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Special Issue:
Containing Transnational Jihad

Guest Editors:
Dino Krause and Mona Kanwal Sheikh

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Table of Contents

Words of Welcome from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume XVI, Issue 1 (February 2022) 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 beginning its 16th year of publication, it has more than 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 **Special Issue on Transnational Jihadism** has been guest-edited by *Dino Krause* and *Mona Kanwal Sheikh* from the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). Together with their contributors, they look at jihadism through the conceptual lens of conflict studies. This Special Issue features five **Articles**, in addition to the introduction by the guest-editors. The first, by *Ioana Emy Matesan*, explores varieties of transnational jihadism.The second article by Dino Krause investigates how "transnational" jihadism really is. In the next article, *Mark Juergensmeyer* offers the readers his perspective as to how religious violence ends. *Saer El-Jaichi* and *Joshua Sabih*, in turn, look at the refutation of militant jihad by some leading "formers". Finally, *Mona K. Sheikh* and *Isak Svensson* compare the utility of a Countering Violent Extremism approach with the Conflict Resolution approach when confronted with jihadism.

These articles are followed by a **Research Note** from *Judith Tinnes* who offers a progress report on her unique monitoring project "Counting Lives Lost" that covers victims of the Islamic State.

The **Resources** section features a number of short reviews by our book reviews editor, *Joshua Sinai.* This is followed a bibliography prepared by *David Teiner* on the Conflict in Libya and *Berto Jongman* contributes another of his wide-ranging surveys on 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. Finally, the principal editors, in their "Words of Appreciation" thank our external peer reviewers as well as all other collaborators for their priceless contributions which made our free and independent journal what it is.

Except for the Special Issue contributions, the texts of the current issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* have been selected and prepared by *James Forest* and *Alex Schmid,* the journal's principal editors. Editorial Assistant *Jodi Moore* handled proof-reading, while the technical online launch of the February 2022 issue of our journal has been in the hands of our new Associate Editor for IT, *Audrey Vrolijk* (ISGA, The Hague).

Articles

Transnational Jihadism: A Conflict to Be Resolved, a Movement to Implode or an Ideology to Be Countered?

by Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Dino Krause

Abstract

Over the course of two-decades-long counterterrorism campaigns in various parts of the world, al-Qaeda and—since 2014—the Islamic State have proven capable of adjusting to setbacks and surviving as transnationally operating organizations. Their continued resilience against counterterrorism efforts underscores the importance of identifying nonviolent containment strategies and furthering academic thinking on 1) resolving conflicts that involve jihadists, 2) strengthening resilience to avoid transnationalization dynamics, and 3) containing the ideological resonance of transnational jihadists. This introduction carves out the key questions that different strands of the literature on containment-related thinking have put on the contemporary research agenda. It identifies three approaches to study transnational jihadism that the contributions to this special issue illuminate further, namely studying transnational jihadism as a particular type of conflict, as a distinct form of organization, or as an ideology or theology with specific content.

Keywords: Transnational jihadism, conflict resolution, peace negotiations, religion, containment

Introduction

This Special Issue of Perspectives on Terrorism examines how the phenomenon of transnational jihadism challenges the ways in which academia and practitioners think about conflict resolution, containment and counter-narratives in the face of extremist ideologies. The ambition is to pull together existing approaches, but also to stimulate novel thinking on the de-escalation and containment of armed conflicts that involve actors who can be considered to form part of the transnational jihadist movement. The contributions to this Special Issue approach transnational jihadism from different perspectives: as a term covering a particular form of conflict, a type of movement or organization, or a particular ideology. Looking at transnational jihadism as a form of conflict implies paying particular attention to the conflict constellation that jihadist actors are part of, including the actions and reactions of opposing or competing parties. Looking at transnational jihadism as a particular type of insurgent group means paying attention to the way they function. For example, local armed groups may pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda (AQ) or the so-called Islamic State (IS) and become integrated into their organizational networks, potentially including the transfer of foreign fighters, ideologues and weapons. Finally, understanding transnational jihadism as a particular form of ideology requires paying attention to the content of the theological or strategic interpretations propagated by key leaders and ideologues. What we ideologically associate with transnational jihadism is a "doctrine" propagating the defense of "the entire Islamic world against the imminent military threat posed by the US and the West," but also the ambition of creating a transnational caliphate, challenging the Westphalian system of nation-states.[1]

The transnational jihadist movement currently has two main organizational manifestations: AQ and IS. Despite disagreeing over a number of ideological and strategical issues, these organizations share some common, defining traits.[2] They both have a cross-border appeal, their demands transgress the nation-state, they react against external interventions and call for Muslim autonomy, and they resemble network-like organizations. These movements perceive jihad—in terms of an armed struggle—to be a (neglected) duty incumbent upon all Muslims, regardless of their national affiliation.[3] AQ was created in the late 1980s as a local recruitment bureau for foreign militants, who were taking part in the mujahideen resistance movement against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. IS emerged as the Iraqi branch of AQ in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, later developing into a separate expansionist movement that took territorial control of large parts of Syria and Iraq. Though deprived of its self-declared caliphate since 2019, IS remains active, both across Syria and Iraq and in other world regions, much like AQ.

Throughout the past twenty years, the dominating strategy to address the jihadist threat has been through military means. Data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) shows that in 11 of the 25 states located

in Africa, the Middle East, or Asia, which experienced organized violence with AQ- or IS-affiliated groups throughout 2020, the respective governments received, or had been receiving, external military support in the form of troop provisions throughout the past ten years.[4] In the short run, the military superiority of the intervening powers has often resulted in tactical successes. For example, in 2001, the US-led intervention of Afghanistan resulted in the expulsion of the Taliban from Kabul within a few weeks.[5] In northern Mali, in 2013, the proclaimed Emirate of Azawad was dissolved after a French military intervention upon request from the Malian government. And in Syria and Iraq, by March 2019, the Islamic State had been expelled from all notable towns it once controlled.[6] However, in all three cases, the jihadists recovered from these early setbacks. In Afghanistan, most recently, the Taliban seized power in August 2021. In Mali, after a decrease in levels of violence following upon the French intervention in 2013, the number of fatalities resulting from violence between the state and (primarily jihadist) insurgent groups has increased every year since 2016.[7] Lastly, in Iraq and Syria, IS managed to adapt to the loss of its self-declared caliphate by morphing back from a proto-state governing millions of civilians into an insurgent group operating predominantly through targeted assassinations, roadside bombings, and suicide attacks.[8] During 2020, AQ and IS were engaged in organized violence in no fewer than 28 countries.[9] Overall, the continued resilience shown by both AQ and IS demonstrates that despite some limited successes gained through these military counterterrorism approaches, jihadists have proven capable of adjusting and re-emerging.

It has been argued that rather than containing the phenomenon, the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) appears to have worsened some of the conditions that had initially given rise to the growth of violent jihadism. As argued by Lia, "[b]y and large, the counterterrorism campaign has been counterproductive."[10] In particular, high levels of civilian casualties caused by counterterrorism operations have allowed "jihadi propagandists to convince their audiences that they are witnessing a war on Islam."[11] In a similar vein, Kalyvas describes how "ill-designed counterinsurgent measures" have benefitted jihadist ideologues in their quest for legitimacy.[12] In some regional contexts, jihadists have also sought to establish bonds with ethnic groups exposed to high levels of state repression. For example, in the Sahel region, some governments have resorted to ethnic self-defense militias in their fight against jihadists. However, these militias have become engaged in ethnically motivated human rights violations and mass killings, thereby further driving recruitment into the jihadists' ranks.[13] On a supra-regional level, military interventions conducted in the context of the GWOT have often led to a dispersal of foreign fighters toward their home countries or toward new battlefields, thus leading to further transnationalization.[14] Against the backdrop of these various challenges associated with military responses to the jihadist threat, in this Special Issue, we aim to contribute to existing research by furthering perspectives that might lead to nonviolent containment strategies in the context of transnational jihadist violence.

Linkages Between Resilience, Resonance, and Resolution

If transnational jihadism is viewed as a form of conflict, it requires resolution in the sense of addressing the dynamics of the conflict and the grievances or incompatibilities of the involved parties. If it is seen as a form of movement with the capacity to tap into different conflict zones, then strengthening of the societal resilience is pivotal. And finally, the thinking that follows from approaching the phenomenon as a particular form of ideology prompts us to think in terms of understanding why it has resonance.

The transnational jihadist movement as such has proven to exhibit a high degree of resilience in the sense that despite massive counterterrorism efforts, armed conflicts with this type of non-state actor have grown in frequency in recent decades, whereas other types of religiously shaped conflicts have become less common.[15] From a conflict-resolution perspective, recent research shows that conflicts with transnationally oriented jihadist groups are significantly less likely to see the onset of peace negotiations.[16] An additional layer of resilience arises from the fact that even in contexts where consolidated insurgencies are not feasible, AQ and IS have successfully mobilized individuals to carry out terrorist attacks in the form of a "leaderless jihad".[17]

The apparent resilience against military defeat and the seeming intractability of transnational jihadist insurgencies raises the question: what can explain its continued resonance among parts of the civilian populations

in the areas in which it operates? In this context, resonance means the ability of jihadists to mobilize support, primarily through the recruitment of fighters, but also in other ways, such as by attracting covert support from private donors. Existing literature on radicalization, conflict extension or transnationalization have provided valuable insights to explain why jihadist groups are resilient and find resonance.

While this Special Issue focuses on the other side of the equation (de-escalation, containment, resolution), there is an obvious link between the reasons behind the successful expansion of the transnational jihadist movement and those factors contributing to the prevention or limitation of such dynamics.

There has been a tendency among many social scientists studying religious violence to dismiss religion as a central explanatory factor. As recently criticized by Dawson, "most researchers partially acknowledge its causal role, yet they persistently minimize its overall significance by categorizing the religious motivational claims made by religious terrorists as nothing more than propaganda."[18] On the other hand, scholars specializing in transnational jihadism have long carved out how differences in their religious worldviews have shaped the strategic competition between AQ and IS as the two rivaling transnational actors.[19] Yet, in spite of such differences, both organizations frame their transnational insurgencies in religious terms and share the long-term goal of establishing a global caliphate.[20] Their narratives view religion as being under attack by both domestic and foreign actors. At the same time, the religious framing does not imply that religion is always the key factor in determining why civilians support or join a jihadist insurgency. Rather, part of their resonance among local populations may be explained by the transnational jihadists' ability to successfully adjust their tactics in different conflicts to particular local conditions. In some contexts, recruitment might occur through the targeting of socioeconomically disadvantaged parts of the population, whereas in other contexts, followers may hail from well-educated university circles.[21] Both AQ and IS have further tapped into tribal and ethnically shaped conflict dynamics, sometimes seemingly acting as a protecting force, while at other times offering opportunities for personal redemption.[22] Moreover, the existing literature points toward political indignation over incumbent regimes—perceived as unjust or repressive—as another key factor.[23]

The observed association between repression and political exclusion, on the one hand, and jihadist militancy, on the other hand, has given rise to a growing number of studies looking into the potentially containing effects of political inclusion on jihadism. Concretely, these studies have investigated whether including Islamist political actors in democratic multiparty politics may not only lead to the ideological moderation of these actors themselves, but simultaneously undermine public support for jihadism.[24] Regarding this "inclusion-moderation" debate, studies have found mixed evidence, identifying processes toward both moderation and further radicalization.[25] However, several group-, country-, or region-specific case studies have highlighted the potentially containing effect of Islamist political inclusion on jihadism.[26]

Other strands of the literature have stressed the organizational traits of the transnational jihadist movement to explain its resilience.[27] This includes the flexibility with which the regional branches of AQ and IS operate. Since many of these groups had existed as more or less coherent organizations prior to formalizing their alliance with AQ or IS, they have also been able to draw upon existing recruitment networks.[28]

Finally, previous research on transnational rebellion has shown that groups with access to operational bases outside the territory of the incumbent government tend to be more resilient.[29] AQ and IS appear to have taken the concept of transnational rebellion to a different level, as their organizational networks not only span across single state borders, but rather across continents.[30] In contrast to rebel groups that explicitly seek to topple a government, reach territorial autonomy, or secession for their ethnic group, AQ and IS have thus proven substantially more flexible in terms of where they operate.[31]

In line with these findings, recent research also shows that locally contained Islamist armed conflicts, that is, those fought over revolutionary or separatist incompatibilities, are neither more nor less likely to see the onset of negotiation. In contrast to this, transnational Islamist conflicts are significantly less likely to be negotiated.[32] Hence transnationalism in itself appears to render armed conflicts more intractable. In fact, to this date there is no case of a peace agreement signed by officially AQ- or IS-affiliated groups, despite occasional cease-

fires or negotiated prisoner releases. In contrast, Islamist rebel groups that signed peace agreements typically have had a more nationally oriented agenda, including the Afghan Taliban, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines, the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) in Indonesia, or Islamist factions within the United Tajik Opposition (UTO).[33]

One of the difficulties in negotiating with transnational jihadist groups lies in the jihadists' far-ranging, maximalist claims. They tend to reject the legitimacy of nation-state borders and democratic politics, while clashing with internationally established human-rights norms. There is also a strategic dimension to it: if a rebel group views itself as involved in a transnational struggle, aiming for the creation of a global caliphate, why would it decide to lay down arms in return for political power that only applies in a delimited territory? In this regard, transnational jihadism challenges conventional logics of political negotiations.[34]

Moreover, both governments and transnational jihadists face potential audience costs when considering whether to enter negotiations. From the government's perspective, negotiating with internationally proscribed terrorist groups not only entails the risk of undermining support from the electorate, but may also be opposed by their international partners.[35] On the other hand, transnational jihadists are involved in a global competition over strategic and ideological dominance. In such a context, negotiations with "apostate" governments may easily be perceived as a sign of weakness or abandoning the "right" path. For instance, IS has fiercely condemned the Taliban for their peace agreement with the US.[36]

There are, however, some notable differences when it comes to how AQ, IS and their respective affiliate groups are positioning themselves regarding the issue of negotiations. Over two decades of global counterterrorism, AQ has lost a substantial number of high-ranking leaders while simultaneously facing increasing obstacles trying to communicate with its affiliates around the world. To respond to these challenges, its leadership embarked on a strategy of localization that granted more autonomy to its affiliated groups. This approach is different than the one embraced by the IS, which has adopted a more "hands-on approach to globalism."[37] In this regard, AQ's localized strategy appears to have undermined the grip of its central leadership over the respective affiliate groups, epitomized by its Syrian affiliate Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham breaking its ties with the organization in 2016.[38] Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy that in 2020, AQ's Sahelian branch Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) announced its readiness to enter peace negotiations with the Malian Government, if France were to retract all its forces from the region.[39] Further, in Burkina Faso, reports emerged about clandestine peace negotiations between the Burkinabe Government and JNIM.[40] The case of JNIM brings the question of AQ's control over its affiliate groups to the forefront yet again. While there are no comparable examples of IS-affiliated groups, it remains an open question whether the organization will undergo similar challenges in the future.

Are Transnational Jihadist Actors Exceptional?

Why should we limit our attention to this particular actor category, instead of looking at all religiously defined actors or transnational insurgencies more generally? An ongoing scholarly debate revolves around the question to what extent Islamist and/or jihadist insurgencies are exceptional.[41] In this regard, the debate resembles the exceptionalism debate about the Middle East in the International Relations (IR) discipline.[42] One could, however, similarly ask to what degree it is the counterterrorism responses to jihadist conflicts that have been exceptional, hence contributing to difficulties in "resolving" jihadist conflicts.[43]

Can jihadist conflicts be contained with traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, or do state actors need to rethink, adjust or invent new forms of containment in the face of an exceptional type of movement? To what degree can jihadist groups be compared to other types of actors in insurgencies? On the one hand, it is crucial to acknowledge the many similarities between transnational jihadism and other types of religious extremism, which scholars in the field of religion and conflict have carved out.[44] Moreover, as alluded to earlier, transnational jihadists often adopt the same recruitment tactics as other contemporary rebels, drawing upon ethnic tensions, socioeconomic exclusion, or political repression. However, we argue that the transnational jihadist movement shares a particular combination of traits, which might set it apart from both other contemporary

rebel groups and transnational movements in the past. Our assumption is that these traits might have implications for thinking about conflict resolution, containment and countering.

Firstly, the religious dimension of the transnational jihadist movement sets it apart from the leftist insurgencies of the 20th century, despite the fact that they also share similarities such as being fought along a transnational, group-based narrative of defensive mobilization.[45] Besides the fact that the historical context was different from today's age of globalization and technological development, we know from previous research that religiously defined incompatibilities have a special ability to transform local grievances into transnational ones.[46] In the field of IR, scholars have also found that religiously defined conflicts were longer lasting and hence more difficult to resolve than nonreligious conflicts.[47] Theoretically, this has been explained, amongst other approaches, through the concept of "cosmic wars", a term coined by Mark Juergensmeyer to describe situations in which the conflict issues have been elevated to higher ground—"the sacred drama".[48]

Secondly, the transnational jihadist movement contains an organizational dimension that makes conflict resolution more complicated. As already observed by Kilcullen, the transnational jihadist movement has no single operational center of gravity, as AQ and IS are affiliated with groups in several regional contexts at the same time.[49] This continues to be unparalleled among other contemporary rebel groups. Such "transnationalization" processes even accelerated when AQ and—from 2014 onwards—IS intensified their "branching-out" strategies, entering new conflict arenas across different continents.[50] As observed by Lia, this has allowed the transnational jihadist movement to become de facto immune against a complete military defeat, as the simultaneous presence in multiple battlefields allows the movement to strategically adapt to setbacks—an advantage that no other contemporary rebel movement enjoys to a comparable extent.[51] It is thus less likely that conflicts with these groups ever reach, what Zartman, one of the grand thinkers in the field of conflict research, coined as a "mutually hurting stalemate"—the point of exhaustion that comes before mediation.[52] Moreover, the findings generated by previous research on negotiating the conditions for peace on a national level may not apply if transnational jihadists are involved, at least not as long as the unique transnational relationships at play are considered sufficient.[53]

Thirdly, and related to the second aspect, transnational jihadist conflicts are more intractable than other forms of armed conflict, which sets them apart even from other types of non-transnational Islamist insurgencies.[54] There are substantial ideological obstacles for negotiation to be found both on the rebels' and the governments' side. As outlined earlier, the Islamic State is known to oppose any form of negotiation with what it deems "apostate" governments, while AQ-affiliated groups have occasionally signaled openness for negotiations. In turn, many governments strictly oppose negotiations with groups that are affiliated with organizations such as the Islamic State or AQ. The prevailing approach to deal with transnational jihadist groups such as IS and AQ has instead been a repressive one, centered on counterterrorism paradigms and involving military solutions.

These observations bring the following question to the forefront, which we hope to spark a discussion of with this Special Issue: how should we think about containment in the context of transnational jihadism? If we look at existing ways of understanding transnational jihadism, then it is distinguished by its ability to attract foreign fighters—either from neighboring countries or from other regions.[55] It also implies organizational collaboration between local jihadist rebel groups and the core organizations of AQ or IS. Moreover, conflicts with transnational jihadist rebel groups have often attracted external military interventions from other states or non-state actors in support of, or against, at least one of the warring parties. Finally, the demands formulated by transnational jihadists transcend national borders, which implies that they ideologically represent a challenge to the Westphalian nation-state system and thus to deference to national sovereignty.[56]

Within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, interest in the role of religion in armed conflicts had already grown considerably for some time.[57] Only more recently, however, have scholars in the discipline begun to pay greater attention to the particular phenomenon of jihadist rebel groups.[58] In this volume, we seek to contribute to this nascent literature by revisiting some of the already well-established theoretical approaches to study processes of conflict resolution and ask to what extent they apply to this particular type of conflict. The issue hence speaks to the broader literature on the granting of autonomy rights to rebel groups, rebel-to-party

transformations, and bargaining theory.[59] Additionally, we broaden the scope of containment-related thinking by including contributions about the de-securitization of "macro-level" jihadist conflicts. In doing so, we engage with the containment tradition of counter-narratives, raising questions of the "practicalities" of ending cosmic wars, and how to de-link local conflicts from larger-scale conflict constellations. With this, we also hope to identify novel, theoretical and empirical avenues that can help understand how the transnational jihadist phenomenon might be more successfully curbed in the future.

