. 6.

[11] Lorne L. Dawson, "Sketch of a Social Ecology Model for Explaining Homegrown Terrorist Radicalisation," The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Research Note 8, No. 1, 2017; URL: https://icct.nl/publication/sketch-of-a-social-ecology-model-for-explaining-homegrown-terrorist-radicalisation/; Lorne L. Dawson, "The Social Ecology Model of 'Homegrown' Jihadist Radicalization"; in: Akil N. Awan and James R. Lewis (Eds.), *Radicalisation in Comparative Perspective* (London and New York: Hurst and Oxford University Press) (forthcoming).

[12] Lorne L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1st edition, 1998, 2nd revised and expanded edition, 2006; Italian translation: *I nuovi movimenti religiosi.* Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005. See also: Lorne L. Dawson, "The Study of New Religious Movements and the Radicalization of Home-grown Terrorists: Opening a Dialogue," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21(1), 2010, pp. 1–21.

[13] Dawson, "Bringing Religiosity Back In … Part I" (2021), op. cit., pp. 6, 7.

[14] This approach has been put into practice, admittedly in a preliminary way, in analyses of the Toronto 18 terrorist group: L. Dawson, "Trying to Make Sense of Home-Grown Terrorist Radicalization," (2014) op. cit.; Lorne L. Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam, "Homegrown Terrorist Radicalization: The Toronto 18 in Comparative Perspective," in Michael Nesbitt, Kent Roach, and David Hofmann (Eds.), *Canadian Terror: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Toronto 18 Terrorism Trials*. Winnipeg: Special Issue of the *Manitoba Law Review* 44(1), 2021: 1–33 (released as well as Edited Book).

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[22] Dawson, "Bringing Religiosity Back In … Part I" (2021), op. cit., pp. 8–9.

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[24] Schuurman, "The Role of Beliefs in Motivating Involvement in Terrorism," (2021), op. cit., p. 87.

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Resources

Counterterrorism Bookshelf: 8 Books on Terrorism- & Counter- Terrorism-Related Subjects

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

So many books are published on terrorism- and counterterrorism-related subjects that it is difficult to catch up on a large backlog of monographs and volumes received for review. In order to deal with this backlog, this column consists of capsule reviews and tables of contents of eight recently published books.

Counterterrorism – General

Aki J. Peritz, *Disruption: Inside the Largest Counterterrorism Investigation in History* (Lincoln, NB: Potomac Books/An Imprint of University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 400 pp., US $ 36.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-6401-2380-9.

This is a fascinating, authoritative, and extensively researched account of how the British intelligence and security services succeeded in thwarting al Qaida's local terrorist cell (with directions from the terrorist group's headquarters in Pakistan) from carrying out its spectacular 'mega-plot' to bomb several airliners *en route* from England to North America in 2006. The book is highly recommended as a best practice case study in counterterrorism against Jihadi groups such as al Qaida and its Western cells. The author is a veteran U.S.-based journalist in national security who previously published a co-authored book on the counterterrorism campaign to kill Usama bin Laden.

Table of Contents: List of Illustrations; List of Major Characters; List of Abbreviations; Author's Note; The Killer beside You; Baker's Boy; Triple A; Recruits; Ali's Evolution; Incident on the Tube; Bang/Fizz; The Rosewater Solution; Glimmers; The Dilemma; Rendezvous in Lloyd Park; Pattern of Life; Wedding Videos; Probe; "Today's Date Is September 12, 2001"; Sarwar's Hole; Transatlantic Tensions; Skin Infection; Our Citizens, Our Planes; It Fell out of My Pocket; The Railway Crossing; Fellowship Is Life; Scramble; The System Worked?; Rashid Rauf's Second Chance; The Twisting Road; A Fine Balance; Appendix 1: Codenames and Nicknames; Appendix 2: Operations.

Alex P. Schmid (Ed.), *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness* (The Hague, The Netherlands: ICCT Press, 2020/21), xxix + 1,278 pp. [Small hardcover print edition 2021; ISBN: 978-9-0903-3977-1, [free E-book edition 2020 at: https://icct.nl/handbook-of-terrorism-prevention-and-preparedness/]

Edited by Alex P. Schmid, the Editor-in-Chief of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, and published by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, this massive and comprehensive handbook features contributions from more than 30 experts in the field of terrorism and counterterrorism. The handbook has 35 chapters (with six by Prof. Schmid, and a large bibliography by Ishaansh Singh), covering six parts: an overall analytic framework, how related fields can contribute lessons for prevention, how to prevent radicalization into terrorism, measures to prevent terrorist activities (such as procuring weapons and activities on the Internet), preventing terrorist attacks, managing the consequences of terrorist attacks, and a conclusion that compares some of the contributors' findings with analysis and recommendations of the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (which is reproduced in the last chapter's appendix). The editor of the handbook was Officer-in-Charge of the Terrorism Prevention Branch of UNODC and is currently a Research Fellow at ICCT.