The Contributions

The contributions in this Special Issue represent different takes on how to advance our thinking on the containment of transnational jihadism. At the same time, they use different terminologies that represent or display different dimensions of the question. Resolving, imploding, transforming, refuting, managing, or localizing are all terms that deal with ways to overcome the threat posed by transnational jihadism, but stressing different aspects of the phenomenon. In this Special Issue, the authors understand transnational jihadism as a particular form of conflict-constellation, as an escalated form of conflict, as a movement-type, as a particular ideological package, or as an individual trajectory. These differences we want to highlight in order to bring out the manifold dimensions in the thinking about addressing challenges posed by transnational jihadism.

In the first contribution, **Emy Matesan** treats transnational jihadism as a movement-type, highlighting the difficulties that arise from its nature as a hybrid between a local and global movement. Puzzled by the question of whether jihadist groups are particularly conflict prone, or resilient due to their transnational ideology, Matesan evaluates how different aspects of their transnationalism affect the prospects of conflict termination and disengagement from violence. She explores three potential vulnerabilities that can arise from a tension between local mobilization and transnational goals: localization, fragmentation and public backlash. Importantly, her article considers both the advantages and disadvantages of transnational Islamist groups, whereas many studies tend to focus only on the former. Hence, her study shows that the case of the Indonesian group Jemaah Islamiyah and its links to AQ have provided both challenges to, but also opportunities for, de-escalation.

In a similar vein—focusing on transnational jihadism as a particular organizational constellation—**Dino Krause** disaggregates the transnationalism of jihadist rebel groups. His study focuses on two dimensions of "transnationalization" with potential impacts on the willingness of AQ- and IS-affiliated groups to enter negotiations: transnational operations and transnational recruitment. The analysis is based on 20 groups affiliated to either of the two global organizations in the period between 2018–20, showing that only a minority of them has both operated transnationally and employed substantial numbers of foreign fighters during this period. With respect to their operational reach and their recruitment patterns, the study thus challenges their perception as inherently transnational groups, calling instead for a more careful exploration of potential negotiation channels.

Mark Juergensmeyer's article can be viewed as a contribution to the "exceptionalism" debate mentioned in the pages above, as he looks at how three different types of rebel groups came to an end—the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao in the Philippines, and the Sikh separatist Khalistan movement in India's Punjab. His findings suggest that in all three cases, the fact that the groups lost resonance over time contributed decisively to a process of internal destabilization. External military force can limit and weaken a movement and provide the coup de grâce that destroys it, but as Juergensmeyer claims, "most movements have been dead before they were destroyed." Across the cases, two further factors contributing to the implosion of the groups stand out: infighting and the opportunities for nonviolent alternatives. His contribution points in the direction of treating the transnational jihadist movement as yet another type of rebellion, bearing similarities with other insurgencies driven by religious and even nationalist worldviews.

The fourth contribution studies transnational jihad as an ideology and focuses on how the resonance of the transnational jihadist movement may be reduced—doing so not from a perspective where counternarratives are seen as a government tool, but by dissecting internal dynamics among the competing jihadist groups. **Saer el-Jaichi** and **Joshua Sabih** zoom in on internal processes of change within the Salafi-jihadi movement.

Concretely, their study explores the refutation of militant jihad in revisionist readings by two former Salafi-jihadi ideologues, known under the aliases Dr. Fadl (Sayyed Imam al-Sharif) and Abu Hafs (Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab Rafiqi). The authors show how these two ideologues combated jihadism through a restorative approach, based on content analysis of Islamic sources. In this regard, according to the authors, the religious arguments brought forth by Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs underscore the central role that religiously founded arguments can play in curbing armed jihad in general and the practice of excommunication (takfir) in particular. As they conclude, "the religious argument (…) and its ethical philosophy [focus] on the preemptive and deterrent aspects in the reconciliation process, and in so doing [emphasize] ideological change as a key to behavioral change."

In the final contribution, **Mona Kanwal Sheikh** and **Isak Svensson** make a case for investigating transnational jihad as a form of conflict. They examine the two practice-oriented fields of Conflict Resolution Research (CRR) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) frameworks in order to gain insights on the management of transnational jihadism. Based on a review of the field of Conflict Resolution Research, they pose the question how CVE frameworks may enhance existing Conflict Resolution approaches in the context of transnational jihadism. Their article emphasizes the importance of creating more interaction between research on disengagement and research on conflict transformation, as well as between literatures on conflict extension and on the globalization of jihad. The authors invite future researchers to more systematically examine the exceptionality of transnational jihadism, both as a worldview and as a reflection of macro-securitization.

Acknowledgments

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About the Authors:

Mona Kanwal Sheikh *is senior researcher and head of the Global Security and Worldviews department at the Danish Institute for International Studies. Her relevant publications include* Entering Religious Minds—The Social Study of Worldviews *(coedited with Mark Juergensmeyer; Routledge, 2019),* Expanding Jihad *(DIIS, 2017),* and Guardians of God: Inside the Religious Mind of the Pakistani Taliban *(Oxford University Press, 2016). Her current research focuses on transnationalization and containment patterns of contemporary jihadi movements, and she is the PI of the ERC-funded project "Transnational Jihad – Explaining Escalation and Containment."*

Dino Krause *is a Ph.D. candidate at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) and Aarhus University. His current research focuses on armed conflicts that involve transnational jihadist non-state actors. Moreover, he is interested in nonviolent civil resistance dynamics and is a coauthor of* Confronting the Caliphate: Civil Resistance in Jihadist Proto-States *(Oxford University Press 2022; forthcoming).*

Notes

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Typological Varieties of Transnational Jihadism and Implications for Conflict Resolution

by Ioana Emy Matesan

Abstract

Conflicts involving transnational jihadist actors have been difficult to resolve. Are global jihadist groups uniquely resilient or conflict prone? In order to address this question, this article unpacks what we mean by global jihadism and evaluates how different aspects of transnationalism affect the prospects of conflict termination and disengagement from violence, drawing on existing arguments from both terrorism studies and peace studies. The article develops a new typology of armed Islamist groups, based on whether they have national or transnational goals, engage in national or transnational mobilization, and operate in one or multiple countries. Building on this typology, the article underlines three potential vulnerabilities of transnational armed actors: localization, fragmentation and public backlash. The empirical section illustrates these vulnerabilities and the tensions that can emerge between local and global imperatives in the case of the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah.

Keywords: jihad, transnational actors, typology, conflict resolution, Jemaah Islamiyah

Introduction

Since 2014, there has been a new spike in the number of armed conflicts. Unlike the period following the end of the Cold War, the recent decade has not seen a corresponding increase in peace agreements, in part because there are more religious claims and a higher proportion of internationalized conflicts.[1] Conflict scholars have shown that when belligerents anchor their grievances in religious claims, the conflicting issues are perceived as indivisible, and the conflict is therefore less likely to be settled through negotiations.[2] With the expansion of the Islamic State, religious claims have taken on a more transnational dimension. In 2016, for instance, 60 percent of Islamist armed conflicts were fought over transnational jihadist aims centering on the establishment of a caliphate.[3] These transnational insurgencies are particularly intractable, not only because their ideology and goals leave no bargaining space, but also because they are able to elicit transnational support from both states and rebels, which increases the uncertainty about capabilities.[4]

While al-Qaeda and the Islamic State may pose new and unique challenges to conflict resolution, transnational jihadist groups are not the first or only armed actors to frame their grievances in universal terms, try to mobilize international support, or establish transnational links with other rebels. The Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany, for instance, sought to overthrow Western imperialism and obtained military training from Middle Eastern militants. Irish nationalists frequently obtained arms and money from Ghaddafi, who also supported a variety of other militant groups, from the Italian Red Brigades to the Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA).[5] Is there something uniquely resilient and conflict prone about today's transnational jihadist groups?

In order to address this question, this article seeks to unpack what we mean by global jihadism and evaluate how different aspects of transnationalism affect the prospects of conflict termination and disengagement from violence, drawing on arguments from both terrorism studies and peace studies. Next, a new categorization of transnational armed Islamist groups is proposed based on the local versus global nature of their goals, mobilization, and geographic operation. A distinction along these dimensions allows us to differentiate between global jihadist groups, local branches of global jihadists, and local jihadists with international support or multiple operation centers. Whereas global jihadist groups may indeed be particularly conflict prone, they can also face pressures to localize. Localization opens transnational armed actors to tensions between local and global imperatives and can lead to two additional vulnerabilities: fragmentation and public backlash. After reflecting on how these vulnerabilities affect conflict, this article considers the case of Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia before concluding with some policy implications.

Global Jihad and the Challenges of Conflict Termination

Global jihadism as a phenomenon is usually traced back to the 1980s, when mujahidin from around the world joined the fight against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Such transnational mobilization against the occupation of Muslim lands was not unprecedented. For example, during the Arab Revolt in Palestine (1936–1939), the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood sent weapons and volunteers to confront British and Zionist forces.[6] At that time, its leader Hassan al-Banna offered an ideological justification for such defensive military actions against occupying forces, but scholars generally consider the Palestinian Sunni scholar Abdullah Azzam to be the intellectual founder of global jihadism.[7] Azzam's focus was global, yet centered around territory, considering it an individual duty for Muslims to liberate occupied Muslim lands, such as in Afghanistan or Palestine. Over the years, the emphasis of global jihad shifted, with Osama bin Laden targeting the far enemy, even as other ideologues continued to focus on the near enemy and apostate regimes.[8] After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the nature of global jihadism changed again, taking on a more sectarian dimension, and after the rise of the Islamic State in 2014 it focused on the territorial consolidation of a caliphate. Whereas today we may think of the Islamic State as the clearest instantiation of global jihadism after al-Qaeda, Robinson suggests that of the different waves of global jihad, "ISIS has the least claim to a global agenda, but the greatest ability to recruit."[9]

This underlines that under the umbrella of global jihadism, there can be variation in terms of goals, focus, relation to territory, or nature of mobilization. Groups can diverge in terms of whether they focus on local or foreign recruitment and whether their attacks are in the core theater, or outside of their main area of operation.[10] These aspects of global jihadism have implications for the prospects of conflict termination and disengagement from violence. In order to evaluate whether transnational armed Islamist groups may pose a unique threat, it is important to briefly consider the challenges posed by different aspects of transnationalism: goals, ideological appeal, area of operation, sources of material support, and military recruitment and training.

Without detailing the diversity of jihadist ideologies, a major fault line that separates transnational armed Islamist groups from revolutionary or separatist Islamist groups is the nature of their claims.[11] Rather than seeking national liberation, regional autonomy or a regime change, transnational jihadist groups have aspirations that go beyond the nation or the state, seeking either the establishment of a regional caliphate or a change in the global order. This is relevant for conflict resolution because maximalist goals make compromise and negotiations impossible, leaving no space for bargaining.[12] Zartman suggests that unlimited ends tend to lead to unlimited means, and any attempt to negotiate with such groups would only encourage them. In order to be able to even consider negotiations, there has to be something to negotiate about, whether territory, independence or other conditions.[13]

Groups with transnational aims may operate across multiple countries, as we have seen with al-Qaeda, or they may be concentrated in one territory, as is the case with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which has been primarily based in Yemen. On the one hand, having no operational center of gravity may make it more difficult to defeat a group militarily, since it can adapt to the conditions of different zones of armed conflict.[14] On the other hand, having multiple operational centers is also likely to elicit a stronger counterterrorism response from states and encourages more cooperation and coordination among countries, as we have seen with the Global War on Terror. In Southeast Asia, the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) started out with an organizational structure that spread across multiple countries, but after the 2002 Bali attacks, not only did the Indonesian counterterrorism unit Densus 88 receive support from both the United States and Australia, but in 2003 ASEAN also created a new security community to strengthen the regional capacity to fight terrorism. Strong counterterrorism measures by Malaysia and the Philippines eventually forced JI to abandon its regional operations and center its activities in Indonesia.[15]

Transnational goals may resonate with a variety of audiences around the globe, though separatist and revolutionary Islamist groups can also frame their grievances in a way that garners support from an international audience. When a group can elicit international support (from other state or non-state actors) and is able to

recruit foreign fighters, the cost of fighting and the pressure to settle are both lower and there is greater uncertainty about capabilities, which can lead to commitment problems.[16] This uncertainty, however, can also be a potential source of vulnerability for groups. Mendelsohn argues that al-Qaeda overestimated its strength and international appeal, while underestimating the appeal of national and tribal identities.[17]

Foreign fighters can also escalate violence and extend conflicts. They bring technical skills, which can lead to more lethal tactics. Research has shown that high-intensity conflicts tend to be less likely to be resolved by means of a negotiated settlement.[18] Foreign fighters can also radicalize ideologies and mobilize additional resources, thereby significantly strengthening rebel groups.[19] When armed groups rely on foreign fighters, they are less dependent upon on the local population, which reduces pressures to moderate their tactics and undermines incentives for compromise and settlement.[20] Malet suggests that in the Syrian civil war foreign fighters constituted a small percentage of the rebel forces, but they had a disproportionately high impact on conflict, escalating levels of violence and making rebel groups more resilient.[21]

Foreign fighters are not the only form of external support. Armed groups may also receive material or technical support from states, and such third-party interventions tend to decrease the likelihood of reaching a negotiated settlement.[22] National diasporas can also offer support, but their impact on violence is more complex—at times they prolong the conflict whereas other times they can push groups toward negotiations.[23] In this regard, support from diasporas may present both a challenge and an opportunity for conflict termination.

This brief overview underlines that there are three major aspects of transnationalism that can make global jihadist groups particularly resilient and conflict prone: the nature of their goals, their ability to mobilize transnational support, and their ability to operate across multiple countries. Yet not all armed Islamist actors may display all three of these characteristics. Based on these three criteria, it is possible to create a new categorization of transnational armed Islamist actors, which can open new possibilities to evaluate the potential challenges to conflict termination posed by different types of actors. The next section develops this typology.[24]

Toward a New Typology of Transnational Armed Islamist Groups

If we differentiate among armed Islamist groups along the three dimensions that are particularly consequential for conflict (goals, mobilization and area of operation), we can identify eight different types of actors detailed in Table 1.

At one end of the spectrum are Islamist groups that have transnational goals, recruit globally, and operate across multiple countries. These are global jihadist groups, such as al-Qaeda. At the other end of the spectrum are local jihadists or national Islamists that recruit locally, operate in one country, and whose main goals are national or local, such as the implementation of shariah law, the Islamization of their own society, or national liberation. Such groups can be local jihadists like al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt in the early 1980s, or national Islamists like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, or the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Since local jihadists have more limited goals, they may be more amenable to enter negotiations, even if they do not consider the state or the political institutions as legitimate. National Islamists may be amenable to enter the political process or power-sharing agreements. Global jihadists, on the other hand, pose significant challenges to conflict resolution, as discussed in the previous section. A key question is whether global jihadism is sustainable, or whether it is bound to face pressures to localize.

In between global jihadists and national Islamists are a variety of other possibilities, as well as two processes of change: internationalization and localization. We have seen groups that start with a national or local focus later pledge their allegiance to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, undergoing a process of internationalization. As both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State expanded, they established local branches around the world, undergoing a process of localization.

Table 1. Typology of Transnational Armed Islamist Actors

	Transnational Goals (global revolution/caliphate)		**National/Local Goals** (regime or policy change/liberation)	
	Transnational mobilization & recruitment	National/local mobilization & recruitment	Transnational mobilization & recruitment	National/local mobilization & recruitment
Operates across multiple countries	*Global jihadist*	*Global jihadist with multiple operational centers*	*Jihadist with multiple operational centers*	*Local jihadist/ national Islamist with cross-national operations*
Operates in one country	*Localized global jihadist with international support*	*Localized global jihadist*	*Jihadist with international support*	*Local jihadist/ National Islamists*

Groups that have transnational goals and operate in multiple countries but mainly rely on local recruitment in each of those countries can be considered global jihadists with multiple operational centers. We can expect such groups to develop stronger ties to the local community, and be more vulnerable to public pressures in response to violence. Local recruitment can also reduce the problem of resource uncertainty. If a group relies primarily on local recruitment, but the goals continue to be transnational, the group may, in fact, become more vulnerable to disagreements over the extent to which the priority should remain global, or whether the group should start focusing more on local concerns and domestic enemies.

Localized global jihadist movements have transnational goals, but only operate in one country and recruit locally. An example would be Ansar al-Shariah in Tunisia, a Salafi-jihadist militant organization that was committed to establishing an Islamic state in Tunisia, but also considered itself to be part of a broader global jihadist movement, sending foreign fighters to Libya and Syria.[25] If such a group manages to recruit both locally and transnationally, we can consider it to be a localized global movement with international support. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), for example, operates primarily in Yemen, but it is able to recruit both locally and attract foreign fighters.[26] In this typology, the term operate refers to the physical presence in a particular territory, whether it is in the form of a cell, an organizational structure, or a cluster of leaders. It does not refer to targets of attacks or to the presence of individual members or sympathizers who may stage an attack. In this sense, AQAP can be considered to be a localized global jihadist group with international support because it operates primarily out of Yemen, even if a few attacks claimed in its name took place on American soil.

Armed Islamist groups with national or local goals may also exhibit aspects of transnationalism if they operate in multiple countries or recruit foreign fighters. National groups that only recruit locally but operate across borders can be considered local jihadists/national Islamists with cross-national operations. This may occur when conditions in the homeland are very restrictive or the ruling regime uses excessive violence so that opposition leaders have to flee the country, establishing a presence abroad. Alternatively, groups may operate in areas with porous borders or in frontier areas and extend their presence across borders, especially in response to regime repression or counterinsurgency operations. An example is the Pakistani Taliban, which recruits mainly locally and is focused on national goals, but whose presence has extended from the tribal areas of Pakistan into Eastern Afghanistan.[27]

Groups with a national focus that recruit transnationally and operate in multiple countries can be considered jihadists with multiple operational centers. They are not global jihadists, because their primary goals are national, but they are jihadists because in order to recruit transnationally they frame their grievances as a more universal struggle while also invoking tenets of jihadism. An example would be the Indonesian JI during its

early period. The group was founded primarily to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, but its founders had spent time in Malaysia before joining the mujahideen in Afghanistan, so when they established the group they recruited among both Indonesians and Malaysians.[28] When JI developed its organizational structure, the group was divided into four regional areas of command, extending to Malaysia, Singapore and Mindanao in the Philippines. Unlike JI, Ahrar al-Sham has been able to recruit both locally and transnationally, but it has only operated in Syria, hence it can be described as a jihadist group with international support.

As with any typology, these eight categories represent ideal types that may not always adequately capture the complex realities on the ground. Since the focus here is on the challenges of transnationalism, for the purpose of categorization, we classify groups as having transnational goals if the leadership focuses on such goals either exclusively or along national goals. Similarly, we label groups as relying on transnational recruitment if such recruitment is significant, even when they also recruit locally. Identifying transnational goals and recruitment is therefore a question of thresholds. At times, discerning the importance of the transnational dimension may be a challenging task, making it difficult to neatly place some groups in this typology. Yet the value of the typology is not only in identifying these ideal types and the nature of localization or internationalization, but also in serving as a heuristic device that can help us identify tensions between a group's local and transnational imperatives.

When there is a disconnect between the nature of goals (local vs. global) and the nature of recruitment (local vs. transnational), groups may be vulnerable to internal tensions, fragmentation and public backlash, especially if the use of foreign fighters leads to heightened levels of violence against the local population. We have seen such tensions in a variety of al-Qaeda affiliates. In al-Shabaab, who started with a national focus but recruited both domestic and foreign fighters, disagreements emerged about whether the conflict in Somalia was primarily a Somali fight, or merely one front in the global jihad. The leader exhibiting support for global jihad was criticized for lacking local clan roots and for disregarding local fighters and the lives of civilians.[29]

In the previous sections we have considered the ways in which the transnational aspects of groups may close down opportunities for conflict resolution. The next section examines in greater detail whether localization can open up opportunities for conflict termination as a consequence of fragmentation and public backlash.