Table of Contents: **Frameworks for Analysis**; Introduction: Purpose and Organization of the Handbook;

Terrorism Prevention: Conceptual Issues (Definitions, Typologies and Theories); **Part I: Lessons for Terrorism Prevention from Related Fields**; De-Exceptionalizing the Terrorist Phenomenon: Lessons and Concepts: from Conflict Prevention and Transformation; Contributions from the Military Counter-Insurgency Literature for the Prevention of Terrorism; 'Killing Them to Save Us': Lessons from Politicide for Preventing and Countering Terrorism; **Part II: Prevention of Radicalization**; A Criminological Approach to Preventing Terrorism: Situational Crime Prevention and the Crime Prevention Literature; At the Crossroads: Rethinking the Role of Education in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism; Prevention of Radicalization to Terrorism in Prisons: A Practical Guide; Prevention of Radicalization to Terrorism in Refugee Camps and Asylum Centers; Preventing Terrorism from Students of Extremist Madrasahs: An Overview of Pakistan's Efforts; Prevention of Radicalization in Western Muslim Diasporas; Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet; Prevention of Recruitment to Terrorism; **Part III: Prevention of Preparatory Acts**; Prevention of Terrorist Financing; Prevention of Cross-Border Movements of Terrorists: Operational, Political, Institutional and Strategic Challenges for National and Regional Border Controls; Prevention of the Procurement of Arms and Explosives by Terrorists; Prevention of CBRN Materials and Substances Getting into Terrorist Hands; Prevention of (Ab-) Use of Mass Media by Terrorists; Prevention of (Ab-)Use of the Internet for Terrorist Plotting and Related Purposes; The Role of Intelligence in the Prevention of Terrorism (Early Warning – Early Response); P**art IV: Prevention of, and Preparedness for, Terrorist Attacks**; Prevention of Low-tech, Lone Actor Terrorist Attacks: The Case of the United States, 1970s – 2019; Prevention of Gun-, Knife-, Bomb- and Arson-based Killings by Single Terrorists; Prevention of Bomb Attacks by Terrorists in Urban Settings: Improvised Explosive Devices; Prevention of Kidnappings and Hostage-Takings by Terrorists; Preventing Suicide Attacks by Terrorists; The Terrorist Threat to Transportation Targets and Preventive Measures; Layers of Preventive Measures for Soft Target Protection Against Terrorist Attacks; Prevention of Terrorist Attacks on Critical Infrastructure; Cyber Attacks by Terrorists and other Malevolent Actors: Prevention and Preparedness. With Three Case Studies on Estonia, Singapore and the United States; Prevention of Lasting Traumatization in Direct and Indirect Victims of Terrorism; **Part V: Preparedness and Consequence Management**; Prevention of Public Panic in the Wake of Terrorist Incidents; Prevention of Major Economic Disruptions Following Acts of Terrorism – The Case of the Bali Bombings of 2002 and 2005; Prevention of Revenge Acts and Vigilantism in Response to Acts and Campaigns of Terrorism; Prevention of Human Rights Violations and Violations of International Humanitarian Law while Fighting Terrorism; **Conclusions**; Terrorism Prevention – The UN Plan of Action (2015) and Beyond; General Bibliography on Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness.

Counterterrorism – Countering the Funding of Terrorism

Jessica Davis, *Illicit Money: Financing Terrorism in the 21st Century* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2021), 240 pp., US $ 49.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-6263-7982-4.

This is an important, authoritative and comprehensive examination of the role of funding in terrorism at organizational, cell, and individual levels. To examine these issues, the author collected data on 55 terrorist organizations, 18 plots, and 32 attacks (p. 6). This data was utilized to generate findings on how terrorist groups at the organizational and operational levels procure funds to finance operations, to recruit and train operatives, purchase weapons, maintain safe houses, and conduct their attacks – all the while attempting to obscure these funds from being monitored by counterterrorism services. In the concluding chapter, the author points out that "Counterterrorist financing involves five main approaches: criminalization and law enforcement, military force, intelligence, financial exclusion (including sanctions and asset freezes), and regulation of the private sector" (p. 225). Effectively countering terrorist financing, the author concludes, involves awareness of the "continuous cycle of adaptation and counteradaptation" by all the actors involved, with "counterterrorism financing tools" adapted to the shifting new realities of how finance is conducted by illicit actors (p. 228). The book's analysis is usefully accompanied by numerous tables and figures. The author is president and principal consultant at Insight Threat Intelligence, Ottawa, and had

previously served as senior strategic analyst at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS).

Table of Contents: Financing Terrorism; Part 1: Raising Money; Finding Donors; Using and Abusing Organizations; Designing Business Models; Making Crime Pay; Part 2: Using Money; Deploying Funds; Managing, Storing, and Investing Funds; Moving Funds; Obscuring Funds; Part 3: New Frontiers; Stemming the Flow of Funds; Old Methods, New Technologies.

Counterterrorism – Countering Violent Extremism

Ajit Maan (Ed.), ***Dangerous Narratives: Warfare, Strategy, Statecraft*** (Washington, DC: Narrative Strategies, 2021), 188 pp., US $ 45.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-5788-1281-6.

As the volume's editor insightfully highlights in the introduction, "Narrative directly impacts the threat environment whether in a physical conflict zone, or in terms of the effects of radicalization, or the interference of foreign governments in domestic politics. Therefore, dominating the narrative space should be a priority" (p. vii). In another important insight, the editor explains that narrative warfare "is not a struggle over information; it is competition over the *meaning* of information" (p. viii). To examine these issues, the volume's contributors, who are leading experts in the field, discuss the role of narrative in physical (kinetic) warfare, how China and Russia weaponize narrative in their kinetic and non-kinetic (i.e., information operations) warfare, how narrative was weaponized in the Balkan wars in the 1990s, how narrative needs to be utilized by police agencies in the United States to improve community policing, and how the 'soft power' of narratives needs to be employed in pursuit of government foreign security campaigns. The editor is Founder and CEO of Narrative Strategies and Professor of Practice in Politics and Global Security at Arizona State University.

Table of Contents: Introduction, Part 1: Narrative in Kinetic Warfare; Narrative and War; Narrative Leads Kinetic Warfare; Part II: Weaponized Narrative – Case Studies; How China's Narrative Collapses Decision-Making and Creates Combined Effects; How Russia's Narratives Reorient Decision-Making and Creates Combined Effects; Narrative IS Strategy; Myths, Memory and Ethnic War in the Balkans: Weaponizing the Kosovo Battle Narrative; Structuring for Success in Narrative Engagement; Re-Writing the Narrative: The Path Forward for Policing; Rethinking Strategy and Statecraft for the Information Age: Whose Narrative Wins.

Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan (Eds.), ***Criminal Drone Evolution: Cartel Weaponization of Aerial IEDs*** (Indianapolis, IN:Xlibris/A Small Wars Journal – El Centro Anthology, 2021), 302 pp. US $ 19.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-6641-1142-4.

The contributors to this important anthology examine the evolving use of weaponized unmanned aerial systems (UASs – drones) by criminal narcotrafficking cartels and gangs in countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela, as well as along the Mexican-United States border. The anthology's 22 chapters discuss issues such as the evolution of the utilization of drones by narcotrafficking organizations in cross-border smuggling, remote detonation of IEDs, and reconnaissance, as well as future trends in drone technology and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) among criminal actors. Robert J. Bunker is Director of Research & Analysis, C/O Futures, LLC and is a Senior Fellow with Small Wars Journal-El Centro. John P. Sullivan served as a Lieutenant with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department and is a Senior Fellow with Small Wars Journal-El Centro.

American Foreign Policy Council, *World Almanac of Islamism 2021* [Fifth Edition] (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 950 pp., US $ 135.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-5381-5399-4.

The 2021 edition of the *Almanac*, as explained by the editor, is intended to examine the current state of the Islamist political religious-political movements worldwide and its impacts on the societies and governments where they operate. Some of the volume's findings include the impact of the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, with governments' responses, such as lockdowns, business closures and social distancing serving to "diminish the mobility of local populations, [making – JS] it more difficult for Islamist actors to organize and mobilize (p. 3). In the long term, however, the editor notes, in vulnerable nations such societal restrictions have "the very real potential to provide Islamist ideology with added appeal, and to give Islamist actors new avenues for recruitment and action" (p. 4). The *Almanac* is recommended as an authoritative, comprehensive, and detailed reference resource for understanding the current activities of Islamist movements worldwide. Ilan Berman, the volume's chief editor, is Senior Vice President of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, DC.

Table of Contents: World Overview; The Americas; Middle East and North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Europe; Eurasia; South Asia; East Asia and Oceania; and Global Movements.