The Vulnerabilities of Transnational Armed Actors: Localization, Fragmentation, and Public Backlash

Mendelsohn suggests that even though transnational jihadism retains its vitality, there are certain structural characteristics that also constrain jihadist movements.[30] Jihadists have underestimated the appeal of national and tribal identities, overestimating the salience of transnational goals and their ability to transform the world. In the absence of a viable strategic plan for a global revolution, and faced with a strong response from the United States and other members of the international community, groups like al-Qaeda started establishing branches and delegating authority to them. This inadvertently created locally oriented power centers over which the central leadership had little control. This "localization" trap created tensions between local and global priorities, leading to ineffective strategies and disagreements. Such disagreements led to the fragmentation of the jihadist movement, which was further exacerbated by clashing egos and the preexisting decentralization of authority in Islam. Transnational jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS have also underestimated public opposition to high-intensity violence, severe restrictions, and disruptions in traditional social and legal practices resulting from counterterrorist operations.

Fragmentation, however, does not guarantee that jihadist groups lay down arms or are willing to negotiate. Fragmented movements are more likely to escalate levels of violence, [31] and fragmentation can also create incentives for spoilers to challenge peace settlements.[32] Furthermore, infighting can also weaken groups and lead to internal decline.[33] If a process of deradicalization is under way, fragmentation can result in the breaking away of the most radical voices, which can enable organizations to move away from violence, as was

the case with the Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (GI).[34]

Fragmentation opens the possibility of moderate voices emerging within the leadership, who might be willing to engage in talks. Whereas scholars tend to agree that negotiating with the central leadership of al-Qaeda is unrealistic because it has absolutist goals and nonnegotiable positions, some think it may be possible to talk with al-Qaeda affiliates, or with elements that are detached from the hardcore base, especially if the dialogue is localized and about specific concerns.[35]

Localization does not always imply a reduction in violence, and its effects depend in part on the nature of leadership. The Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda under al-Zarqawi embarked on a "counterproductive spiral of violence" against the Shi'a community, tarnishing al-Qaeda's reputation.[36] However, the localization of transnational armed actors makes them vulnerable to fragmentation and holds the potential to change their relationship to the local community, especially if the group starts relying more on local recruits than on foreign fighters, or if its operations become territorially confined.

In the Syrian conflict, al-Qaeda found it necessary to develop "locally embedded Salafi jihadi" groups in order to compete against the Islamic State. Afterward, these groups had incentives to break away from al-Qaeda because their association with it could antagonize local allies and make them the target of international counterterrorism efforts.[37] When the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, which later transformed into Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), became the dominant force in Idlib, it developed a civilian technocratic administration to manage the province.[38] As HTS developed governing bodies, it started delegating many functions to non-HTS constituencies, placing educated local urban elite members in charge of many civilian positions, and allowing international NGOs to supervise the health sector. In order to maintain local legitimacy, the group avoided implementing strict Islamic law, and it embarked on rapprochement with Turkey. In the security realm, HTS sidelined more radical factions and collaborated with more mainstream factions in order to mobilize local support and maintain control of the province.[39]

Yet when a group becomes more dependent on the local community, it also becomes more vulnerable to public backlash. This alone may not change a group's behavior or push it toward reconciliation, but it can exert additional pressure and increase the costs of violence. In the case of GI in Egypt, escalating levels of violence against civilians and informants turned previously sympathetic communities against the group. As GI began losing support in different localities in Upper Egypt, it continued shifting its area of operations until by the end of 1996 it became unable to sustain confrontations in any location.[40] The combination of military defeat and public condemnation raised the costs of violence and led to widespread disillusionment within the group, eventually pushing its leaders to renounce violence in 1997.[41]

JI and the Double-Edged Sword of Transnationalism

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore a case from each category of the proposed new typology. Instead, we seek to illustrate the processes of internationalization and localization and probe the tensions between the global and local imperatives in the context of a single case, while recognizing that the extent to which insights from this case are generalizable remains to be tested. We selected the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) because it has undergone both internationalization and localization. Its evolution can illustrate these processes and demonstrate how groups may change categories over time. JI is also a case whose connection to global jihad has been contested from the beginning; it can therefore also expose both the challenges and the value of categorizing transnational armed actors.

JI has some clear transnational elements. It was formed in Afghanistan, and it developed a transnational organizational structure with four regional areas of command. While JI does not conscript foreign fighters as widely as some other global jihadists, in Afghanistan it recruited among both Indonesians and Malaysians. Treating JI as a global jihadist organization, however, obscures the group's historical connections to Indonesia, and the

fact that for its emirs the primary goal has been the creation of an Islamic state in Indonesia.

JI emerged as a breakaway group from the Indonesian Darul Islam (DI) network. DI started as an Islamist rebellion during Indonesia's early independence period (1945–1949), and after it was defeated in the early 1960s, subsequent generations of DI activists continued to promote the vision of an Islamic state in Indonesia. During the 1980s, DI members traveled to Afghanistan for military training, which infused the movement with new ideas about global jihad and a caliphate.[42] When DI members Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir formed JI, their goal was to build an Islamic state in Indonesia, but they also considered it to become the basis of a future Southeast Asian caliphate. Former member Nasir Abas recounts that JI held weekly lessons about the history of DI in Indonesia, and part of his motivation to join as a non-Indonesian was to "liberate" the land that had once been declared an Islamic state by DI.[43] Instead of insisting on a territorial state, however, JI focused on building a counter-society, which could amass sufficient resources and develop a strong enough organizational structure to transform into a counter-state.[44]

The homage to both an Islamic state in Indonesia and a caliphate muddles the distinction between national and transnational goals and shows the challenge of categorization. Experts on the group consider the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia the primary and most immediate goal of JI, because of the historical roots to DI and because a caliphate necessitates the establishment of an Islamic state as a base to begin with.[45] Given this national focus but global recruitment and operation, we consider JI an Indonesian jihadi group with multiple operation centers rather than a global jihadist group. As the discussion will show, the distinction can help us understand some of the tensions between the local and global imperatives within JI.

JI's transnational operations embedded the group in multiple zones of armed conflict beyond the main mission and influenced the scope and targets of violence. In 1997, JI plotted an attack on a train station in Singapore, but the attack was never carried out.[46] As JI established military training camps in Mindanao, several JI leaders also pledged to support the activities of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) by attacking the Philippine Ambassador in Jakarta.[47]

JI's transnational recruitment and military training also posed obstacles to conflict resolution by bringing technical expertise into the local conflicts in Poso and Ambon, thereby escalating the intensity of the violence. In Ambon, JI participated in the conflict under the umbrella of Laskar Mujahidin, contributing important military skills and weapons.[48] In Poso, JI members provided military training to local Muslim youth and propagated jihadist religious interpretations.[49] Scholars have shown that JI's involvement in Poso significantly altered the conflict and led to a "terror period," characterized by bombings, shootings and assassinations.[50]

The transnational dimension of JI also opened the group to some vulnerabilities. Having multiple operational centers prompted a strong response from other states, especially after 9/11, incapacitating the JI in Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. This forced the group to abandon its regional structure and concentrate its operations on Indonesia, changing to a jihadist group with (dwindling) international support. This localization out of necessity did not drastically alter JI's mission or its position on violence, but it diminished its resources, forced the group to reconsider the costs of violence in the Indonesian context, and pushed the central JI leadership to "return to its Darul Islam roots" and focus on *da'wa* outside of the direct armed conflict zones.[51] JI limited its violence to Poso, where it organized military trainings and continued attacks on Christians in spite of the Malino Peace Accords of 2001. Outside of Poso, violence became very costly: JI was severely weakened by counterterrorism efforts after 2002, and the public was outraged by the carnage of terrorist attacks, initially refusing to believe that Indonesians could be capable of such acts.[52]

JI reveals that tensions can emerge when a group's priorities are national, but the operations and recruitment are transnational. These strains came to the foreground after Osama bin Laden's 1998 fatwa that called for a jihad against the West. Al-Qaeda's call sparked a debate and growing divisions between the Indonesia-based leaders, who thought the focus should be on cultivating strong cadres through *da'wa* and building an Islamic state in Indonesia, and the Malaysia-based leaders, who wanted to join the anti-Western struggle.[53] These di-

visions exacerbated after Sunkgar's death in November 1999, leading to deep fragmentation within the organization. In the context of weak leadership, this fragmentation enabled high-level terrorist attacks by factions and splinter groups, such as the 2002 and 2005 Bali attacks, the 2003 Marriot attacks in Jakarta, the 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, and the 2009 attacks on Marriot and Ritz Carlton in Jakarta. But fragmentation also left these factions weakened and exposed, facilitating their incapacitation by the government and enabling the JI leadership to coalesce around the rejection of terrorist tactics outside of direct conflict zones. By 2004, JI leaders condemned terrorist attacks and urged members to collaborate with the police if rogue factions continued their unsanctioned violence.[54]

After a 2007 government raid in Poso ended JI's military activities there, JI shifted its focus exclusively to tactics of proselytizing and capacity building. Since then, aside from a temporary attempt to revive the military wing, the group has focused on nonviolent religious activism and propaganda inside Indonesia, putting armed struggle on hold. This was not an ideological renouncement of violence, but a pragmatic reassessment of strategy in the Indonesian context. Prominent members, along with the spiritual leader Abu Rusydan, emphasized that when Muslims are too weak to confront the state and conditions do not allow for jihad, it is necessary to focus on preparations. As Chernov Hwang notes, JI learned that it "could either change strategies or be arrested into irrelevance."[55] Since its prioritization of *da'wa* over jihad, some JI members have left the group and joined other jihadist movements. JI has not been able to prevent this, but it has remained committed to the suspension of violence inside Indonesia, even as other jihadists continued in the use of violence or joined the Islamic State.[56]

Rethinking Policy Responses toward Transnational Armed Actors

Global jihadist groups can pose significant challenges for mediation and conflict termination. However, transnational armed groups also often face pressures to localize, which can introduce tensions between the local and global imperatives and make groups vulnerable to fragmentation and public backlash. These vulnerabilities are not guaranteed to lure groups away from violence—fragmentation may lead to a spike in militancy in the short run—but they may present incentives for de-escalation.

Scholars have suggested that in order to be able to address conflicts involving transnational armed Islamist groups, it is critical to de-link them from the transnational struggles, re-localize conflicts, and disaggregate the different dimensions of transnational jihadism.[57] By developing a typology of transnational armed Islamist actors, this article has considered what such a disaggregation might look like and has shown that localization can present both opportunities and challenges. Localization can change the costs of violence and encourage groups to have more limited aims and to develop stronger ties to the local community, thereby becoming more vulnerable to public pressures for compromise and settlement. Localization can also foster fragmentation, especially if there are disagreements over strategy and objectives, and tensions between the scope of mobilization (local versus transnational) and the scope of goals (national versus global). In turn, fragmentation may open avenues for mediation, but it can also lead to escalation, at least in the short run.

The case of the Indonesian JI suggests that the path away from violence may not always be through military destruction or follow a negotiated settlement. At times, groups that have embraced jihad may recognize that armed action is too costly in their local context, and it needs to be placed on hold. Such temporary cessation of violence may not be an optimal solution, but it may be a feasible way to save lives.

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[21] David Malet, "Foreign Fighters in the Syrian Civil War," p. 127.

[22] Dylan Balch-Lindsay, Andrew J. Enterline, and Kyle A. Joyce, "Third-Party Intervention and the Civil War Process," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2008), pp. 345–363.

[23] Hazel Smith and Paul B. Stares (eds.) *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers* (Tokyo, Japan: United Nations University Press, 2007).

[24] For the purpose of clarity and parsimony, the typology only includes the three criteria that scholars identify as the major aspects of transnationalism. Beyond these three dimensions, there are other important factors that can differentiate transnational Islamist groups from one another, such as organizational structure (hierarchical versus horizontal), organizational cohesion, level of material support from outside actors, and control over territory. We do not consider these aspects to warrant expanding the typology, as they do not yield additional ideal types. Instead, it is more useful to treat them as characteristics that each type of group may display. For instance, we may have a centralized or decentralized global jihadist group, or a fragmented or cohesive national Islamist group.

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[29] Tricia Bacon and Daisy Muibu, op. cit., p. 302.

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How Transnational is "Transnational"? Foreign Fighter Recruitment and Transnational Operations among Affiliates of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State

by Dino Krause

Abstract

To this date, there are no instances of peace agreements signed by armed groups affiliated with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS). Previous research has highlighted their transnational demands and their integration into a transnational organization as major obstacles. Yet, these groups are also deeply embedded within local conflict configurations. This article posits that to explore prospects for future negotiations with these groups, one must obtain a better understanding of how they function on the ground. A descriptive empirical analysis is provided of two dimensions of 'transnationalization' that should both have an impact on jihadist affiliate groups' willingness to enter negotiations: transnational operations and transnational recruitment. The analysis of a sample of twenty jihadist affiliate groups in the period 2018–2020 reveals substantial variation regarding both variables. The results should have relevance for both researchers and policymakers seeking to identify nonviolent containment strategies in armed conflicts with rebel groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and IS.

Keywords: al-Qaeda, foreign fighters, Islamic State, jihadism, peace agreements

Introduction

Since the emergence of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State as transnational jihadist organizations, there have not been peace agreements with any of their various affiliate groups around the world. Moreover, even the onset of peace negotiations is significantly less likely, once an Islamist group formulates transnational aspirations, which is the case for all al-Qaeda and IS-affiliated groups.[1] The lack of negotiations with these groups is particularly problematic, as the transnationalization of armed conflicts tends to aggravate the use of destructive tactics, indiscriminate targeting, and overall contributes to more protracted conflicts.[2] In 2020, half of the world's twenty most intensive state-based armed conflicts involved al-Qaeda or IS-affiliated rebel groups.[3]

While negotiations with these groups may appear as a far-fetched scenario at first sight, al-Qaeda's Sahelian affiliate *Jama'at nusrat al-islam wal-muslimin* (JNIM) has voiced its willingness to open peace negotiations, should France retreat its military forces from the region.[4] Already in 2010, A.K. Cronin noted that while negotiations with al-Qaeda's core organization were unrealistic, this would not necessarily be the case with respect to its affiliate groups.[5] As regards IS-affiliated groups, negotiations with governments have taken place, but thus far only over more limited issues such as humanitarian aid, or hostage releases.[6] IS has accused its rivals from al-Qaeda of 'apostasy' due to the latter's alleged willingness to negotiate with governments.[7] At least in the near future, it is thus unlikely that an IS-affiliated group would enter peace negotiations with a government, as this would directly contradict its own narrative. However, does this mean that this will prevent all IS-affiliated groups from entering negotiations in the future? In 2016, al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate (HTS) broke away from the central organization, seeking to present itself as a less radical actor open for negotiations.[8] As IS's network of affiliate groups operate in a highly divergent set of conflicts, it is reasonable to pose the question whether some of these groups may undergo similar processes in the future.

In previous research, the lack of negotiations with jihadist affiliate groups has been explained through their transnational organizational setup and the far-ranging transnational goals. However, transnationalization is a multifaceted concept, comprising not only organizational affiliation and ideology, but also operational and recruitment-related aspects. To explore the prospects of future peace negotiations with these groups, this article provides an analysis of the degree of affiliate groups' transnational operations and transnational recruitment.

Previous Research

Previous research within the field of religion and conflict has shown how in so-called "cosmic wars", extra-worldly rewards can affect the decision-making calculus of the involved rebels, thereby decreasing the perceived value of laying down arms and reintegrating into society.[9] Other studies highlight the indivisibility of sacred spaces and other religiously defined incompatibilities, and the resulting difficulty to enter negotiations.[10] While these arguments are formulated with regards to religious conflicts as such, recent research on the subcategory of *Islamist* conflicts reveals a more nuanced picture: whereas nationally focused Islamist insurgencies appear to be neither more nor less likely to enter negotiations than other types of armed conflict, those in which the non-state party formulated transnational Islamist aspirations are significantly less likely to see the onset of peace negotiations.[11] As regards the involved governments, one major obstacle lies in the high audience costs faced by incumbent leaders, should they enter negotiations with an al-Qaeda or IS-affiliated group. The problem with audience costs is not restricted to jihadist affiliate groups but has rather been raised with respect to terrorist groups in general.[12] Still, it is likely to be particularly relevant in the case of affiliate groups, not least because the latter are perceived as *transnational* security threats, which may thus imply additional opposition against negotiations from the incumbent governments' international partners.[13]

But even if governments *are* willing to negotiate, how realistic are such endeavors with jihadist affiliate groups? To explain the lack of negotiations with these groups, it has been argued that their far-ranging, transnational demands diminish the bargaining space between the government and the rebel-side.[14] Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how an armed group would agree to lay down arms, while it views itself as part of a divine struggle for the creation of a global caliphate. Still, this argument may not reveal the full picture. A recent study of negotiations between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram found that even though the group transformed over time from a locally focused insurgency toward one that was closely aligned with the transnational Salafi-jihadi movement, "[a]t the heart of the conflict were still the same or similar type of grievances, and the sub-regional and global ties appeared more tactical and symbolic than substantial."[15] This relates to an ongoing scholarly debate over the centrality of transnational jihadist aspirations as driving factors of al-Qaeda or IS-affiliated rebel groups when compared to locally rooted ethnic, economic, or political grievances.[16] Scholars have emphasized that Islamist groups may join transnational organizations primarily out of tactical considerations.[17] Such cases have been described as "instrumental" coalitions between local and transnational actors.[18] Some have even argued that "extremist" ideology as such is employed by rebel leaders in a purely instrumental fashion, in order to signal strength and boost their reputation.[19] Rather than engaging in these sometimes polarized 'local vs. transnational' debates, other studies have identified a combination of local conflict drivers interacting with transnational influences, and nonreligious factors interacting with religious considerations, resulting in a mix labeled "glocal jihad".[20]

What appears certain is that there is at least some variation with regards to the centrality of transnational religious aspirations for different jihadist affiliate groups. It is thus unlikely that this factor alone could explain the lack of negotiations with these groups. Moreover, transnationalization is a multifaceted concept and groups affiliated with al-Qaeda or IS can become 'transnationalized' on different levels. To explore avenues for future conflict resolution, it is held here that more attention should be paid to how these groups actually function on the ground.

This article seeks to make two contributions to existing research. First, on a conceptual level, by applying Harpviken's framework of transnationalization to a wider sample of jihadist affiliate groups, it provides an avenue for future research for how to disaggregate this actor type.[21] In doing so, it speaks to a growing literature that has sought to move beyond the, sometimes simplistic, 'far vs. near enemy' debates regarding transnational jihadism.[22]. While the underlying motivation of this study is to explore prospects for conflict resolution, the applied framework is also well suited to explore other types of outcomes in conflicts with affiliate groups. Second, on an empirical level, this article provides new data on the transnational operations and transnational recruitment of a sample of twenty jihadist groups affiliated to al-Qaeda or IS.

Transnational Operations, Recruitment, and the Prospects for Conflict Resolution

In his study of the Afghan Taliban's links to al-Qaeda, Harpviken presents a conceptual framework through which to explore transnationalization, which he defines as "the process by which non-state groups integrate with transnational actors."[23] He investigates transnationalization along four dimensions: organization (1), resource mobilization (2), tactical repertoire (3), and ideological framing (4). As regards ideological framing, despite differences between al-Qaeda and IS, the cross-case variation along this variable is limited, as their affiliate groups all subscribe to a *transnational* jihadist agenda. With respect to resource mobilization, there is a lack of data that would allow to draw meaningful conclusions, for instance about financial flows from al-Qaeda or IS toward their affiliates. Therefore, the focus in this study is on Harpviken's categories of tactical repertoire (1) and organization (2). Regarding tactical repertoire, the article explores to what extent affiliate groups themselves carry out attacks across national borders, that is, engage in 'transnational operations'. As regards organization, the focus is on the issue of 'transnational recruitment', that is, the presence of foreign fighters within different affiliate groups. This leads to the question how these two dimensions of transnationalization—operations and recruitment—affect the prospects of conflict resolution.