Counterterrorism: Military Warfare

Gideon Avidor (Ed.), *Mission Command in the Israel Defense Forces* (Dahlonega, GA: University of North Georgia Press, 2021), 386 pp., US $ 19.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-9407-7176-2.

The contributors to this edited volume examine Israel's military strategy by focusing on the relationship between mission command and command and control in warfare. Real world scenarios that utilized mission command deliberations are discussed by the contributors, who were serving officers in those missions. With the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fighting six conventional wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, 197, 1982 and 2006, the volume also discusses what are referred to as "campaigns between wars," which the volume's editor explains are threats presented by terrorist organizations, which are fought "on a low tactical level of limited operations nature" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (pp. viii-ix). The military warfare practitioner-based insights provided by volume's contributors make it an important resource for military strategists, public policy and academic specialists on these issues. The editor, a retired IDF Brigadier-General, had commanded tank brigades and divisions in several wars and also served as commander of the IDF's School of Armor.

Table of Contents: **Section 1: Theory**; Command Systems and Control: Combat Leadership and Ground Forces Mission; Command; Mission Command: Between Theory and Practice; Fighting Terrorist Acts from the Sea; Mission Command and Intelligence: A Built-In Paradox; **Section 2: An Army is Born**; Mission Command Follows the Army Built-Up; "They did it their way": Mission Command in the I.D.F. 1949–1956; **Section 3: Leaders Talk**; A Quick Guide for the Junior Officer; Leading and Command; Mission Command Culture; Reflections of a Staff Officer; The Challenges of Educating and Training I.D.F Officers; Directed Command and Mission Command; Hypocrisy: Mission Command in the Age of the Strategic Corporal; The Commanders' Independence; Mission Command and Logistics: Why is it so difficult?; Mission Command on the Tactical Level; **Section 4: Mission Command Put to Test**; First Missile Boat Battle; The Battle of Beirut, 1982; The 35th Paratrooper Brigade in the Battle over Lebanon, 1982; The Northern Commander in the Second Lebanon War, 2006; Command and Leadership in Operation "Defensive Shield"; Junior Command in the Gaza Strip; An Infantry Battalion Commander in Lebanon, 2006; From Surprise to Knockout: The Battle of Wadi Mabuk; **Section 5: Mission Command Over the Horizon**;; Mission Command and Non-linear Warfare; The New Dimension in War - Virtual Warfare; **Terminology**.

Meir Finkel, ***Studies in Generalship: Lessons from the Chiefs of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces*** (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2021), 368 pp., US $ 29.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-8179-2475-1.

This is a highly insightful and in-depth account by a retired Brigadier-General in the Israel Defense Forces of the roles of the IDF's Chiefs-of-Staff throughout Israel's history since independence in 1948. The performance of the Chiefs-of-Staff is examined in six significant areas: how they identify change in the strategic environment, how they understand the military domains facing the country, how they manage crises that might erupt with their generals during wartime, how they manage the rehabilitation of their military after a non-victorious war (such as following the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 2006 Lebanon War), how they lead the transformation of their forces' organizational formation, and how they manage the relationships with the country's political leaders. With regard to the prescription of lessons from the Chiefs-of-Staffs' management of warfare, which also apply to counterterrorism, the author writes that a risk management approach needs to be implemented, with contingency plans formulated to close gaps "in a low priority scenario" in order to avoid low probability scenarios from escalating into larger threats (p. 266). The author is the current head of research and former director of the Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies/ IDF J3.

Table of Contents: Foreword by H.R. McMaster; Preface; Glossary and Abbreviations; Introduction; Identifying Change; Developing Familiarity with all Military Domains; Losing Trust in a Wartime General; Rehabilitating the Army after a Botched War; Leading Change in Force Design; Building Relationships with the Political Echelon; Conclusions; Appendix A: Tenures of IDF Chiefs of Staff; Appendix B: Prime Ministers, Defense Ministers; and Generals.

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Nina Käsehage (Ed.). Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic

(Transcript: Münster, 2021), 279 pp., US $ 40.00 [Paperback], ISBN 978-3-8376-5485-1 Open Access: https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-5485-1/religious-fundamentalism-in-the-age-of-pandemic/?number=978-3-8394-5485-5.

Reviewed by Ahmet S. Yayla and Serkan Tasgin

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the health, social, political, and economic well-being of populations around the globe has been severe. In *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic*, a collection of scholarly articles edited by Nina Käsehage (Senior Lecturer at the Department for Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the Faculty of Theology, University of Rostock, Germany), the authors examine the effects of the pandemic on religious fundamentalism around the world.