First, conflicts in which insurgents operate across national borders are characterized by a particular combination of military advantages for the rebels, and an "information-poor bargaining environment" regarding the rebels' true capabilities.[24] The ability of rebels to evade state repression by slipping across the border into a neighboring state constitutes a military advantage, as states are typically constrained in their ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations beyond their own territory.[25] Rebels with this advantage should thus be less likely to end up in what Zartman has coined a "mutually hurting stalemate", a necessary condition for the onset of peace negotiations.[26] At the same time, there is an information problem, as states lack the ability to surveil and monitor the rebels' operations, with intelligence-gathering being more difficult abroad than domestically, thereby increasing the risk of bargaining failure.[27] To draw the focus back to jihadist affiliates, it appears thus reasonable to expect fewer obstacles for negotiations with groups that only operate within a single state. While it has been noted that Salafi-jihadist insurgent groups "often operate regionally and internationally", this aspect has, to the date, not been examined systematically.[28]

Similar to the argument regarding transnational operations, foreign fighters provide rebel groups with potential military advantages. They typically constitute dedicated combatants that often fight until their death.[29] While some may constitute experienced and highly skilled fighters, others may be used as suicide bombers, precisely due to their lack of experience. Still, both types of foreign fighters can be useful for jihadist affiliate groups.[30] Moreover, the availability of transnational recruitment networks lowers the costs of fighting for the rebels, as the transnational constituency does not incur the same costs as the local population.[31] While these dynamics should strengthen the rebel group, the local population may however reject the foreign fighters due to their perception as being alien to the local context, or because of their more brutal behavior vis-à-vis civilians.[32] If this is the case, a loss of public support may lead to internal group divisions, which previous research has found to be associated with higher levels of anti-civilian violence, more lengthy conflicts and reduced prospects for negotiations.[33] In both scenarios, foreign fighters would thus provide an obstacle to conflict resolution, albeit in different ways. Lastly, similar as with transnational operations, foreign fighter recruitment increases the uncertainty that states have about the rebels' capabilities, thus increasing the risk of bargaining failure.[34] Against this backdrop, it appears reasonable to assume fewer obstacles for negotiations with jihadist affiliate groups that employ lower numbers of foreign fighters.

It must be noted that this explorative study does not seek to, and cannot, empirically test the assumed association between transnationalization and the prospects for conflict resolution with jihadist affiliate groups. This is due to the lack of real-world examples of peace negotiations with al-Qaeda- or IS-affiliated groups. Rather, the goal of the analysis is to assess the transnationalization of these groups, building on the assumption that the two dimensions discussed here should play a role when it comes to the identification of those groups which may potentially be available for future peace negotiations.

Defining a Sample of Jihadist Affiliate Groups

In the following, jihadist affiliate groups are defined in line with Melander et al., based on whether an armed group has made a formal pledge of allegiance to the core leadership of al-Qaeda or IS, and whether the latter has formally accepted that pledge of allegiance.[35] The main part of the sample was constructed based on an analysis of all 'Islamist' armed groups listed in the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) dataset. However, the RELAC is limited to state-based armed conflict, yet some affiliate groups have not been involved in state-based violence, but rather only in non-state conflict or in one-sided violence against civilians. To capture these groups as well, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) was screened, which led to the inclusion of several additional groups.[36] Furthermore, the time period is restricted to 2018–2020. The main reason is that by adopting a broader time frame, foreign fighter recruitment would have to be measured over an extended period. This would complicate the data-gathering process as several groups have shifted their recruitment strategies over time. Still, regarding transnational operations, Figure 2 and Table 3 in the Appendix present findings obtained through a sample covering an extended time frame (2001–2020). Moreover, regarding the second factor—foreign fighter recruitment—comments were added for those groups that underwent major changes in their recruitment strategy, such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Shabaab.

Because this article focuses on *affiliated* rebel groups, the two core groups, the remnants of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda's core based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are excluded from the sample. One challenge consists in matching the actors listed as 'IS' by the UCDP, with IS's designated 'provinces' (*wilayat*). The reason is that the GED does not specify to which IS province a certain event belongs. In its heydays (2014–2017), IS's province-structure was highly disaggregated. For instance, in Libya alone, it declared three such provinces in 2014.[37] After the loss of its caliphate in 2018, the organization restructured its global network and adopted a less localized and more country-oriented province-structure.[38] Given the time frame of the present study (2018–2020), this post-2018 IS province structure to define an IS-affiliated group, is followed, albeit with some adjustments.

First, IS treats its Greater Saharan branch (ISGS) as a constituent part of its West Africa Province (ISWAP). However, ISGS and the other core part of ISWAP, which has its stronghold in northeastern Nigeria and originally became known under the name Boko Haram, not only share distinct organizational histories, but also operate autonomously and in distinct areas.[39] Here these groups are studied separately from each other. The same approach is used for IS's affiliate groups in Mozambique and in the DR Congo, which are fighting under the common banner of Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP), but remain largely autonomous actors.[40]

Contrary to these cases, IS has disaggregated its province-structure in Pakistan and India, where it designated two new provinces in 2019. Formerly, these groups' activities had been claimed under the common banner of its Khorasan Province (ISKP).[41] However, despite a few major attacks claimed by its Pakistan Province in the following months, the designation was temporarily abandoned at a later stage, only to reappear in a recent claim for an attack in Rawalpindi.[42] Such inconsistencies, and the fact that these provinces were previously subsumed under ISKP, suggest that their designation may have served tactical purposes, rather than representing more autonomous groups. Against this backdrop, the analysis focuses on ISKP and does not study the other two provinces as separate actors.

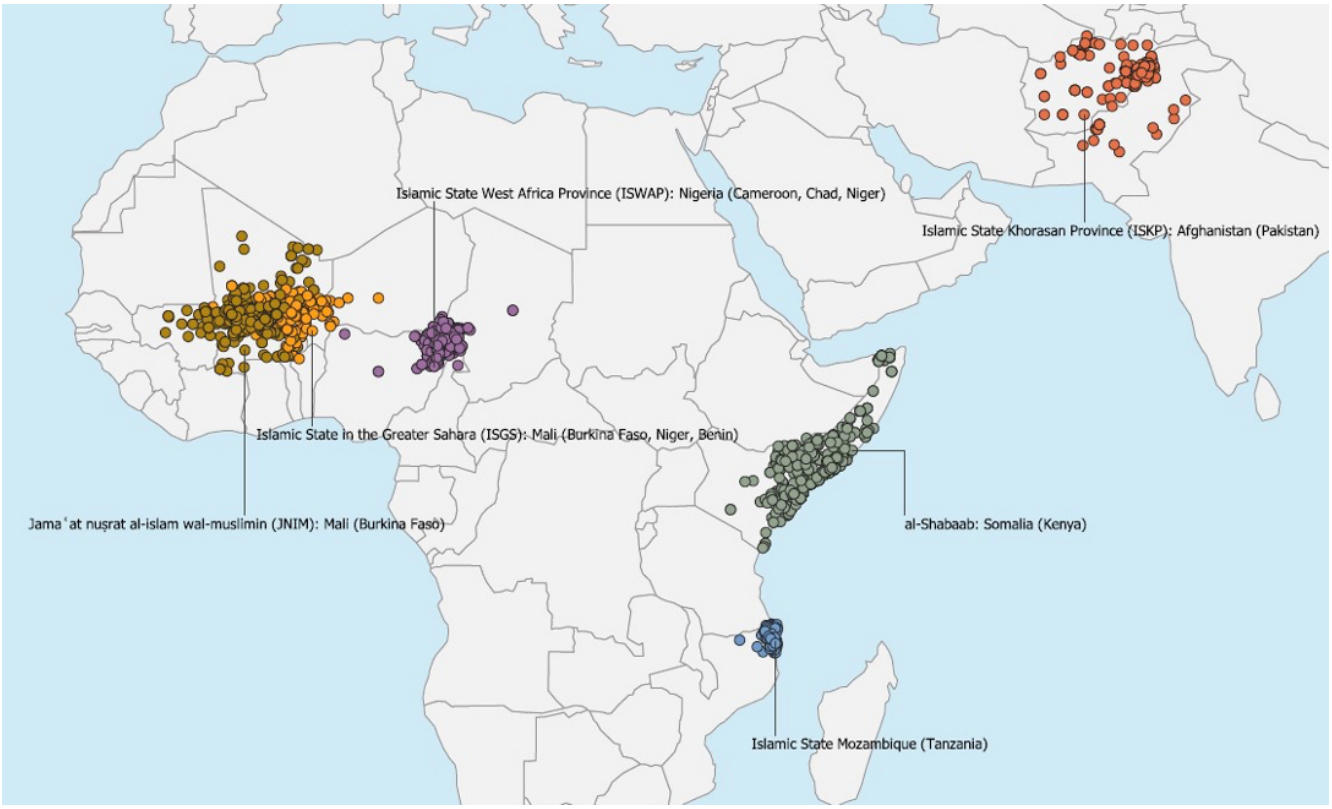
Some of the post-2018 IS-provinces are not included in the analysis due to a lack of activity. First, its Turkey Province was only publicly mentioned by IS in 2019.[43] However, the GED does not list any activity linked to IS in Turkey in the period 2018–2020. No events are further recorded during 2018–2020 for the remaining IS-provinces, namely in Saudi-Arabia (Najd Province and Hijaz Province) and in Bahrain.

Lastly, the IS-affiliated group in Sri Lanka, which carried out the so-called 'Easter bombings' in 2019, stands out from the other groups, as it was not formally designated as an IS province by the organization. Still, given the group's pledge of allegiance to IS and its acknowledgment by then IS-leader al-Baghdadi, it is included in the analysis.[44]

Transnational Operations

The following Figure 1 provides an overview of all al-Qaeda- and IS-affiliated rebel groups that, between 2018 and 2020, were involved in one of the following types of organized violence, within a single calendar year, in more than one country: a) state-based internal armed conflict; b) non-state conflict against another rebel group; c) one-sided violence against civilians. The colored dots correspond to individual events listed in the GED.

Figure 1: Transnationally Operating Affiliate Groups, 2018–2020



Note: Countries with second-highest and lower numbers of events are listed in brackets

Only six of the 20 affiliate groups active during the last three years operated in at least two countries within the same calendar year. Figure 2 in the Appendix illustrates that four other groups that once operated transnationally are by now confined to a single country or have become fully inactive. The latter is the case with regards to IS's Najd Province in Saudi-Arabia, which was active in 2015 and 2016 and, next to its operations in Saudi-Arabia, claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Kuwait in May 2015. Other previously transnationally operating groups are still active but confined to single countries. This applies to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which was active in various Northern and Western African countries, but is today confined to Algeria, after its southern factions merged with different Sahelian insurgent groups to form JNIM. IS's Libyan province had previously been able to extend its reach into neighboring Tunisia, where it orchestrated a string of attacks throughout 2016. However, in the following years, the group became constrained to Libya, where it has since faced increasing pressure from various military opponents. Similarly, HTS (which renounced its allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2016) is today only active in Syria's Idlib province after it ceased its previous operations on Lebanese soil in 2017. Among the transnationally operating groups displayed in Figure 1, Islamic State in Mozambique presents an exception insofar as its activities in Tanzania have consisted of a few isolated attacks, whereas the other transnationally operating groups have established a more consolidated presence in several countries, indicated through higher numbers of attacks.

Table 1: Non-transnationally Operating Affiliate Groups, 2018–2020

Group Name	Country	Years with Activity (based on UCDP)
AQAP	Yemen	Since 2009
AQIM	Algeria (previously also Burkina Faso, Chad, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Tunisia)	Since 2007 as 'AQIM'
Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front, today Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-HTS)	Syria (previously also Lebanon)	Since 2012
Hurras al-Din	Syria	Since 2018 (largely inactive today)
Islamic State Algeria	Algeria	2014–2020 (largely inactive today)
Islamic State Bangladesh	Bangladesh	2015–2020 (largely inactive today)
Islamic State Caucasus	Russia	Since 2014
Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP); DR Congo	DR Congo	Since 2019 (previously operating as 'Allied Democratic Forces' since 1996)
Islamic State Libya	Libya (previously also Tunisia)	Since 2014
Islamic State Philippines (East Asia Province)	Philippines	Since 2016
Islamic State Sinai	Egypt	Since 2014
Islamic State Somalia	Somalia	Since 2018
Islamic State Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	2019 (no activity after 2019 'Easter bombings')
Islamic State Yemen	Yemen	Since 2014

Notes: 1) While the Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) does not list transnational attacks for IS Sinai, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) lists three incidents (2015–2017) where IS Sinai fired rockets into Israeli territory. However, this would not meet the criterion of operational transnationalization, as these attacks were still carried out from Egyptian territory; 2) the GTD further attributes a suicide bombing in Saudi-Arabia, as well as the Charlie Hebdo attack (both in 2015) and the shooting at a US Naval Air Base in Pensacola (2019) to AQAP, as the group claimed responsibility. None of these attacks are, however, listed in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data, possibly due to a lack of direct links between attackers and AQAP at the time of coding (aside from the claim of responsibility); 3) The GTD lists Jabha East Africa (IS Somalia) as responsible for an attack against a mosque in Mwanza (Tanzania) in 2016, but there have been conflicting reports in this regard.[45] Similarly, the GTD attributes a stabbing incident outside the US Embassy in Nairobi to the group, but the event description is rather speculative ("however, sources also suspected that Al-Shabaab may have been involved in the attack").[46]

Transnational Recruitment

Hegghammer defines foreign fighters as combatants who are noncitizens of the state in which they are fighting and who lack kinship ties to the respective armed groups.[47] In a similar vein, Chu and Braithwaite take the issue of "proximity, whether social or geographic" into account, distinguishing foreign fighters from neighboring states from those traveling greater distances, and those sharing the same ethnicity as the local combatants from those who do not. [48] In the following analysis, foreign fighters are defined as combatants lacking the citizenship of the country in which they operate. To take the aspect of proximity into account, information on fighters from neighboring countries has been separated from information on combatants coming from third countries. While it would be desirable to also examine co-ethnicity more systematically, there are data limitation issues, as the information regarding the ethnic identity of foreign fighters varies greatly between groups. Still, comments have been added if indications for systematic recruitment of co-ethnic foreign fighters were available.

Before presenting the results, some caveats must be raised. To begin with, information about foreign fighters was gathered through a variety of sources (and in different languages), including online newspaper articles, policy reports, peer-reviewed studies, and in some cases, the jihadists' own propaganda outputs. This

Table 2: Affiliate Groups and Recruitment of Foreign Fighters

Group name	Numerical estimate of foreigners	Foreign fighters from non-neighboring countries	Foreign fighters from neighboring countries
Hurras al-Din [50]	In 2019, about half of the group's 1,500–2,000 fighters estimated to be foreigners	Fighters from Europe (Germany, France, UK), North America (US), North Africa and Gulf region (Saudi-Arabia), amongst others	Fighters from various neighboring countries, especially Jordan and Turkey
ISCAP (Democratic Republic of Congo/DRC) [51]	No recent numbers available	Fighters from East- and Southeast Africa (Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa)	Fighters from Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda
ISCAP (Mozambique) [52]	In April 2021, number of foreigners estimated "in the low hundreds" [53]	Small contingent of Ugandans; one case of a Somali fighter reported	Between May 2017–March 2018, 52 Tanzanians were prosecuted in Mozambique for links with the group; cases of South African fighters reported as well
IS Libya [54]	Hundreds of foreigners have fought with IS in Libya, but it is unclear how many remain active	Several dozen fighters from West- and East-African countries, Arabian Peninsula; small contingents from Middle East (Iraq, Palestine), and other regions (US, Europe, South Asia)	Fighters from all neighboring countries documented; highest number from Tunisia
ISKP [55]	In May 2021, Afghan government reported holding 408 foreign ISKP fighters; unclear how many are currently active and/or alive	12 detained Kyrgyz fighters and a total of 30 detained fighters from Jordan, Indonesia, Russia, India, Turkey, Bangladesh and the Maldives	According to Afghan authorities, vast majority (173 fighters) stemmed from Pakistan, but there were also 70 fighters from other neighboring countries (China, Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)
IS Philippines [56]	More than 100 foreigners reportedly joined the group even after the Marawi battle in 2017	Both from wider Southeast Asia (primarily Indonesia and Malaysia) and beyond (Arabian Peninsula, Europe, North Africa, Middle East, South Asia)	
Al-Shabaab [57]	No recent numbers available	Tanzanians make up second-largest contingent of foreigners, followed by Ugandans; foreign fighters predominantly ethnic Somalis; strong decrease of Western and Arab foreign fighters (both in number and influence) after internal power struggles (2011–13)	Since at least mid-2000s, hundreds of Kenyans (predominantly ethnic Somali) have joined the group; substantial presence also of Ethiopians (predominantly Ethiopian Somalis, but also Oromo)
AQAP [58]	In 2017, group declared to only have had five non-Yemeni fighters, for entire time frame 2012–2017	Some cases of Western foreign fighters who received training in the past, but not recently	Several Saudis among founding members, but decrease in number and influence over time
AQIM (Algeria) [59]	Unclear how many (if any) foreigners remain among Algeria-based group, after southern factions merged into JNIM		
Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front, today Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-HTS) [60]	Number and influence of foreign fighters decreased strongly after split from al-Qaeda in 2016; they are more present within HTS-allied Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) and other HTS-allied but formally independent factions		

Table 2 [continued]: Affiliate Groups and Recruitment of Foreign Fighters

Group name	Numerical estimate of foreigners	Foreign fighters from non-neighboring countries	Foreign fighters from neighboring countries
IS Yemen [61]	Unclear, but overall low number	Reports of two (unspecified) Africans among deceased fighters in 2018	Group was formerly led by a Saudi
IS Algeria [62]	Indications of two (unspecified) foreigners killed in a 2015 raid		
IS Bangladesh [63]	Key roles played by dual citizens Tamim Chowdhury (Bangladeshi-Canadian) and Saifullah Okazaki (Bangladeshi-Japanese), but no accounts of foreign fighters		
IS Caucasus [64]	No concrete numbers available	One case of a deceased Kyrgyz fighter reported	
ISGS [65]	No concrete numbers available	Several high-ranking fighters from Western Sahara, including recently killed Abou Walid al-Sahrawi	Main recruitment among ethnic Fulani in 'three-border region' (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), which is also where ISGS itself operates
IS Sinai [66]	Unclear, if any	Earlier, unconfirmed reports about a Tunisian fighter and a Western-looking foreign fighter in a 2015 propaganda video	Earlier, unconfirmed reports about a Sudanese fighter
IS Somalia [67]	No concrete numbers available	Small number of Canadian and US fighters of Somali origin; one case of an Egyptian fighter documented	Fighters from Djibouti, Ethiopia (predominantly from Ogaden region) and Kenya; strong ethnic (Somali) component
IS Sri Lanka [68]	No reports of foreigners among group that carried out the 2019 attacks		
ISWAP [69]	No concrete numbers available	Reports of a few dozen Senegalese fighters	Group predominantly recruits in Nigeria and, to a smaller degree, other countries in which it operates (Cameroon, Chad, Niger)
JNIM [70]	No concrete numbers available		Cross-border recruitment with strong ethnic component (Katiba Macina focuses on recruiting among ethnic Fulani, similar to ISGS; remnants of al-Mourabitoun and AQIM's Sahara-based faction traditionally with stronger ethnic Arab influence, from Algeria and Mauritania)

approach allows the researcher to collect more detailed information than could be obtained through, for instance, a systematic keyword search through a single search engine for all groups. On the other hand, the comparability across groups is limited due to the differing depth and breadth of the consulted sources. It is further important to note that the impact of, for instance, a dozen foreign fighters on a group is likely to depend on the *overall* group size. However, determining the group size of each jihadist affiliate group would go beyond the scope of this article.

In some cases, the information on foreign fighters has been traced back to government statements about detained and prosecuted foreigners. There is a risk that governments exaggerate the true number of foreign fighters for political reasons. For instance, in Yemen, President Hadi claimed in 2014 that 70% of AQAP's fighters were foreigners, a statement clearly at odds with both the group's own claims and with scholarly findings.[49] To mitigate the risk of such misinformation, information provided by government-related sources (including UN Security Council reports) has been reported only in a few cases, where it was in line with the information provided by other sources. Overall, the following overview is an explorative attempt to identify the larger global patterns in foreign fighter recruitment across jihadist affiliate groups, but it does not claim to be exhaustive with regards to each group. To accomplish the latter, a more systematic and fine-grained database on the wider subject of foreign fighters would greatly benefit future research.

Similar as with regards to their operational focus, the extent of transnational recruitment of jihadist affiliate groups varies substantially. Overall, the number of groups that recruit larger numbers of fighters from non-neighboring countries is limited. Rather, the bulk of contemporary foreign fighter flows appears to occur between neighboring countries, often along ethnic lines, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Strictly speaking, these foreign fighters would not meet the original definition proposed by Hegghammer, as they share ethnic links to the warring factions. There is further a range of groups that has employed few, or seemingly no foreign fighters at all. Some of these groups remain significant security threats, such as IS's Sinai Province, or AQAP in Yemen, whereas others have become largely inactive. Therefore, while foreign fighters are sometimes seen as an inherent feature of transnational jihadist groups, these findings indicate that this does not apply to all groups at a comparable degree.

Discussion

While jihadist affiliate groups are integrated into al-Qaeda and IS as globally operating organizations, the degree to which these affiliate groups have themselves transnationalized their operations and recruitment varies substantially. Many of these groups are strongly "regional" phenomena, both with regards to their operations and their recruitment patterns: while the majority of affiliate groups has only been active in a single country, those that have operated transnationally carried out the vast majority of attacks in neighboring countries. A similar pattern can be observed with regards to foreign fighter flows, which to a large extent occur between neighboring countries.

What does this mean for the prospects of conflict resolution? Governments seeking to explore the option of entering peace negotiations with transnationally operating jihadist affiliate groups will have to coordinate such attempts with neighboring governments. For instance, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) agreements are unlikely to last, if militants are able to maintain hidden bases across borders. While in some cases, as for instance the G5 Sahel, neighboring states have already worked together to curb jihadist cross-border activities, other neighboring states have been strategic rivals, as in the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has played into the hands of the jihadists. Moreover, cooperation is also necessary to limit the flow of foreign fighters. As outlined previously, the presence of substantial numbers of foreign fighters is likely to hamper the prospects for conflict resolution attempts. Therefore, if neighboring states improve collaboration on intelligence sharing and border security, this may help to limit foreign fighter flows and thus lay the groundwork for future negotiations.

Conclusion

The present study has zoomed in on transnational operations and recruitment as two dimensions of transnationalization that are both relevant to assess affiliate groups' potential availability for negotiations. The results illustrate substantial variation among al-Qaeda's and IS's affiliate groups along both factors. Governments should therefore carefully evaluate these (and other) dimensions of transnationalization, instead of excluding beforehand the option of negotiations due to the rebels' transnational claims and their organizational affiliation alone.

Still, serious obstacles remain. On the one hand, even affiliate groups that operate and recruit locally can be highly committed to the transnational jihadist cause and therefore reject negotiations. On the other hand, governments ought to be willing to at least consider negotiating with the jihadists. Here, both audience costs vis-à-vis the electorate but also practical obstacles emanating from the terror-listing of affiliate groups constitute major hurdles. Moreover, even if jihadists signal willingness to negotiate, they may formulate too-far-ranging demands.

The present study provides different entry points for future research. An important question concerns the underlying motivations of affiliate groups for their operational or recruitment-related transnationalization (or the lack thereof). For instance, in Yemen, both IS and AQAP have only few foreign fighters in their ranks. Yet, while IS has actively sought to change this, AQAP has seen foreigners more as a liability than an asset.[71] Similarly, while some affiliate groups seek territorial, cross-border expansion, others may prefer to remain within a state's borders. Future research should examine what factors determine such choices by affiliate groups. Another important question is related to the interaction between different dimensions of transnationalization. For instance, does a growth in foreign fighter recruitment precede operational transnationalization, or is it, on the contrary, a consequence of the latter? Overall, more research on these questions is needed, as transnationalization processes continue even after IS's loss of its caliphate in 2019. Most recently, in 2021, the DRC-based faction of ISCAP claimed its first attacks in Uganda since the group's transformation into an IS-affiliate.[72]

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Appendix

Figure 2: Transnationally Operating Jihadist Affiliate Groups, 2001–2020

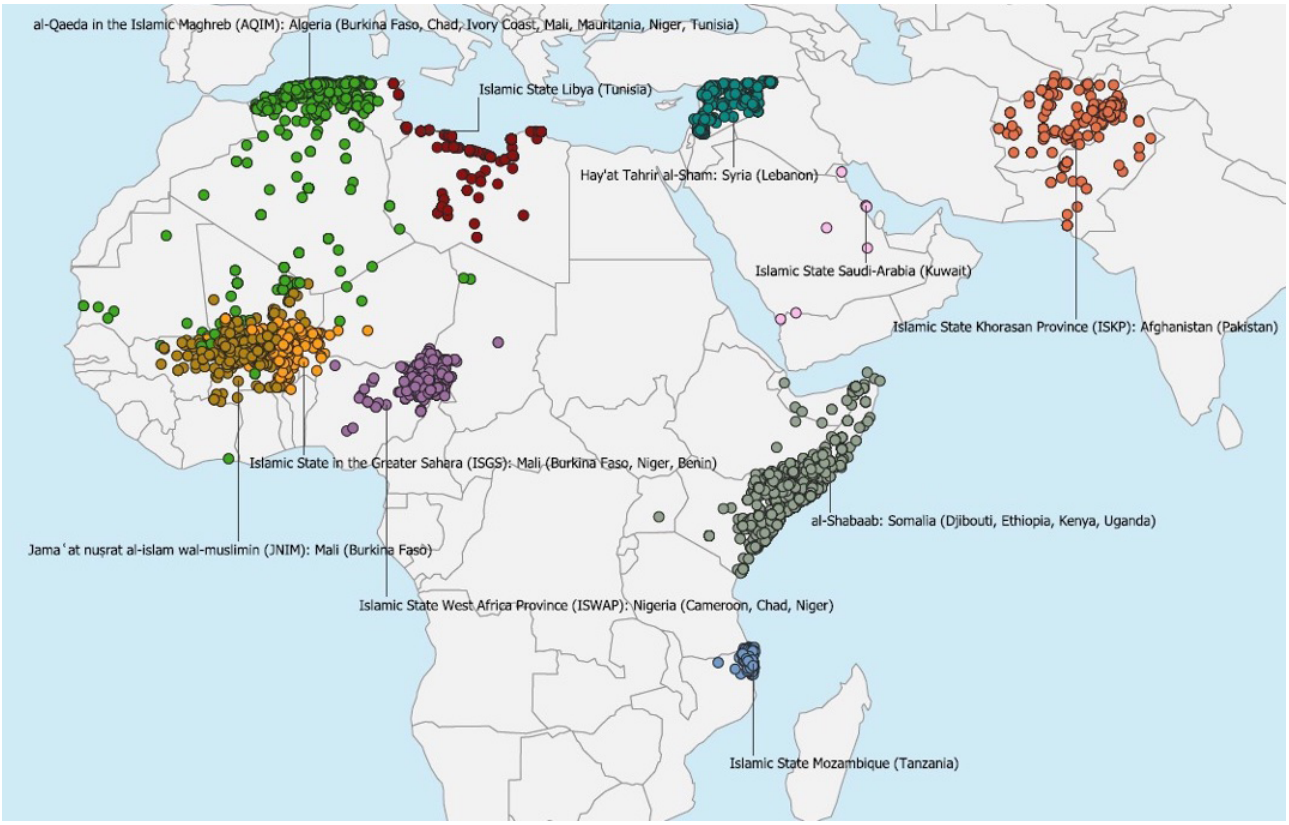

Table 3: Transnationally Operating Jihadist Affiliate Groups, 2001–2020

Group Name	Countries with Activity	Years with Transnational Activity
Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)	Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Tunisia	2009–2017
Al-Shabaab	Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda	Since 2010
Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front, today Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-HTS)	Syria, Lebanon	2013–2017
Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)	Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger	Since 2014
Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)	Afghanistan, Pakistan	Since 2015
Islamic State Saudi-Arabia (Najd Province)	Saudi-Arabia, Kuwait	2015
Islamic State Libya	Libya, Tunisia	Only in 2016, otherwise limited to Libya
Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)	Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso	Since 2017
JNIM	Mali, Burkina Faso	Since 2017
Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP); Mozambique	Mozambique, Tanzania	Since 2020

Note: HTS broke away from al-Qaeda in 2016; IS's attack in Kuwait in May 2015 was claimed by its Saudi-Arabia-based Najd Province (https://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/07/kuwait-isis-terrorism-wilayat-najd/).

How Religious Violence Ends

by Mark Juergensmeyer

Abstract

This study of how three religion-related militant movements came to an end—ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Moros in Mindanao in the Philippines, and Khalistan in India's Punjab—reveals that such movements are most decisively destroyed from within. External military force can limit and weaken a movement and provide the coup de grace that destroys it, but most movements have been dead before they were destroyed. Conversations with former activists in the three movements studied reveal that there are several factors for their implosion: infighting, a loss of faith in the goals and ideology of a movement, and the opportunities for nonviolent alternatives. Authorities resisting a violent movement can hasten the end by providing more options to violent struggle.

Keywords: Terrorism, ISIS, Khalistan, Moros, Infighting, Religion

In my conversation with the former jihadi militant, Muhammad, he seemed even angrier about the failed leadership of the ISIS and al-Qaeda movements than he was about the combined Iraqi, Syrian, Kurdish and United States forces that were united against them. I was able to talk with him in a prison in northern Iraq shortly after the final destruction of the territorial control of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL).[1]

"It was the leadership," Muhammad groused, "that let the movement down." Not only did it discredit the organization, he felt, it disrespected the grand image of the Caliphate and the ISIS struggle for which he thought there was a divine mandate. In his mind the movement was dead before it was demolished.

Some of the same feelings were expressed by former militants in the Khalistan movement, the uprising of young rural Sikhs in India's Punjab throughout the 1980s that finally came to an end in the early 1990s. Many years later, I was able to talk with both leaders and foot soldiers in the movement about their involvement and how it ended.

Though the leaders of the Khalistan groups with whom I spoke, including Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, Sohan Singh, Simranjit Singh Mann, and Narinder Singh, were hesitant to blame themselves or their fellow leaders, they admitted that internal divisions and loss of vision contributed to the movement's downfall.[2] Their former followers with whom I spoke, the militants in the movement, were not as hesitant. It was clear to them that the leaders had let them down and the movement had collapsed from within.

In Mindanao, the southern island of the Philippines, I talked with many of the old Muslim militants who were part of the Moro separatist movement that has largely ended after 2018.[3] They also blamed the schisms in the movement for part of their ineffectiveness. They admitted that because there was no single central organization, the infighting and divergent tactics of the rebel groups tore the movement apart. What brought many of these groups together, however, was the promise of a better future beyond the fighting, an awareness of possibilities of success outside the revolutionary strategies that they had previously adopted. This was fulfilled with the signing of the peace agreement with the Philippine government in 2018.

In my recent study of how these three formerly violent political movements related to religion have ended—ISIS, the Khalistan movement, and the Moro movement in the Philippines—there is no single explanation regarding how violent movements such as these come to an end. Nor have any of these completely ended; small factions continue to soldier on. But the main core of militants has resolved itself to the fact that their struggle is not successful, at least for now. What I have tried to do is get inside the worldview of the members of the movements to see how they have perceived their ending, and why.

This approach may complement other studies of how such movements terminate. One of the most comprehensive is Audrey Kurth Cronin's How Terrorism Ends.[4] In this book, Cronin surveys dozens of case studies and

organizes them into six ways in which movements end, through the decapitation of the leaders, negotiation, achieving their objective, imploding, repression, and reorientation to nonviolent activities. Another useful study is Isak Svensson's Ending Holy Wars: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars. In his book Svensson probes the religious factor in rebel movements and analyzes the way that it complicates and sometimes helps the process of negotiated settlement.[5]

These and other books provide helpful distinctions, though my approach is somewhat different. I want to understand how the collapse of movements is perceived from the perspective of those who are engaged in them, and to ask how the image of grand warfare that animates them is eventually discarded, or distanced from their current realities.

My approach has been to read the writings of the movements and engage in conversations with their supporters. It is an effort that Mona Kanwal Sheikh and I have called "epistemic worldview analysis," which is described more fully in the book Entering Religious Minds: The Social Study of Worldviews, which we have jointly edited in and in which we have essays explaining this approach.[6]

What I have found with regard to the ending of the three movements that are the subject of my recent study is that there are a multiplicity of factors both internal and external to the movements. Often, however, the internal dynamics of a movement has made the critical difference. In the three cases observed in this article, the attempts to destroy the movements solely with military means often backfired when the movements were strong and the leaders saw the attempts to suppress them as a challenge, or as an acceptance of their imagined notion of a grand and divinely ordained cosmic war. But when the movements were internally depressed, weakened, or susceptible to changing their tactics, the fight was often terminated from within, and efforts at military repression from outside could provide only a coup de grace. From the examples I have just mentioned, we can identify three factors in a movement turning away from violence: a loss of faith in the movement's vision, fractures in the communal consensus of the organization, and the awareness of alternative opportunities that provide new hope.[7]

Loss of Faith

In a refugee camp in northern Iraq, I talked with a wife of a former ISIS militant who openly displayed her disdain toward the movement and what it had done to her husband.[8] She claimed that it had ruined her family's life. She did not know where her husband was, whether he was dead or alive, and—if alive—whether he was awaiting trial or even execution. It was all a maddening mystery to her. She said she had once believed in the Caliphate, but now it seemed like an empty hoax.

Though I found that not all former fighters and their supporters felt this way, I noticed that many did. But when did their faith in the Caliphate and its notion of a grand war begin to erode? I put this question to the wife of the former militant and, at first, she did not give an answer. When pressed, she muttered, "when things fell apart."

This answer was consistent with other accounts that I heard from former ISIS supporters, and from reports from other scholars and journalists who have interviewed them. When things were going well, when the Caliphate was expanding and the stolen resources from the region were sufficient to provide for the necessities in life, it was easy to believe in the prophetic future of a golden era that would be ushered in after this period of turmoil. But later, as there was turmoil within the movement and when it seemed to be falling apart, it all seemed like a cruel joke.

In the Khalistan movement in India, several of the ex-militants with whom I spoke said that the movement began to collapse when it no longer had a clear purpose.[9] There was a moment, they said, when their organizations were fighting for Khalistan and for the dignity of Sikhs as a community. But later they saw the movement degenerate into infighting and thuggery. Though research by three social scientists at Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar cast doubt on how much the ordinary youths in the moment were ever motivated by the high ideals that the leaders espoused, there is no question that some at least gave lip service to that higher vision.[10] For them the excitement of being part of a thrilling battle was enhanced by the sense that they were

in a war for their faith, fighting for all that was right and sacred, a war propelled by divine forces. As the movement slid into drug dealing and petty theft, it was hard to maintain that lofty image.

In the Philippines, the evolution of Abu Sayyaf is further testimony to the dissolution of a movement's ideals. One of the founders of the movement, Abdurajik Abubakar Janjalani, had been a teacher of Islamic theology and had been involved in the mujahidin militia in Afghanistan.[11] One of the reasons that he broke from the Moro National Liberation Front was the issue of religion. He thought that the MNLF had abandoned its lofty religious ideals and was pandering to political expediency in negotiations with the Philippine government. He wanted his movement to be purer in its intentions, and to engage in jihad with a spiritual as well as political purpose. Over time, however, Abu Sayyaf became identified with drug dealing and taking hostages for profit. In proclaiming itself affiliated with the Islamic State it attempted to regain its religious credibility, though other Muslim activists with whom I talked in Mindanao regarded it as window dressing for what had essentially become a criminal gang.

In each of these cases the character of the movement changed when the vision was abandoned. Even though the fighting continued, as it did in the case of Khalistan and Abu Sayyaf's branch of the Moro movement, there was a change in the way that the movement was seen by its members. One of the foot soldiers in the Khalistan movement told me that after a while he did not know why they were fighting, except to sustain themselves through stolen resources.[12] He indicated that he would have left the militant Sikh movement earlier than he did, but he did not know how to do so. He was afraid that the police would not trust him and he would be finished off in a "police encounter," the term often used for extrajudicial police killings. Or, if he showed weakness and an eagerness to leave, he feared that members of the movement would turn on him and kill him in an effort to prevent any information about the movement's location and activities from leaking out. Despite these fears, many supporters at the margins of the movement were able to simply fade into the background as it declined. Weary of terror and war, fringe members began to drop off.

Fractures in Communal Consensus

At the same time that they lost faith in the purpose of the movement, many militants were disillusioned by infighting within their organization. Muhammad told me about a disagreement that he had with a fellow jihadi over strategy, a fight that turned violent.[13] Muhammad pulled up his shirt to show me the scar where he had been stabbed in that encounter. Increasingly, it had appeared to him that they were fighting as much among themselves as they were against their perceived enemies.

The ISIS movement remained intact even though there was fighting within the ranks. In the case of the Khalistan and Moro movements, however, the infighting led to multiplying schisms. When I interviewed the old Khalistan leader, Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, he expressed frustration that his attempt to unite all of the different rebel movements under the umbrella of a single organization was not successful.[14] Even Zaffarwal's own group, the Khalistan Commando Force, broke into several quarreling camps.

Sometimes the disputes between these splinter movements could turn deadly. In the Khalistan movement, the numbers of Sikhs killed by Sikh militants increased dramatically during those years that the movement was most active.[15] Infighting may have led indirectly to the military invasion that resulted in the death of one of the spiritual leaders of the Sikh uprising, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. A former member of the inner circle of the movement was bribed by a rival faction to kill Bhindranwale, or failing that, to do in his right-hand man, Surinder Singh Sodhi, a young admirer of Bhindranwale whom the leader called "my brother."[16] The killers gunned down Sodhi in a tea stall, after which Bhindranwale lashed out at his rivals for what he described as "chopping my right hand."[17] In revenge for the killing his henchmen murdered several key personnel in the rival movement, thus prompting the Indian army to step up its plans to invade the Golden Temple, which took place soon after. This momentous invasion, Operation Blue Star, led to a litany of violence: the death of Bhindranwale, the subsequent assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the killing of thousands of Sikhs in reprisal, and a new lease on life for the Sikh uprising following those attacks.

In the Moro movement, the emergence of a splinter group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, was aimed in part at discrediting the negotiating tactics of the main movement in central Mindanao, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Butch Malang, the commander of the MILF forces, told me that although some of his own fighters had joined the breakaway movement, the lives of the MILF fighters were put in jeopardy by the splinter group's actions.[18] Many of Malang's group felt that their lives were threatened as much by BIFF as by the Philippine government forces.

Part of the reason for the divisions within the Moro movement was that there was never a centralized command, nor a single leader. In the case of the Khalistan movement, the figure of Bhindranwale provided something of a unifying image of leadership for the movement, despite the rival organizations that emerged in the Sikh resistance. However, after Bhindranwale was killed in Operation Blue Star in 1984, the movement failed to find another charismatic figure to unite it. Later in the 1980s, many of the organizations in the movement, including the Khalistan Commando Force and the Sikh Students Federation, broke up into splinter organizations that vied with each other for attention and support. In the case of ISIS, the figure of the Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, provided the central leadership that largely united the movement. But the organizational structure was generally decentralized, and on the local level there were the fierce struggles for leadership and strident infighting which Muhammad found so disheartening.

Though Muhammad clung to the idea of a Caliph as a righteous ruler worth fighting for, he seemed uncertain about whether al-Baghdadi was a sufficiently strong leader to deserve that title. According to the Islamic studies scholar Ebrahim Moosa, a Caliph can lose his divine mandate when he is regarded as not performing as a Caliph should.[19] It is not clear whether this is the way that many of the ISIS fighters viewed al-Baghdadi, especially during the last days the movement exercised territorial control, but Muhammad was clear in his blame of the movement's leadership without specifying whom he had in mind.