In forming an ideology, social and economic problems can serve as catalyzing factors behind radicalization into extremism as they offer justifications for violence by those who feel affected. From this perspective, the volume examines whether the health, economic, and social crises that resulted from the pandemic would trigger an increase in radicalization into religiously fundamentalist extremism. The Coronavirus crisis has shown that an outbreak of this sort and the preventive measures by governments to counter it can indeed result in new forms of social unrest and lead to conflicts as some populist and extremist groups seek to exploit the fear and uncertainty stemming from the pandemic to further their religious or political objectives. This study fills a gap by providing a wide range of outlooks on the effects of the pandemic on religious fundamentalism, examining militant and extremist Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic movements in Central Asia, Europe, Israel, Mali, Russia, Syria, and Tibet and how they responded to the pandemic's impact.

This anthology contains eight chapters. The first chapter, "Cultural Wars and Communal Perseverance: Jewish Fundamentalism in Our Time," by Yaakov Ariel, explores how the COVID-19 outbreak accelerated divisions between separatist ultra-Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist and nationalist Orthodox groups. In her essay, "The Impact of COVID -19 on Orthodox Groups and Believers in Russia," Anastasia V. Mitrofanova discusses the effects of Russia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on the Orthodox Church groups and believers. According to the author, members of the Russian Orthodox tend to embrace conspiracy theories, e.g. regarding the impact of 5G wireless networks.

In "Towards a Covid-Jihad – Millennialism in the field of Jihadism," Nina Käsehage examines how jihadist and millennialist circles have been affected by the COVID crisis. She focuses on former Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), who had already returned to their home countries, and on females held in detention camps, who had not yet returned home, to assess the jihadist instrumentalization of the pandemic for their purposes. Uran Botobekov, in "How Central Asian Salafi-Jihadi Groups are Exploiting the Covid-19 Pandemic: New Opportunities and Challenges," examines how Asian Salafi-Jihadi groups, specifically the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Hayat Tahrir al Sham's (HTS), exploited the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Asia in efforts to increase their influence among local populations and to recruit new members.

Olga Torres Díaz, in her chapter on "Islamic Fundamentalism Framing Politics in Mali: From the Middle Ages to the Age of Pandemic," examines how Islamic fundamentalism frames politics by focusing on religious revival in Mali. Díaz traces the rise and influence of Salafist Islam,known as Wahhabism in Mali, led by Muhammad Dicko. The latter orchestrated two large-scale violent protests during the pandemic to press President Keita to resign In the chapter on "Global Virus, International Lamas: Tibetan Religious Leaders in the Face of the Covid-19 Crisis," Miguel Álvarez Ortega examines how pandemic crises have been handled positively by leading teachers in Tibetan Buddhist schools. Tibetan Buddhists appealed to their followers to comply with the COVID-19 preventive measures.

The final chapter of the book titled "Religious Fundamentalism – A Misleading Concept?" by Peter Antes discusses how authoritarian regimes often use religious fundamentalist labels to stigmatize religious minorities, while ideological rival group use the fundamentalist label to weaken their opponents. Antes concludes that

during pandemic times when conspiracy theories are making the rounds, the label of religious fundamentalism can be easily misused.

In sum, this volume provides an in-depth look into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on different populations by describing how various religious fundamentalists and some of their opponents perceived and reacted to the coronavirus. The volume should be useful for both academics and P/CVE practitioners who are engaged with radicalization and religious extremism. However, further research is needed to explore alternative perspectives on the relationship between pandemic and radicalization as the world continues to struggle with the consequences.

About the Reviewers:

Ahmet Yayla *is an Assistant Professor in the Homeland Security Program and Director of the Center for Homeland Security at DeSales University, and a member of the faculty of the Master's Program in Applied Intelligence in Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies.*

Serkan Tasgin *earned his Ph.D. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from Michigan State University. He is currently a participant in the Offener Hörsaal program at the University of Berne (SUB) in Switzerland.*

Bibliography: Hostage Takings and Extrajudicial Executions
(Part 1)

Compiled and selected by Judith Tinnes

[Bibliographic Series of Perspectives on Terrorism - BSPT-JT-2021-6]

Abstract

This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on hostage takings and extrajudicial executions. While focusing on recent literature, the bibliography is not restricted to a particular time period and covers publications up to November 2021. It should not be considered as exhaustive. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing more than 200 core and periphery sources in the field of Terrorism Studies. Additionally, full-text and reference retrieval systems have been employed to broaden the search.

Keywords: bibliography; resources; literature; hostage takings; kidnappings; abductions; barricade situations; hijackings; extrajudicial executions; beheadings

NB: All websites were last visited on 13.11.2021. - See also Note for the Reader at the end of this literature list.

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Note

Whenever retrievable, URLs for freely available versions of subscription-based publications (e.g., self-archived manuscripts in institutional repositories, on professional networking sites, or author homepages) have been provided. Please note, that the content of such Green Open Access documents is not necessarily identical to the official publisher versions (e.g., in case of preprints); it might therefore not have passed through all editorial phases publishers employ to ensure quality control (peer review, copy and layout editing etc.). In some cases, articles may only be cited after obtaining permission by the author(s).

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Recent Online Resources for the Analysis of Terrorism and Related Subjects

Compiled and Selected by Berto Jongman

Most of the clickable items included below became available online between November and December 2021. They are categorized under twelve headings (as well as sub-headings, not listed below):

1. Non-Religious Terrorism
2. Religious Terrorism
3. Terrorist Strategies and Tactics
4. Conflict, Crime and Political Violence other than Terrorism
5. Extremism, Radicalization
6. Counterterrorism - General
7. Counterterrorism: Specific Operations and/or Specific Policy Measures
8. Prevention, Preparedness and Resilience and Rehabilitation Studies
9. State Repression, Civil War and Clandestine Warfare
10. Intelligence Operations
11. Cyber Operations
12. Risk and Threat Assessments, Forecasts and Analytical Studies

N.B. *Recent Online Resources for the Analysis of Terrorism and Related Subjects* is a regular feature in 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. For past listings, search under 'Archive' at https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism

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2. Religious Terrorism

2.1. Al-Qaeda and its Affiliates

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***About the Compiler*: Berto Jongman** *is Associate Editor of 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. He is a former senior Military Intelligence Analyst and currently serves as an International Consultant on CBRN issues. A sociologist by training, he previously worked for Swedish and Dutch civilian research institutes. Drs. Jongman was the recipient of the Golden Candle Award for his World Conflict & Human Rights Maps, published by PIOOM. He is editor of the volume 'Contemporary Genocides' (1996) and has also contributed to various editions of 'Political Terrorism', the award-winning handbook of terrorism research edited by Alex P. Schmid.*

Announcements

Conference Monitor/Calendar of Events (December 2021 and beyond)

Compiled by Olivia Kearney

The Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), in its mission to provide a platform for academics and practitioners in the field of terrorism and counter-terrorism, compiles an online calendar, listing recent and upcoming academic and professional conferences, symposia and similar events that are directly or indirectly relevant to the readers of Perspectives on Terrorism. The calendar includes academic and (inter-) governmental conferences, professional expert meetings, civil society events and educational programs organised between December 2021 and February 2022 (with a few shortly thereafter). The listed events are organised by a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental institutions, including several key (counter) terrorism research centres and institutes listed in the February 2021 issue of this journal.

We encourage readers to contact the journal's Associate Editor for Conference Monitoring, Olivia Kearney, and provide her with relevant information, preferably in the same format as the items listed below. Olivia Kearney can be reached at <oliviaj.kearney@gmail.com> or via Twitter: @oliviajkearney.

December 2021

Webinar on the Far Right in Israel
Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), Online
1 December, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CrexUiO

Transitional Justice Approach to FTFs
Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), Online
1 December, *Online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @theGCTF

Security Dilemmas in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Community-Based Armed Groups
United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Online
1 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @USIP

Humanitarian Protection 20 Years into the 'Global War on Terror'
Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Online
2-3 December, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @PRIOUpdates

Countering the Use of Cryptocurrencies to Finance Terrorism in Morocco
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), Online
3 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @UN_OCT

National-Local P/CVE Cooperation Good Practices
Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), Online
6 December, *Online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @theGCTF

Expert Roundtable Event on Video Games and Violent Extremism
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), Online
6 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @UN_OCT

Promise and Peril in Afghanistan? Taliban, IS-K, and the Human Security Dimension
The Soufan Center, Online
7 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @TheSoufanCenter

ISIS and the Crime-Terror Nexus in America: A Counterpoint in Europe
ICSR, Online
7 December, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ICSR_Centre

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and the UK's Foreign Policy Priorities
Chatham House, Online
8 December, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ChathamHouse

ICCT Annual Conference 2021 – Trends in Radicalisation to Violence
International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), Online
8-9 December, *Netherlands*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ICCT_TheHague

Jamestown's Terrorism Watch Week
The Jamestown Foundation, Online
8-15 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @JamestownTweets

Capstone Workshop on "Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Families"
Radical Awareness Network (RAN), Online
8-9 December,
Website: visit | Twitter: @RANEurope