Faith in a movement can erode when its leader is seen as losing legitimacy. It could be through demonstrations of their incompetence, greed, or inconsistencies. In the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, it is likely that the leader Muhammed Omar lost support from some of his followers when it was revealed that he was living in relative luxury in palatial quarters funded in part by Osama bin Laden. Posthumous respect for bin Laden was likely to have diminished when it was revealed that a stash of pornographic videotapes was found in his quarters when the hideout was invaded by American soldiers in the attack that led to bin Laden's death.

The death of a leader does not necessarily lead to a loss of regard for his authority. In the case of the Palestinian resistance in Israel, the Israeli missile attack that destroyed Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was not the occasion for his image to lose credibility or the movement to erode. Just the opposite. He was immediately proclaimed a martyr, and pictures of the fallen leader were plastered throughout the region. The elections following his death led to overwhelming support for Hamas and the establishment of Hamas' control in Gaza. In the case of ISIS, the death of al-Baghdadi in 2019 during an American military raid on his quarters in the Idlib region of Syria did not signal the end of the Caliphate, or a lack of respect for the fallen leader's image. For one thing, he committed suicide as enemy troops encircled him, thereby dying through self-martyrdom—an appropriate end for a jihadi leader. Moreover, his successor was quickly named, and the ideas of a Caliphate and an Islamic State endured. As in the case of Hamas, movements can sometimes become stronger after a charismatic leader is killed and the fallen leader is treated as a martyr. Although Bhindranwale's movement splintered organizationally, the number of young people who volunteered to join the movement increased after his death in 1984. They were in part inspired by his legendary martyrdom.

When a movement is already weak and its authority is challenged, the killing of a leader can help to hasten a movement's demise. This may be what has happened with Abu Sayyaf and the Maute brothers' gang after their leaders were killed in the Marawi siege in Mindanao in 2017. However, in this case their groups were already weakened and the leaders' authority questioned as the prospects for the groups' success diminished in the fighting.

In all three of the cases mentioned, the infighting and loss of esprit de corps within the movement was a major factor for their undoing. When an activist movement splits and turns on itself, the paranoia of the movement

turns inward. The demonization applied to external enemies is turned inward toward perceived heretics, those suspected of treason within their own ranks. The group would be literally killing itself. Thus, as one old militant said to me, such movements were already "walking dead."

New Hope

There is another powerful internal factor contributing to the transformation of a formerly violent movement: hope. The movement for an autonomous Muslim Mindanao provides an interesting case in this regard. When I asked Naguib Sinarimbo, an ex-Moro militant, to trace the trajectory of his rise within the movement, his full embrace of the image of cosmic war animated by religion and aimed at an intractable enemy, and later his engagement in negotiations for peace with the very enemy that he would earlier have willingly killed, I wanted to know what happened. What was the critical moment in which his views changed?

He said that it was when he met a Philippine general, Victor Corpus, who listened to him. The general had himself been a militant at one time, a soldier in the Communist insurrection, who had surrendered and later joined the Philippine army, rising to a high military rank. Therefore he understood what it was like to have been part of an insurrection and then feel the pain of abandoning it. He seemed genuinely concerned about the plight of the Moro people, Naguib told me, and he wanted to help them find a way out that would give them the dignity which they sought and the peace that the government demanded. That moment came to Naguib as an epiphany, he said. Before that he did not know that it was possible to see the enemy in such human terms.[20]

It was not just this attitude of respect, he said, it was the larger program that the general and his staff outlined for the Moro people. Naguib was convinced that the agreement that they negotiated really did fulfill the demands that the Moro movement was making, and provided the region with a modicum of independence, economic support, and respect.

Naguib was expressing a vital part of the peace process that leads to an end of conflict. This is when combatants can see beyond war and imagine opportunities for themselves after the fighting is over. Fighting no longer appears desirable or necessary. In the Palestinian movement, the suicide bombings attributed to the Hamas movement declined during times when negotiated peace settlements seemed possible and economic conditions in Gaza and the West Bank improved. They also declined when Hamas was given a political role and its followers perceived that they had a voice in public life. When they felt that their voice was not being listened to, however, either their own followers or a schismatic group would turn to violence again, and the cycle of war would return. In the case of Khalistan, it is noteworthy that some of the old Khalistan leaders, including Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, Jagjit Singh Chohan, and Simranjit Singh Mann, turned to electoral politics in the years after the demise of the movement. They were able to see a future for themselves in public life.

In Mindanao, leaders like Naguib Sinarimbo were also planning to play roles in electoral politics. They were getting ready for the next stage of the movement, the implementation of Bangsamoro as a political entity. This meant that the leaders and fighters in an armed struggle that had lasted many years had to learn to adjust to peace. They had to treat the government like an ally rather than a foe, and learn the arts of compromise and negotiation that all democratic politicians have to adopt.

This was not an easy task. As Naguib told me, many of his colleagues were skeptical. Some left the movement in dismay over what they regarded as capitulation. Many who were wavering needed reassurances and support. One of the reasons why the transition was so difficult was that it required longtime militants to adopt a radically new view of the world. They were being asked to abandon the vision of cosmic war—the existential struggle between good and evil—that had animated much of their fighting, and that made mortal enemies out of those with whom they differed, including the government and other branches of the wider movement. Butch Malang admitted that was a daunting assignment. It took him a year, he said, to adjust to the new reality, and he did so eventually only with grave misgivings.

"Some of our fighters know only how to fight," he said, somewhat sadly.[18] In his case, however, the old commander eventually took on a new role of facilitator in one of the major elements of the peace process, the

cessation of hostilities. New circumstances—the hope of a settlement—can make veterans look differently at a struggle, and even allow them to imagine the possibilities of reconciliation and peace. Moreover, it helps when the government gives roles to their old adversaries and actively promotes a rehabilitation program for former militants—programs that provide networks of social support and training for new jobs outside the (para-) military arena. These are attempts to return combatants to ordinary society, to allow them to see a role for themselves beyond the armed struggle.

Religion has played a role in the transition from conflict to peace, and in Mindanao it was once a destructive one, buttressing the bellicose jihadi worldview. But religion has also been employed in positive ways in recent years. Since the MILF movement influences all of the mosques in the area, Sinarimbo told me, it has given the imams in each district instructions on what to include in their sermons about the peace process. The imams have encouraged the faithful to embrace the plan and not reject it as the BIFF and Abu Sayyaf urged them to do. Hence the most profound change within the movement has been a shift in attitude away from the divisions of the past and toward a different role within society—one that no longer requires militancy to achieve social change.

In the Punjab, an old Khalistan activist, Gurtej Singh, told me "all we wanted was respect."[21] Gurtej Singh had been a confidant of the martyred leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, and insisted that Bhindranwale was never in favor of Khalistan, a politically separate state for Sikhs. All he wanted for the Sikh community, Gurtej Singh said, was the honor that they were due as the majority community in the Punjab linguistic region, the post-1966 Punjab State in India. He said that the Sikh insurgents were never a terrorist organization, but a movement for Sikh pride. He added that it was a response to the humiliation they felt when Sikhs—particularly those in the dominant rural caste, the Jats—were treated as second-class citizens in their own territory, robbed of their water rights and mistreated by the police.

Whether or not Gurtej Singh's analysis was correct, in the period since the cessation of hostilities in the Punjab, the Indian government has tried to more visibly show respect to the Sikh community and to give them greater cultural recognition. Sikh shrines have been improved and recently an enormous government grant provided for a new freeway access point and multilevel parking structure adjacent to the Golden Temple. An elegant marble plaza with fountains and statuary was constructed in the approach to the Sikhs' most sacred shrine. In towns across the Punjab, statues have been erected in memorial of historical Sikh figures, such as Bhagat Singh, who was an early nationalist leader in the struggle against the British. Some of the more recent martyrs—the young men killed in the Khalistan uprising—have been memorialized with tacit governmental approval in such villages as Sultanwind, where one of the most prominent young men in the village became the leader of the Khalistan Commando Force and swallowed a cyanide tablet to kill himself when he was captured by the police. Today, a school library has been named in his honor.

In Iraq and Syria, it remains to be seen how Sunni Arab culture and leadership will be revered in a post-ISIS society. Many of the former supporters of ISIS with whom I talked in refugee camps told me that in Iraq the Shi'a treat Sunni "like dirt".[23] One of the former jihadi militants with whom I spoke in prison said that he did not welcome the violence of al-Qaeda and ISIS but that it was necessary. Since the Shi'a government is violent, he said, they had to respond in kind. In his mind, the respect that he craved was not yet forthcoming from the Shi'a-dominated Iraqi government.

In this case, military liberation from ISIS occupation was only part of the process of reintegration of the Arab Sunni population into the political life of those countries, and it was an incomplete one at that. The military destruction of ISIS territorial control was likely the final coup de grace for an organization that had essentially imploded from within. What followed was not so much peace as largely the absence of killing, although sporadic attacks have continued for years afterward. Peace, in the sense of economic renewal and full acceptance of Sunni Arabs into the political process of Iraq and Syria, is yet to come. Failing that, the spirit of war will continue and the conditions will be ripe for a revival of militant encounters in the future.

This article has focused on only three cases, but these suggest that often military and police suppression can go only so far in terminating a rebellion and that heavy-handed tactics alone can sometimes make matters worse.

Just as effective is a measure of hope: providing possibilities for new beginnings for a movement's followers where grievances are addressed and new paths for individuals and groups are opened. For war to end, old militants must be able to see a world after war and a life beyond the struggle.

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Notes

[1] Conversation with Muhammad (a pseudonym), jihadi fighter in prison in northern Iraq, March 13, 2019. ISIS is the acronym for "the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," although the Arabic word for Syria that is used, *sham,* refers not only to Syria but to the Arab Sunni Muslim–dominated regions that include Syria, Western Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and pre-1948 Israel, the region that the French called "the Levant," hence the alternative acronym, ISIL. These informal conversations were not formal interviews, and I use pseudonyms to mask the identities of most of those with whom I spoke. My research was supported in part by the Resolving Jihadist Conflicts Project at Uppsala University, for which I am very grateful.

[2] Author's conversation with Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, Dhariwal, January 19, 2017; Sohan Singh, Mohali, August 4, 1996; Simranjit Singh Mann, Chandigarh, August 3, 1996; Narinder Singh, Chandigarh, August 4, 1996; and others. I have used the real names of public figures, who have approved my use of their comments for publication.

[3] Author's conversation with Naguib Sinarimbo, Cotabato City, Mindanao, Philippines, May 2, 2018; Butch Malang, Cotabato City, August 24, 2016, and others.

[4] Audrey Kurth Cronin, How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

[5] Isak Svensson, Ending Holy Wars: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars. Brisbane Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2013.

[6] Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Mark Juergensmeyer (Eds.), *Entering Religious Minds: The Social Study of Worldviews.* London: Routledge, 2019.

[7] The following analysis is based on a section of my book, *When God Stops Fighting: How Religious Violence Ends*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022, chap 5. The choice of the three case studies and the way that the conversations were held are discussed in that book.

[8] Conversation with Hadiya (a pseudonym) Hasan Sham Refugee Camp, Kurdistan, Iraq. February 12, 2017.

[9] Zaffarwal, Sohan Singh, Mann, Narinder Singh, op. cit.

[10] Harish K. Puri, Paramjit Singh Judge, and Jagrup Singh Sekhon. *Terrorism in Punjab: Understanding Grassroots Reality*. Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1999.

[11] See Bob East, *The Neo Abu Sayyaf: Criminality in the Sulu Archipelago of the Republic of the Philippines.* London: Nielsen UK, 2016.

[12] Conversation with Surjit Singh (a pseudonym), Sultanwind, August 18, 2017. Arrangements and translation assistance by Prof. Jagrup Singh Sekhon.

[13] Muhammad, op. cit. I have no way of certifying the veracity of this story or the truthfulness of these statements, but they do show a disaffection with the ISIS organization and leadership. As I mention in my book, *When God Stops Fighting,* the warden told me he had isolated Muhammad from other prisoners since he was seen as hostile to the ISIS organization.

[14] Zaffarwal, op. cit.

[15] According to figures supplied by the Home Ministry of the Government of India, initially the number of Sikhs killed by Sikh militants in the early 1980s was in the dozens. By 1988, it had swelled to over a thousand. Data reported in the *Times of India,* February 8, 1992, p. 15.

[16] Quoted in Shekhar Gupta, "Temple Intrigue," *India Today,* May 15, 1984, p. 56.

[17] Gupta, "Temple Intrigue," p. 57.

[18] Malang, op. cit.

[19] Ebrahim Moosa, "Overlapping Political Theologies: ISIS and Versions of Sunni Orthodoxy." Paper presented at the working group of the project on "Resolving Jihadist Conflicts," Uppsala, Sweden, September 7, 2016.

[20] Sinarimbo, op. cit.

[21] Malang, op. cit.

[22] Conversation with Gurtej Singh, Chandigarh, January 17, 2017.

[23] Conversation with Ahmad (a pseudonym), Hasan Sham Refugee Camp, Kurdistan, Iraq, March 10, 2019.

Preventing Harm: Refutation of Militant Jihad in "Revisionist Literature"

by Saer El-Jaichi and Joshua A. Sabih

Abstract

This article showcases why ideology, and more specifically religion, is pertinent to the study of deradicalization by examining the influential revisionist efforts of two former advocates of Salafi-Jihadism, Dr. Fadl [alias for Sayyed Imam al-Sharif] in Egypt in 2007 and Abu Hafs in Morocco in 2009. With recourse to both the revisionist ideologues' argumentation and primary documents, we show that these efforts are informed by an Islamic legal perspective, which is undergirded by an interpretive approach constructed around the intent and higher objectives (maqāsid) of the shariʿa. As shown, this takes the form of engaged readings of the classical Islamic rulings pertaining to armed jihad and its conduct in the light of the realities of modern societies. On the basis of their revisionist methodology, Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs develop a faith-based model of containment that attempts to reconcile Islamist political thinking with the role of the nation-state in safeguarding the goals of the shariʿa as a means to preventing internal strife (fitna). Against this backdrop, the article argues that both authors' call for a revival of the shariʿa's higher objectives provides jihad with a new conceptualization and, in doing so, contributes to broader debates about the role that religious values can play in dismantling radical theological interpretations of politics and religiosity.

Keywords: Ideology, deradicalization, extremism, religion, Islamic law, Salafi-Jihadism

Preliminary Notes

In the heyday of combating terrorism after 9/11, the perception was widespread that the only way to put an end to Jihadist violence was a global war on terror—either directly or by proxy since the borderline separating national and transnational Jihadi violence had become fuzzy. The Jihadist has become an international pariah and global enemy. It was in this climate that an auto criticism emerged from within Jihadi Salafi groups. Such self-criticism(s) was nourished by former preachers of Jihadism who began to question their previously held views by challenging the religious legality of contemporary Jihadism and its doctrine of armed jihad through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence. Their findings are known under the generic term murājaāt (literally: revisions, reevaluations, or re-examinations). These critical revisions were inspired by one school of jurisprudential thought and its method of textual interpretation, known as maqāid al-sharia (higher objectives of the sharia). In short, this school´s primary aim is to elucidate the 'genuine' spirit of Islamic law—broader than both Natural and Positive Laws—to safeguard the well-being of the Muslim community (umma). This ambitious aim is construed in terms of two interdepending forms of relationship: coherent and order-based internal Muslim relations and manageable external Muslim/non-Muslim relations. Classical Muslim jurisprudence relying on this method would emphasize that legal commands and prohibitions, including the justifications and requirements for waging jihad, depend on the circumstances and necessities surrounding Muslims themselves. In effect, the incorporation of this method and its implied worldview into the juristic discourse of jihad articulates different normative rules for proper conduct in warfare to a) protect the moral and social order of the community, b) maintain its stabilizing political institutions, and c) defend its security against external dangers.

This article showcases two major examples of revisionist readings by former ideologues of Salafi-Jihadism. The first case focuses closely on the document first published in 2007 under the title: Tarshid al-amal al-jihadi fi-misr wal ālam ("Rationalizing Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World", henceforth RJA). The author, Sayyed Imam al-Sharif (alias Dr. Fadl) is the former chief ideologue of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) and mentor of Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of Al Qaeda [AQ]. The second document, with the title Ansifuna (Be Fair to Us), dates back to 2009 and was published as a letter to the Moroccan authorities by Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab Rafiqi, (alias Abu Hafs). Abu Hafs' letter-document Ansifuna is the fruit of a series of earlier internal Jihadi discussions and revisions conducted inside Moroccan prisons.[1] Importantly, Abu Hafs' stance

is also inspired by, inter alia, Dr. Fadl's RJA. Abu Hafs' revisions are a product of an internal study program of ideological deradicalization and reeducation conducted by Sheikh Abu Hafs himself. As such, it is worth investigating as the first of its kind in the Moroccan model of individual deradicalization attempts.

Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs both explore and analyze possible ways of combating Jihadism based on what we term here the "cumulative approach"—a method that uses content analysis of the Islamic sources as a tool for bringing each ruling or decision on—in this case—jihad to conform with the higher objectives of the sharia (maqāid). Since Jihadist ideology is founded on theological premises first and jurisprudential premises second, a need for examining (and refuting) these premises through the cumulative approach becomes a religious duty upon both the religious scholar and the Muslim ruler.[2] And it is at this juncture that both Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs propose, in their jurisprudentially founded revisions, to primarily treat the issue of jihad and its regulations on legal grounds alone, not on theological ones.[3]

In general, therefore, the eagerness of these former ideologues of jihad to dismantle Salafi-Jihadism might be seen as an attempt: (1) to relegate armed struggle to the authority of the state and (2) to protect Muslim societies from all forms of internal strife (fitna). However, the guiding principles, it should be noted, are the same in both cases, namely the prevention of Harm (dar al-mafāsid) and the promotion or preservation of Benefit (jalb al-masālih). Through the prism of this cumulative approach, cognitive and behavioral deradicalization through jurisprudential revisions—as in the two present case studies—should be viewed as an authentic Islamic attempt in preventing harm. The religious argument in any containment of violence is in the public interest, or in the language of jurisprudence: an unrestricted interest (masālih mursalah). This Islamic model of conflict resolution and deradicalization—as we shall see—is moulded by this underlying objective of the sharia: "Whatever contributes to the preservation of these five essentials] religion, human life, the faculty of reason, progeny, and material wealth[, says Raysuni, is a benefit, and everything which causes them to be forfeited is a source of harm, while its prevention is a benefit."[4]

Despite the marked influence of Morocco's Maliki tradition of fiqh (jurisprudence) on Abu Hafs' stance vis-à-vis the monarchy, what links Abu Hafs most directly with the anti-Jihadist, revisionist stream represented by Dr. Fadl is his agreement with the basic tenet that Muslims today are not obliged to abide by the opinions of the four major Sunni schools (madhāhib).[5] Despite their shared commitment to the higher objectives of Islamic law, though, Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs differ slightly in terms of how they deploy the principle of preventing harm. In Dr. Fadl's usage, this principle serves the purpose of delegitimizing all sorts of atrocities against civilians, often with primary reference to the prevention of chaos in society. Abu Hafs' approach, on the other hand, serves to revive the monarchy's theological legitimacy, and to warn against the unbridled license of practicing takfir [apostasy or excommunication] against the state. Because of these aims, in Abu Hafs' usage, the prevention of harm is undoubtedly an argument in favor of kingly authority in both religious and political matters: i.e., as the Imam.[6]

In dealing with an Islamic model of containment of violence and deradicalization, we have chosen these two texts for three reasons: genre, methodology and impact. Genre-wise, Dr. Fadl's and Abu Hafs' revisions belong to a literary genre—murājaāt—in which an author reconsiders critically his own or other scholars' views, ideas, and positions. In the case of our two former-Jihadists, their revisions were written as legal treatises with slightly discursive/polemical tendencies that aim to both refute and convince. As far as methodology is concerned, they both use what in Islamic tradition is called "examination of textual validation" (tasīl sharī.) within the purview of maqāsid's cumulative approach. Here, our two former Jihadists follow a twofold checking procedure: in addition to text-proofing every view or ruling on jihad and takfir—for instance—the choice of the proof-texts—Quran, Sunna of the prophet, and a saying of a religious scholar—are examined in the light of the sharia's higher objectives. In doing so, the two former Jihadists not only break away from their own previously held militant views, but they also challenge the very methodology through which Jihadists validate their stance on jihad and takfir. Rejecting the use of proof-texting on its own—in the restorative approach—is not due to its inadequacy as a hermeneutical method but because it contradicts the very spirit of Islamic law and its ethical philosophy: preventing harm and preserving benefit.

In terms of their wider impact, both revisions are best discussed in terms of their reception and discursive performance. Upon its publication, the RJA was widely reviewed in both Egyptian and Arabic newspapers and journals, and among them especially in media outlets supportive of government policies. This in turn led to an increase in the resentment felt against Dr. Fadl by his former Islamist/Jihadist cohorts. Not only had Dr. Fadl 'betrayed' his earlier radical ideals; he also gave local authorities the ideological ammunition they needed to undermine the religious legitimacy of their actions and visions. This resentment found its most obvious expression in one of the more venomous attacks on Dr. Fadl in Ayman al-Zawahiri's treatise, Exonerating the Nation of the Pen and the Sword from the Blemish of the Accusation of Weakness and Fatigue.[7] As one of the Jihadi activists who had sought inspiration and guidance from Dr. Fadl during the Afghan-jihad in the 1980s, and as an ardent defender of Dr. Fadl's previously held methodology on Jihadist issues, Zawahiri had every reason to take an early opportunity of declaring himself a fierce opponent of his former mentor. As the Arabic title of his reply indicates, in the eyes of Zawahiri, the main tendency of Dr. Fadl's RJA to focus on the alleged weaknesses or flaws of armed Islamist movements is an attempt to cover up Muslims' neglect of their duty to fight the West and their collaborators, i.e., Arab regimes. An important clue into Dr. Fadl's RJA's impact may be gleaned from the online discussions that were organized by al-Qaeda's official media production group, As-Sahab, in December 2007, between sympathizers and supporters of the jihadi brand of Salafism and al-Zawahiri "on the password-protected al-Ekhlass and al-Hesbah forums." As pointed out by T. Rid and M. Hecker, Dr. Fadl's revisions formed an important backdrop for these discussions; and this leaves us in no doubt that the revisionist views expounded in Dr. Fadl's RJA were perceived by al-Qaeda members as a potential threat to their radical ideology.[8]

Although less prominent among international Jihadi Salafist circles than Dr. Fadl, Abu Hafs' reputation as a young Wahhabi Salafist, who witnessed the first Afghan war together with his father when he was very young, and who later studied in Saudi universities, made him nationally famous as one of the five icons of Jihadi Salafism's first generation in Morocco. He became, through his study groups in the city of Fez in the 90s, the chief ideologue of the Moroccan brand of transnational Jihadism.[9] His revisions constituted a blow to Jihadi groups and later became a practical example of ideological deradicalization in support of the monarchy's counter-Jihadist strategy. Abu Hafs' delegitimization of armed jihad and the theology of takfir in his concise legal treatise is written in clear and simple language, where each of the ten principles are supported by ten counterarguments founded on the universal objectives of the sharia. Abu Hafs wrote his legal treatise in the form of a letter addressed to both the authorities and the public.

Revisions as a Juridical Genre of Deradicalization and Reconciliation: Sharia's raison d´être is Preserving Benefits and Preventing Harm

Though limited in their application and experimental in their nature, the first significance of our two cases lies in the insistence that the Islamic tradition can be usefully conceptualized as a means of communicating ideas and opinions against Jihadist ideology. As such, it draws our attention to the religious model of conflict resolution, which offers a proactive and holistic approach to how to engage a Jihadist into a process of deradicalization with a primary focus on the ideological drivers of violence (al-unf), radicalization (al-taarruf) and extremism (ghuluw). Similarly, the most important question in these revisions is not only how to deradicalize a Jihadist but how to help a Jihadist to ideologically self-deradicalize. In a similar way, these revisions reveal the limitations of the security solution and call for an all-encompassing solution which includes spiritual security. There are no "final" military or political solutions to violent extremism for the sole reason that security solutions cannot "distinguish between political terror and crime. And unlike the criminal, the political terrorist is not easily deterred by punishment."[10] Put another way, the logic used in the "final solution" to political problems results in death.[11] A second significance of these Jihadist revisions lies in their scholarly perception of radicalization and deradicalization as processes in which spiritual and religious values are cherished and nourished.

Context and Motivation: Senseless Confrontations

What do Jihadists want to achieve? asks Dr. Fadl in RJA. The question is implicit in his statement: "Jihadists are engaged in meaningless confrontations."[12] The sixth principle in Abu Hafs' ten principles reaffirms this tragic realization: "We affirm our condemnation and denunciation of all indiscriminate bombings that have taken place either in our country or in other Muslim countries. These bombings took lives and caused the destruction of inviolable wealth. The harm (mafāsid) that the indiscriminate or senseless bombings produce cannot be sanctioned by neither "the explicit objective of the sharia nor sound reason."[13] Often this revisionist trope justifies the need for criticism and a call for a rectification of previously held views and doctrines.[14] In other words, the question that the revisionist asks is always: What went wrong?[15] The revisionist tries to identify the causes of the failures and rectify them. Abu Hafs talks about undertaking revisions of Jihadism without recanting armed jihad as a defensive instrument, the use of which is governed by the higher objectives of law. In this case, Abu Hafs, like earlier revisionists, "stresses the importance of introspection, which would allow him to reflect upon and distance himself from past mistakes, and to correct the path of Jihad."[16] Correcting past mistakes, but how do our two revisionists do that? Here, both Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs seek refuge in the maqāsid jurisprudence of the Malikite Jurist al-Shatibi (d. 1388). Dr. Fadl explicitly states that "preserving the lives of Muslims and their strength is among the objectives of Islamic Law."[17]

The pervasive terror that the Jihadist preaches operates within an apocalyptic framework "beyond [Western conceptions of] ideology and the political."[18] In the same vein, Jean Baudrillard expresses his doubt in Western perceptions of Good and Evil as a meaningful explanatory framework of today's pervasive terror. The notions of Good and Evil in Western enlightenment thought are perceived in terms of progress, i.e., Good shall win over Evil in a rational society. He concludes that the terrorist "does not seek to change the world but to radicalize it by means of [human] sacrifice";[19] a savage chaos, in Salafi Jihadism's explanatory framework, is a wishful and unavoidable human condition.[20] Both Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs have also come to similar conclusions, but unlike Baudrillard, they also had firsthand experience: being Jihadists and Muftis of Jihadism. Our two revisionists would give Baudrillard a consenting node regarding the inadequacy of the Enlightenment's perception of Good and Evil to explain the theological explanatory framework of global jihad. Since terror against terror has failed as a universal answer, our revisionists have turned to maqāsid not only as a theory of law but also as a philosophy of ethics. In fact, even Baudrillard, inadvertently, would have a leaning toward maqāsid's philosophy of ethics: "if Islam were to dominate the world terrorism would have risen up against Islam."[21] Let us now explore how the sharia's raison d´être—preserving benefits and preventing harm—works.

In the first part of this article, we examine how the principle of preventing harm is applied by Sayyed Imam al-Sharif (Dr. Fadl). Due to space, we limit ourselves to the publication known as Rationalizing Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World (henceforth RJA). This is widely recognized as the crowning achievement of Dr. Fadl's revisions and can therefore serve as a fruitful reference point for discussing how religious arguments can be effectively used to develop new practical ways of policy intervention vis-à-vis Jihadist insurgency. This part provides an understanding of Dr. Fadl's notion of preventing harm through a close analysis of two interrelated corollaries in RJA. First is the claim that Muslims today are disempowered and therefore not obliged to comply with the requirements of armed jihad. Second is the concept of the 'public good' (maslaha) used by Dr. Fadl to undermine the legality of waging armed jihad against the West (far enemy). The second part of the article contains an exploration of the juridical arguments put forward by Abu Hafs in his revisions, which also builds on the idea of preventing harm. The significance of Abu Hafs' contribution lies in his return to Maliki law and to its philosophy of ethics: maqāsid al-sharia (higher objectives of the sharia). This return represents both a rejection of extremism (ghuluw) and radicalism (tatarruf) and marks a shift toward the endorsement of the Moroccan monarchy on purely religious grounds. Revisions in Egypt: Preventing Political and Social Evils in the Light of Maqāsid Jurisprudence and siyāsa shariyya

Dr. Fadl subscribes to Salafism, in contrast to reformist intellectuals who mostly conceptualize Islam from a modernist perspective. In formulating his revisionist standpoint, Dr. Fadl attempts to frame his arguments in ways that discourage rebellion (khurūj) in accordance with the position of most traditional Sunni scholars.

The significance of this stance lies in the fact that it tries to revive the quietist tendency of Salafism within the framework of classical Sunni discourses that call for obedience to governmental authority. That is, he emphasizes the necessity of "commanding the right and preventing evil" (al-amr bi-l maruf wa-l nahy an al-munkar) in a manner that serves to undermine calls for revolt against the state; even in the case of 'sinful' authorities.[22]

In doing so, Dr. Fadl situates himself not in a particular Sunni law school but more broadly in the pre-modern tradition known as siyāsa shariyya, whose main representative is the influential Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who also occupies a central place in modern Jihadism. Among other characteristics, this tradition views politics as inextricably embedded in the sharia but draws a clear "distinction between rules that are fixed" and rules pertaining to the political domain (siyāsa) that change in conformity with the requirements of public order.[23] Typically, therefore, proponents of this tradition raise questions about the protection of Muslim interests (maslaha) and the challenge of adapting to changing conditions while retaining a strong commitment to the various dimensions of the sharia, including the legal, normative, and social. Great emphasis is therefore placed on the common good, in terms of promoting benefit and preventing harm (understood as the prevention of internal disorder (fitna). Importantly, the practice of jihad, as this tradition frames it, is relegated from the individual sphere to the dominion of the state or the executive power (be it president or king). In fact, the standard view of jihad throughout many Sunni writings in the pre-modern period makes best sense when read against this background.

Already before his formal membership of Zawahiri's underground organization, al-Jihad, in 1977, and most emphatically after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, Dr. Fadl's ideas drew dissenting Islamists into the politics of revolutionary armed struggle against 'apostate' Muslim rulers of nation-states. In the RJA, however, Dr. Fadl aims to provoke a debate that challenges the typical vision of jihad adopted by different insurgent groups to justify attacks against the nation-state, contrary to his own previously held views. To be sure, the version of siyāsa shariyya embraced in the RJA is less conformist than other versions that have been adopted in the pre-modern era. As such, Dr. Fadl may be situated in the line of Ibn Taymiyya as a modern exponent of the siyāsa shariyya, seeking reconciliation with the existing nation-state through an acceptance not so much of its legitimacy but rather of its de facto political authority (ghalabah—conquest of power). That is to say, the text endorses a quietist (rather than a politically activist) stance, but within the framework defined by the mainstream Sunni juristic discourse.

Importantly, Dr. Fadl does not reject militant jihad out of hand as a religious duty; he nowhere declares, for example, that he sees spiritual jihad as a substitute for militant jihad, which is typical for reformists inclined toward Sufism. Indeed, the phenomenon coined as "the spiritualization of jihad" by David Cook has little or no affinity to Dr. Fadl's position in the RJA.[24] Rather, Dr. Fadl focuses upon uncovering what he calls the "reasons behind (past) rulings on jihad" (asbāb al-jihad).

Rejecting Violence toward the State as Preservation of the Purpose of the Law

The points of departure for his discussion are the controlling rules—or regulations (*thawābit*)—that derive from the larger purposes underlying Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). As described by Dr. Fadl, in early Islam these regulations formed a backdrop to precepts (*ahkām*) in connection with specific situations. Among other things, this meant that an action cannot be undertaken if it generates a harmful outcome, "even when the action pursues a religiously legitimate goal (*shar ʿī*)."[25] This applies particularly, he says, in cases where a goal demands an effort that "exceeds the person's capabilities or does not suit the person and his circumstances."[26] Regarding the issue of jihad, which is "the pinnacle of Islam", there are no exceptions to this principle, quite the contrary: it helps Muslims not only to safeguard their religious way of life and worldly interests (*dīn and dunyā*), but also to show restraint in matters relating to "bloodshed" (*al-ʾihtiyāt fi-ʾumūr al-dimāʾ*).[27]

According to Dr. Fadl, the kind of armed jihad pursued by Islamist militants relies on the use of unlawful tactics based on the "secularist" maxim "the end justifies the means" (*al-ghāya tubarrir al-wasīla*).[28] Dr. Fadl goes so far as to say that those "led astray" by this logic in today's world have used whatever means possible

to achieve their aims, relying on what he calls "the jurisprudence of justification (*fiqh al-tabrīr*)."[29] Those who follow this way or path (*maslak*) may approve (*yastahsin*) of [things] or perpetrate hideous actions and then look for evidence in support of them afterward. In the early Muslim community, the righteous forefathers (*al-salaf al-sālih*) would refer to these individuals as "the adherents of impure novelties" (*bidʿah*). The same description could apply, Dr. Fadl maintains, to contemporaries who tend to isolate the textbooks of the pious *salaf* from their original context. In support of this contention, Dr. Fadl points to Ibn Taymiyya who argued that the founders of the four Sunni legal schools "prohibited people from blindly emulating them (*taqlidihim*)."[30] Furthermore, when early Muslims had to decide about any matter in religion, including the duty of jihad, their answers were shaped in large measure by the existence of "*dār al-islām*, a caliphate and a caliph." That fact, in Dr. Fadl's view, is a strong argument in favor of not blindly applying the ancestors' answers to our present reality. Thus, when unqualified individuals in our days mistakenly believe that the opinions of the salaf are binding, they reveal their ignorance of the traditional way of giving a legal judgment (*fatwa*), which implies "the knowledge of that which is obligatory in a given situation" (*maʿrifat al-wājib fi al-waqiʿ*).[31] Hence the cumulative approach.

This is a very important point because it leads Dr. Fadl to emphasize that *fiqh* has always been broadened to include new rules to meet the exigencies of the times; and this has implications for understanding why Muslims are no longer requested to perform the duty of jihad today, says Dr. Fadl. The criteria for performing armed jihad are the same as those for other religious duties: the Muslim must possess the ability (*qudra*) to do an act.[32] Arguing from this premise, Dr. Fadl underscores that the term "*qudra*" should not be taken literally here, as referring to the basic capacity for "bodily action" (*qudra badaniyya*), but rather more broadly in terms of all that is in one's power or capacity, including "the circumstances surrounding the [duty] of jihad."[33] The connotation behind this meaning is that God intends the believer "to choose the legal duty that most closely matches his situation and capability" (*al-munāsib li-wāqiʿihi wa-qudratihi*).[34] Seeking to provide a solid basis for that interpretation, Dr. Fadl points to the Qurʿān, where God praises those who chose "to fight on the path of God" (*al-mujāhidīn fī sabīl illāh*) as well as "the People of the Cave" (*ʾahl al-kahf*) who chose to hide to escape persecution.[35] In such cases, as Dr. Fadl puts it, believers were facing a threat posed by "a force of religious opponents" (*hashd minʾl-mukhālifīn fiʾl dīn*) but responded to the situation in different ways. However, Dr. Fadl has another, more important argument. That is, the example of pagan Mecca, where Muslims were not required to preach or fight jihad. To save them from greater harm in their disempowered environment, he asserts, God did not impose any duty of jihad on them before they undertook the *hijra* to Medina.[36] Dr. Fadl maintains that, in today's world, this option is still effective, not canceled or abrogated (*ghayr mansūkh*). Meccan Muslims, like "Islamist groups in most Muslim countries today, tend to oscillate between impotence and disempowerment."[37] Interestingly, a few years earlier Dr. Fadl had criticized opponents of offensive jihad as "halfway believers," who were beset with doubts about their religion.[38] But he did, obviously, change his mind, because here he points to how Muslims must measure their own capacity and make choices based on both practical and religious dimensions of utility. He is critically alert, for instance, to the safety of Muslims if (or when) the enemy strikes again and to the ways in which offensive jihad invariably involves "encroachment upon the money and lives of the innocent ones" (*maʿsumīn*), describing every such act as a "grave sin" (*kabāʾir al-dhunūb*).[39] We will return to this discussion below, but now, let us explain the importance of Dr. Fadl's shift of focus from the later, Medinan period to the Meccan period when elucidating the reasons why military jihad should be suspended.

First, this shift testifies to the fact that Dr. Fadl takes his cue from premodern Salafis, such as Ibn Taymiyya, as much as from ideas offered by reformist writers, who demanded a return to the Meccan-phase of the Prophet's career in order to retrieve "the original message of Islam."[40] Secondly, for the purpose of this article, Dr. Fadl's preference for Mecca is important because it helps us understand the rationale that leads him to condemn "the use of force in changing what is reprehensible" (*taghyīr al-munkar biʾl yad*), including violent confrontation with government authorities in Muslim lands—(i.e., the near enemy)—in the pursuit of implementing shariʿa.[41] As we shall see in the next section, Dr. Fadl uses the same rationale, alongside the concept of the 'public good' (*maslaha*), to undermine the legality of waging armed jihad against the West (the far enemy).

Peace Promotion as a Means to Safeguard Islam and Muslims

The concept of the 'public good' (*maslaha*) used by Dr. Fadl to undermine the legality of armed jihad against local authorities also underlies his endeavor to rebut the arguments routinely presented in favor of Jihadist expansion into territories of *dar al-kufr* ("land of disbelief"). Dr. Fadl points out that the raison d'etre of offensive jihad, as inferred from the Qurʿān, is the fighting of injustice with the aim of "promoting the religion" (*izhār al-dīn*). In his view, this can easily be inferred from God's saying in the Qur'an [Q 8:39], a verse that jihadis normally read as a license to call for perpetual war against non-Muslim states: "And fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in Allah."[42] Dr. Fadl complicates the meaning of the verse, stressing that it was revealed in Medina when Muslims were in a favorable position. This enabled them to promote Islam in more forceful ways.[43] This is contrary to the contemporary situation where Muslims are barely able to defend themselves. Against this background, he emphasizes that the obligation to fight jihad is lifted if that is likely to "destruct [human] lives" (*halāk al-nufūs*) and "endanger Muslims" (*al-ʾidrār bi'l muslimīn*).[44] Instead, Dr. Fadl conceptualizes the promotion of religion as the ability to interpret the rules of the shariʿa and apply them to the present situation. He takes this argument further when he deals with another Qur'anic verse [Q 47: 35]: "…be not weak and ask not for peace, when you have the upper hand." In Dr. Fadl's view, this verse addresses the prohibition against "the acceptance of any terms of peace with the enemy" (*musālamat al-aʿdāʾ*) when Muslims have the "upper hand" in response to aggression. For this reason, the rule proclaimed in the verse is circumscribed (*muqayyad*), not general or unrestricted.[45] Once again, the idea here is to avoid damage, rather than achieving a legally relevant benefit. This stance indicates important continuities with Ibn Taymiyya, who paved the way for similar (albeit more sophisticated) elaborations on the implementation of the shariʿa in accordance with the principle of *maslaha*; as, for instance, in this passage which contains remarkable similarities to the argument developed by the author of *RJA*:

The principle overall is that the *shariʿa* never neglects a benefit (*maslaha*) […] One of two possibilities must obtain for the rational person who believes that something is a benefit even though the revelation does not mention it. Either the revelation indicates it and the person looking into it does not know it. Or it is not a benefit even though he believes it to be a benefit […] Often people imagine that something is profitable in religion and in this world, when in fact its profit is outweighed by harm.[46]

Echoing here Ibn Taymiyya's conception of *maslaha*, Fadl proposes the survival and the propagation of Islam through other means, instead of fighting, including these:[47]

- *daʿwa*, the practice of calling non-Muslims to Islam
- *hijra*, emigration to avoid persecution
- *ʿuzla*, isolation by abstaining from ordering good and prohibiting evil (*al-ʾamr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahıy ʿan al-munkar*)
- *ʿafw*, forgiveness
- *al-safh waʾl iʿrād*, avoiding enemies
- *kitmān al-imān*, concealment of faith

Against this backdrop, Dr. Fadl offers a variety of clues that jihad is not the only legal means to correct deviation from the shariʿa. To illustrate his point, he goes on to provide examples of how the pious ancestors would choose "the legal option which was appropriate" (*al-khayār al-sharʿī al-munāsib*) to the reality and circumstances in which they found themselves; for instance, by refraining from armed methods as was the case with the prophet's companion Khalid b. al-Walid who decided that it was best to save his troops by retreating from the battlefield against the Byzantines at the north of Muʾta or Areopolis (east of the Jordan River). The second example given by Dr. Fadl comes from another Qur'anic verse [Q 48:1], where God praises the peace agreement with the infidels of Quraysh, known as *sulh al-hudaybiyah*. According to Dr. Fadl, this verse uses a different word for "victory," namely *fath*, the term normally used to designate Muslim conquests, even though the Prophet failed in seizing political power and consolidating it by force in pagan Mecca. On this basis, Dr. Fadl concludes that believers are not only permitted but also encouraged to enter international agreements/treaties (*muʿāhadāt*) with non-Muslims, even in war time.[48] To underscore the primacy of the public good (or

well-being) over other commitments, including the principle of offensive jihad, Dr. Fadl also cites the Qur'anic verse [Q 8:61]: "But if they incline to peace, so shall you, and put your trust in Allah." In this way, he seems to nullify the notion of permanent warfare, thereby separating himself from Islamist ideologues who refuse to abide by international agreements. By adopting this position, which encourages obedience to state authority, Dr. Fadl seems to wave between being a political quietist and subscribing to the Sunni tradition's doctrine of *siyāsa shar'iyya*, which does not interpret religion in opposition to the prerogatives of the ruler, which include, inter alia, the right to declare jihad and conclude treatises with non-Muslims.