Risk of Researching Right-Wing Extremism: How the Far Right Threatens and Intimidates Scholars
Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), Online
9 December, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CrexUiO

Virtual Event | Lessons of the Syrian Conflict
Center for a New American Security (CNAS), Online
9 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CNASdc

Mission Brief | The Next National Defense Strategy with Dr. Mara Karlin
Center for a New American Security (CNAS), Online
9 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CNASdc

Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making
Institute for International Affairs, Online
9 December, *Italy*
Website: visit | Twitter: @IAIonline

From Stabilization to Prevention: Changing the US Strategy on Violent Conflict
United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Online
10 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @USIP

Small-Scale Expert Meeting on Lone Actors: Making Use of Needs and Risk Assessment Tools in P/CVE
Radical Awareness Network (RAN), Online
10 December,
Website: visit | Twitter: @RANEurope

The Power of Guns – Indirect and Direct Use of SALW by Terrorist Groups
International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), Online
13 December, *Netherlands*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ICCT_TheHague

Fighting Extremism in Pakistan – Local Actions, Local Voices
The Wilson Center, Online
13 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @TheWilsonCenter

Twenty Years of Stabilization and Reconstruction: Lessons from the US Experience in Afghanistan
Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), Online
13 December, *California, United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @FSIStanford

Management of Returning FTFs and Their Family Members with a Focus on Returning Women and Children
Radical Awareness Network (RAN), Online
14 December,
Website: visit | Twitter: @RANEurope

Year in Review: 2021 Impact on Platforms' Counterterrorism Efforts and Global Online Regulation
Tech Against Terrorism, Online
14 December,
Website: visit | Twitter: @Techvsterrorism

Six Months After the Countering Domestic Terrorism Strategy: A Conversation with John Cohen
George Washington Program on Extremism (GWPOE), Online
15 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @gwupoe

The Roles of Women and Children in Terrorism
Council of Europe, Online
15-16 December, *France*
Website: visit | Twitter: @coe

RAN POL Workshop for in Depth Case Diagnosis
Radical Awareness Network (RAN), Online
16 December,
Website: visit | Twitter: @RANEurope

The "Post American" Security Complex in the Middle East
Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), Online
16 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @FPRI

The War on Jihadism: Lessons from Twenty Years of Counterterrorism
Washington Institute, Online
17 December, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @WashInstitute

National-Local P/CVE Cooperation Good Practices
Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), Online
29 December, *Online*
Website: visit | Twitter: @theGCTF

January 2022

Webinar on the Far Right in Malaysia
Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), Online
12 January, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CrexUiO

Big Data and the Resurgence of the Far Right
Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), Online
13 January, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CrexUiO

Hate Crimes, Terrorism, and the Framing of White Supremacy
Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), Online
18 January, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @FSIStandford

Beyond January 2022

What Can We Learn From Interviewing 'Formers'
Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), Online
12 May, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CrexUiO

GLOBSEC 2022 Bratislava Forum
Globsec, Bratislava
2-4 June, *Bratislava, Slovakia*
Website: visit | Twitter: @Globsec

BISA 2022 Conference
British International Studies Association, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
15-17 June, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @MYBISA

International Terrorism and Social Media Conference
Swansea University, Swansea
28-29 June, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @SwanseaUni

Acknowledgment: Special thanks go to Alex Schmid and Berto Jongman for their suggestions and contributions to this conference calendar.

About the Compiler: **Olivia Kearney** *is an Associate Editor of Perspectives on Terrorism as well as a member of the Editorial Board for the ICTR Journal. She is the Community Building Officer for Project CRAAFT led by RUSI Europe. Before that, she worked as a Project Assistant for the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) after having obtained a Master's degree in Crime and Criminal Justice at Leiden University.*

Introducing our New Associate Editors

by Alex P. Schmid and James J.F. Forest

Perspectives on Terrorism is an all-volunteers online journal consisting of an Advisory Board, an Editorial Board and an Editorial Team. Due to the large volume of submissions our journal receives, the principal editors have sought – and found – three new Associate Editors which we would like to introduce to our readers:

Tricia Bacon

Tricia Bacon, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at American University's School of Public Affairs where she directs the Policy Anti-Terrorism Hub. Prior to her university employment, Dr. Bacon worked for over ten years on counterterrorism at the US Department of State. Tricia Bacon is also a non-resident Fellow with George Washington University's Program on Extremism. Her research focuses on terrorist and insurgent groups' behavior and decision-making, U.S. counterterrorism policy, and the role of intelligence in national security decision-making.

Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn

Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of Leiden University and a Research Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague. She is also a board member of the European Expert Network on Terrorism (EENeT). She has assisted Prof. Edwin Bakker in developing the massive open online course [MOOC] "Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Comparing Theory & Practice" which has attracted over 150,000 participants from more than 80 countries.

Kumar Ramakrishna

Kumar Ramakrishna, Ph.D., is a tenured Associate Professor, Provost's Chair in National Security Studies, Associate Dean in charge of Policy Studies, as well as Head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore. Prior to this appointment he was Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS) in RSIS (2006-2015), and Head, National Security Studies Programme (NSSP) (2016 to 2020). In addition, in November 2020 he was appointed Visiting Professor at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University (UK).

We are pleased to welcome these three distinguished scholars in our Editorial Team and look forward to work with them!

Call for Papers for Special Issue on "Anti-Government Extremism"

Increasing political animosity and polarization in the United States and Europe have cultivated an environment in which violence, threats and harassment against government institutions and officials have become increasingly prevalent. Although this phenomenon was illustrated most prominently with the insurrection attack against the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the bombing of government buildings and the shooting massacre of youth party members in Norway in 2011, and recent murders of elected politicians in England and Germany, the problem of anti-government extremism is much more widespread. The growth of anti-government movements, conspiracy theories, and ideologies that justify harassment and violence against politicians, government officials, and democratic institutions demands a consideration of the triggers and dynamics that drive this form of extremism.

To this end, we are soliciting proposal abstracts for a planned special issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* to be published in December 2022. Specifically, we seek abstracts that address one or more of the following topics:

- Attacks, plots, threats and harassment against politicians, government officials and institutions (e.g., case studies, statistical patterns, consequences, countermeasures).
- Anti-government conspiracy theories and ideologies used to justify violence, threats and harassment against politicians, government officials and institutions (e.g., QAnon, the Great Replacement, Eurabia, ZOG).
- Anti-government movements (e.g., varieties of violent anarchism, militia movements, Sovereign Citizens, Reichsbürgerbewegung).

Abstracts need not be limited to a single ideological focus; we are interested in exploring anti-government extremism across the ideological spectrum, including comparative perspectives.

Abstracts should be 15-30 lines long. The final papers should not exceed 6,000 words and must adhere to the journal's Guidelines for Authors, available on the website at: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism/about/guidelines

Deadlines and important dates:

- Abstracts: January 15, 2022
- Invitations to contribute: Sent by January 31, 2022
- First draft: To be presented at workshop in late April (date and place TBD)
- Final manuscripts (for peer review): July 1, 2022
- Final revised manuscripts: November 1, 2022
- Publication of special issue: Late December 2022.

Email your abstracts to the editors of the Special Issue:

Dr. Tore Bjørgo
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Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX)
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Dr. Kurt Braddock
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About Perspectives on Terrorism

Perspectives on Terrorism (PoT) is a joint publication of the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), headquartered in Vienna, Austria, and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of Leiden University, Campus The Hague. Now in its 15th year, PoT is published six times annually as a free, independent, scholarly peer-reviewed online journal available at the URL: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism.

Perspectives on Terrorism has recently been ranked by Google Scholars again as No. 3 in 'Terrorism Studies" (as well as No. 5 in "Military Studies"). PoT has close to 9,500 registered subscribers and many more occasional readers.

Our journal seeks to provide a platform for established scholars as well as academics and professionals entering the interdisciplinary fields of (Counter-)Terrorism, Political Violence and Conflict Studies.

The editors invite researchers and readers to:

- use the journal as a forum for debate and commentary on issues related to the above.
- present their perspectives on the prevention of, and response to, terrorism and related forms of violent conflict;
- submit to the journal accounts of evidence-based, empirical scientific research and analyses on terrorism;

Perspectives on Terrorism has sometimes been characterised as 'non-traditional' in that it dispenses with some of the rigidities associated with commercial print journals. Topical articles can be published at short notice and reach, through the Internet, a much larger audience than subscription-fee based paper journals. Our online journal also offers contributors a higher degree of flexibility in terms of content, style and length of articles – but without compromising professional scholarly standards. The journal's Research Notes, Special Correspondence, Op-Eds and other content are reviewed by members of the Editorial Team, while its Articles are peer-reviewed (double-blind) by outside academic experts and professionals. Due to the hundreds of submissions we receive every year, only the most promising and original ones can be sent for external peer-review.

While aiming to be policy-relevant, PoT does not support any partisan policies regarding (counter-) terrorism and waging conflicts. Impartiality, objectivity and accuracy are guiding principles that we require contributors to adhere to. They are responsible for the content of their contributions and retain the copyright of their publication.