Preventing Harm Is a Benefit: Monarchy, Law, and Legitimacy in Morocco

In contrast to other Islamic countries, Morocco is a country, whose constitution declares the king as head of state and *Amir al-Mu'minīn* (Commander of the Faithful). Accordingly, Moroccan society is defined in a two-fold way, namely as an *umma* (community) in the religious sense and a nation in the modern political sense. The political power of the king as head of the state is territorial, i.e., confined to the territories of Morocco, whereas his religious power—or rather spiritual jurisdiction—is trans-territorial. Moroccans—Muslims and Jews—therefore, are both subjects of the king and citizens of the state.[49] As members of a spiritual *umma* and a political nation, Moroccans are governed by the oath of allegiance and by the constitution. A third dimension is added to the two powers of the monarch, namely a symbolic one. The latter derives from a combination of genealogical, historical, political, and spiritual attributes that the monarchy invests in what is called religious diplomacy and spiritual security. Now, the monarchy is branded as the kingdom of the friends of God (*mamlakat al-'awliyā'*) and adheres officially to three components of the Moroccan brand of Sunnism: the Maliki law school, the Ash'arite theological school (the middle path of theological creed) and the spiritualist tendency within Sufism represented by al-Junaid (d. 910).[50]

As we shall see in Abu Hafs' revisions, the question of the monarchy's legitimacy becomes one of the three prioritized questions discussed in this strand of revisionist literature. In a Moroccan context, the Jihadist position vis-a-vis the legitimacy of the existing oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*) toward the monarch became idolatrous or heretical on theological grounds. For example, in his short theological-juridical treatise, *On whoever seeks judgment of the tyrant rulers is a disbeliever*, the former Moroccan Jihadi ideologue Abdelkarim al-Shadhili, delineates that:

one of the requirements of Tawhid (the absolute sovereignty of God), whose meaning and identity features are no longer recognizable by [Muslim] people today, is that people seek to be governed by the law of God Almighty. The question of sovereignty (hākimiyyah) and legislation (tashrī') are not matters of positive law ('ahkām far'iyyah) but matters relating to Tawhid and the foundation of belief. This is what is meant by tawīd al-'uluhiyyah (Tawhid of Godship), i.e., the individual is bound by worshipping God alone and being ruled by his Law.[51]

Thus, since the issue of the *hakimiyya* is a theological matter—inherent attribute of God´s sovereignty—not an article of positive law, Jihadi Salafis raise two related issues, namely:

1. When should an Imam be considered legitimate?
2. Must Muslims obey a ruler who does not apply the *shari'a*?

These two questions have been a source of dispute among Moroccan Jihadists and have stood at the center of several debates among them in and outside Moroccan prisons, writes Abu Hafs in his revisions.[52] Through the cumulative approach of *maqāsid* jurisprudence, Abu Hafs presents a starting point for answering these questions by reference to Imam Malik (d. 796). On this basis, he proposes that the legitimacy of the monarchy—the eighth principle of his ten principles—should be decided not on theological grounds but on juridical ones, i.e., the objectives of the divine law.[53] Again, the underlying principle here is: *preventing Harm is a Benefit*. The latter logic modifies the maxim that *preserving harm takes precedence over preserving benefit*. Seen from the vantage point of Abu Hafs, therefore, there are two premises for renouncing armed jihad against the existing monarchy:

We [recanting Jihadists] clearly declare that even though we are among the advocates of the Rightly Guided Caliphate, we have no problem with the monarchy because a) the scholars of the *umma* since the Umayyad era until today have accepted this system of [governance] and pledged allegiance to it [to hear and obey], and b) as long as the monarch preserves religion, unite the *umma*, uphold security and prevent harmful conflicts (fitna).[54]

The methodology at play here is *taʾsīl sharʿī* [establishing the origin of laws] It is a process that aims at authenticating every creed or law through the lens of preventing harm and promoting benefit. In matters pertaining to acts of worship, according to Jihadi Salafism, this mode of authentication is not permissible, i.e., believers are not allowed to challenge the objectives of religious duties based on rational reflection. Abu Hafs' ten arguments in support of the non-opposition to the monarchy are in congruence with the authentication methodology known in Maliki jurisprudence as the method of *sadd al-darāʾiʿ* (prohibition of evasive legal devices). This method has a preemptive and deterrent function.[55] As an example of prohibition of evasive legal devices, Abu Hafs states that since:

it was decided by the jurists that preventing harm takes precedence over preserving benefit, then preventing the harm resulting from disobeying the ruler [by means of armed jihad] takes priority over preserving the benefits from the establishment of a shura-system. Ibn Battal—may God have mercy on him—said: The jurists have unanimously agreed that it is obligatory to obey the ruler—who took power by force—and accompany him in jihad campaigns, and that obedience to him is better than revolting against him. In doing so, we will prevent the shedding of blood and calm the agitators.[56]

Society and the Near Enemy

According to Abu Hafs' description, the internal jihadi discussions in prison (in the period from 2004 to 2009), resulted in several revisions which culminated in 2009 with the so-called "initiative" (*al-mubādara*). The letter-document *Ansifuna* is the written expression of this initiative. It offers a window into the process of these discussions among the four chief sheiks on the one hand and between every sheikh and his own Jihadi followers on the other. It also offers a useful entry point for interrogating the religious premises upon which decisions are based regarding a) recanting violence, b) renouncing the doctrine of takfir (apostatizing), and c) accepting monarchical rule. In his description of these discussions and debates, Abu Hafs mentions two crucial earlier revisions which took place in the year 2004; that is, a year after the bloody attacks of May 16, 2003, in Casablanca. While the first document ("revisions") was made public through the newspaper al-Ayyam—it was a response to a security report that was issued after a summit on terrorism in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 2004.[57] In the words of Abu Hafs: "the importance of the document lies in the four sheikhs' adopting a clear and explicit position regarding a number of sensitive issues…after a difficult and long labor."[58] It is worth noting that in 2004, these four sheikhs came together in support of transnational Jihadi ideology, endorsing its goal of targeting the far enemy (i.e., the US and its allies). In particular,

the common point that brought together the sheikhs of the Jihadist movement and the followers of this current was the idea of the duty to support the global Jihadist cause and the Islamic State model brought about by the Taliban movement as well as al-Qaeda. They were also fascinated by Osama bin Laden as a model to be emulated. They viewed both the Taliban and bin Laden as spearheading the confrontation with American hegemony.[59]

The second document prepared by the four sheikhs was not made public, according to Abu Hafs. It was sent to the authorities in the form of a letter under the title "to whom it may concern," proposing a way out of the crisis and how the Salafi Jihadist issue could be resolved. Interestingly, the four sheikhs proposed to play the role of mediators, i.e., they pledged to mediate with the global Jihadist movement to spare Morocco in all future operations or terrorist plans in exchange for the release of the Jihadi Salafist inmates. The Moroccan Jihadi returnees from Afghanistan had a personal relationship with these Jihadist groups and could intercede on behalf of the monarchy for Morocco to be spared.

Ignoring the first two documents, the security authorities took the decision to move the four sheikhs and send each of them to a prison close to the city where he lived before imprisonment. The letter-document *Ansifuna*, however, was made public from the local prison of Bourkayz, in Fez, in December 2010. It was the product of an initiative launched by the Consultative Council for Human Rights—a state institution—in coordination with the Al-Karama Human Rights Forum, an NGO close to the Islamic Justice and Development Party that later would lead the government for ten years (2011–2021). In this initiative, the Jihadist inmates outlined three principles, the subjects of which were structural and doctrinal revisions. It was meant as a negotiating paper mandating CCHR/al-Karama to negotiate their release with the monarchy.

Abu Hafs maintained that Islam is the religion of the "middle path" (*al-waatiyya*). However, he also emphasized that the monarchy in its existing form was the only institution that could guarantee the *umma's* spiritual security and prevent it from falling victim to civil strife (*fitna*). He further held that pledging allegiance (*bayʿah*) to heed and obey (*al-samʿwa al-tāʿah*) the monarch to prevent bloodshed and close the door of sedition correlates with recanting the doctrine of takfir (apostatizing) of Muslim societies because it contradicts the most important objective of the shariʿa, namely *preventing harm*.

Dismantling radical ideologies on the individual level goes together with resocialization of the person in question. Abu Hafs' revisionist proposition is framed in line with his argumentation that answers a central question: *Why [should] we refrain from condemning Muslim societies as infidel?* This is, in fact, one of the ten principles put forward in *Ansifuna*. To these principles, Abu Hafs provides ten arguments in favor of not apostatizing Muslims. These follow a logic that begins with fearing God's wrath in this world and in the next:

Out of fear of God Almighty, and out of fear from His severe punishment that awaits those who accuse one Muslim of unbelief (apostasy) imagine what the punishment would be like for those who accuse the whole society of Muslims of disbelief? In a hadith related by Bukhari, the prophet says: "Whoever accuses a believer of unbelief is like killing him."[60]

Equating accusing a Muslim of disbelief with killing him or her according to this hadith raises the question: how should we consider the religious arguments used by the Jihadists in accusing Muslim societies of disbelief? Applying the *maqāsid* principle, i.e., the prohibition of evasive legal devices, would expose the religious argument of the Jihadists as heretical. This is exactly how Abu Hafs describes those who accuse an individual Muslim of apostasy, while attributing this ruling to God himself. In his view, fearing God and fearing His wrath might work as a deterrent. Moreover, the harm that results from such an accusation of unbelief, i.e., the disruption of the *umma's* unity, is far greater than any benefit that might result from establishing an Islamic state. He cites another Maliki scholar, al-Qādi Iyyād, in support of this assertion: "The shedding of the blood of the monotheist worshippers is very dangerous." The rectifying force in Abu Hafs' revisionist attempt is the fact that the universality of Islam derives from the objectives of the law, according to the founding father of the *maqāsid* jurisprudential methodology, al-Shatibi (d. 1388):

The rulings of the Law encompass a universal interest, as well as a particular interest peculiar to each specific case. The particular interest is indicated by each piece of evidence as it relates to this or that case or circumstance; as for the universal interest, it is for every human being to be answerable to some specific precept of the Law in all of his movements, words and beliefs. Otherwise, he remains like a dumb beast left to roam at will until he is reined in by the Law.[61]

In conclusion, Abu Hafs proceeds in his revisions to answer two key questions:

1. Who are we?
2. What do we agree on?

As an answer to these questions, Abu Hafs states:

We are a group of Islamist inmates in the case that is now known as the "Salafi Jihadist" case. Even though we were not organized in any organization—clandestine or public—we ended up in detention together suffering from unjust sentencing. We do agree on several beliefs, and we share a great deal of principles, which we gather

in these points. We also consider these points the foundation of this initiative and the primary conditions for anyone desiring to join it.[62]

In this sense, accepting the monarchical system and recanting apostatizing society undermines the very Jihadist argument on the obligation of jihad against the 'near enemy', i.e., Muslim societies. In the Moroccan case, the monarchy's political theology—the king's role as both commander of the faithful and a head of state—has made it difficult for Jihadi Salafism to gain ground on Moroccan soil. This may also have been one of the reasons why most Moroccan radicals opted for transnational jihad.

Conclusion

The revisions of Dr. Fadl and Abu Hafs can be viewed as two different examples of religious deradicalization, disengagement and reconciliation. Dr. Fadl's revisions provide a juridical argument against the use of armed jihad and the theology of takfir, with the aim of highlighting the senselessness of armed confrontation with both the near and the far enemy. Similarly, Abu Hafs' revisions provide a practical demonstration of the important role that religion *can*—and perhaps *must*—play in any deradicalization process.[63] In the two cases we explored here, the religious argument based on *maqāsid al-shariʿa,* and its ethical philosophy focuse on preemptive and deterrent aspects in the reconciliation process, and in so doing emphasizes ideological change as a key to behavioral change. What does this imply for deradicalization research? In combination with many of the variables pointed out in the existing literature, such as the role of "family (kinship responsibilities) and integration into the community" [64] or psychological factors such as "disillusionment" and "burnout" [65], ideological transformation might have an important and influential role to play for the development and outcome of the deradicalization process since it can help militants to find new ways and means of construing and legitimating their conception of religion in a nonconfrontational manner. For militants engaged in deradicalization programs, this could contribute to their efforts to abandon violence in the name of 'jihad'.

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Notes

[1] The two Arabic revisions (*murājʿāt*) that the present article deals with are: Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, *Tarshid Al-ʿamal al-Jihadi*' (Rationalizing Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World), 2007; URL: http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/tarshid-al-jihad.pdf, and Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, *Ansifuna* (Be fair to us). (Fez: 2010). It is noteworthy that the story of how these two texts/revisions came about is quite similar: both were written within the confines of prison.

[2] In the case of the Moroccan brand of Islam and its trans-territorial religious diplomacy in countering transnational Jihadism on the African continent, see Cédric Baylocq and Aziz Hlaoua, "Spreading a Moderate Islam? Morocco's New African Religious Diplomacy," *Afrique Contemporaine* 257(1), 2016, pp. 113–128. By opting for the cumulative approach, our two former Salafi Jihadists break with the "restorative approach", which consists of the purist Salafi belief that God has given mankind the entire law in the Qurʾan and the Sunna. Through the cumulative approach, the hermeneutical methodology of jurisprudential epistemology consists of engaging human agency by means of human raison and revelation in a consistent and continuous search for the *shariʿa's* universal objectives within the constraints of history and based on the necessities of human life.

[3] Ahmad Al-Raysuni, *Fiqh Al-Thawrah: Murājaʿāt Fī al-Fiqh al-Siyyasī al-ʾislāmī*. (Cairo: Dar al-Kalimah, 2013); Mohamed Misbah, *Moroccan Jihadis*. (Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2021); Bilal Telidi, "Advocacy and Politics in Winning the Islamic Movement Over: A formative and Systemic Approach." *Awaser* (11), 2021, pp. 33–65.

[4] Ahmad Al-Raysuni, *Imam al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives of Islamic Law*. (London-Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005, p. 231).

[5] For example, see the interview with Abu Hafs (June 30, 2018); URL: https://marayana.com/لاجر-و-ءاسن/لاجر-و-ءاسن-تاراوح/2018/06/30/320/.

[6] A discussion of the text of the Moroccan oath of allegiance (bayʿah) can be seen in Mohamed Tozi, *Monarchie et Islam politique au Maroc*. (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999); Joshua Sabih, "Unwitting Schmittians: Sovereignty and Violence in Jihadi Salafism's Political Theology"; in: Saer El-Jaichi and Mona Kanwal Sheikh (Eds.), *Theological Perspectives on Transnational Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming)

[7] Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Risalah fi Tabriʾat Ummat al-Qalam was-Sayf min Manqasat Tuhmat al-Khawr wal-Duʿf* (Exonerating the Nation of the Pen and the Sword from the Blemish of the Accusation of Weakness and Fatigue), 2008; URL: https://www.noorbook.com/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%87-pdf.

[8] Thomas Rid and Marc Hecker, *War 2.0: Irregular Warfare in the Information Age*. (Westport, London: Praeger Security International, 2009, p. 196).

[9] Concerning Abu Hafs's life and how he became a Salafi Jihadist, see his serialized interviews with the digital newspaper Alyaoum24.com. URL: بتكي صفح وبا تاعجارت ال تاعجارم: ةعبارلا ةقلحلا" ـــ ويلا 24 (alyaoum24.com); بتكي صفح وبا تاعجارت ال تاعجارم: "ةسماخلا ةقلحلا" ـــ ويلا 24 (alyaoum24.com); بتكي صفح وبا تاعجارت ال تاعجارم: (15ةقلحلا) ـــ ويلا 24 (alyaoum24.com)

[10] Mahmood Mamdani, G*ood Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and The Roots of Terror*. (New York: Three Leaves Press Doubleday, 2004, p. 229); in addition to the four sheikhs mentioned below in note [52], the most prominent early Salafi Jihadist was Dr. Abu Ubaidah Abdekalim al-Shadhili, the views of whom we refer to in this article; see note [51].

[11] Talal Asad, "Trying to Understand French Secularism"; in: Hent De Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (Eds), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, p. 426).

[12] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 13.

[13] Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, 2010, op. cit., p. 14.

[14] Amr Hamzawy and Sarah Grebowski, "From Violence to Moderation: Al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad." *Carnegie Papers* (20), 2010, pp. 1–19; URL: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Hamzawy-Grebowski-EN.pdf.

[15] Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*. (London: Orion Pub Co, 2004).

[16] Amr Hamzawy and Sarah Grebowski, 2010, op. cit., p. 5.

[17] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 12.

[18] Jean Baudrillard, *Lèsprit de Terrorisme*. (Paris: Galilée, 2002, p. 16).

[19] Jean Baudrillard, 2002, op. cit., p. 16.

[20] Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass;* URL: https://www.noor-book.com/en/ebook-%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B4--pdf.

[21] Jean Baudrillard, 2002, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

[22] As we shall see, Abu Hafs adopts the same standpoint regarding the Moroccan monarchy. As a matter of fact, Abu Hafs uses as legal argument the customary practice of the consenting position of classical Muslim scholars vis-à -vis the successive Islamic dynasties since the Umayyads (661–750).

[23] Andrew F. March, *The Caliphate of Man: Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019, p. 56). Dr. Fadl does not reject classical law schools. His leaning toward *maqāsid* jurisprudence and its philosophy of ethics is a clear recognition of these schools' relevance in general, and of the Maliki jurisprudence's contributions therein.

[24] David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015, p. 39)

[25] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 3.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 2.

[28] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 3.

[29] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 6.

[30] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 5.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 7.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Sura 18 of the Qur'an.

[36] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 8.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Sayed Khatab, *Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism: The Theological and Ideological Basis*. (Cairo-New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011, p. 152).

[39] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 10.

[40] Clinton Bennett, *Studying Islam: The Critical Issues*. (London-New York: Continuum, 2010, p. 86).

[41] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 9.

[42] Qur'an, Sura 2, verse 193.

[43] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 12.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 14.

[46] Hoover, Jon (2019) *Ibn Taymiyya*. (London: Oneworld Academic, 2019, p. 59).

[47] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 15.

[48] Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, 2007, op. cit., p. 14.

[49] The question of the borders of the kingdom of Morocco is still a problematic issue since Morocco still does not recognize the present borders as the kingdom's historical borders. Morocco still considers Spain's presence in the two enclaves Ceuta and Melilla as part of a colonial agenda. Another example of unsolved border conflicts is the one between Morocco and Algeria, regarding the control of western (Moroccan) Sahara. Morocco is de facto still in the process of decolonization. Traditionally, both political and military forms of decolonization are considered forms of jihad. In this connection, it is interesting that al-Qaeda's leader Ayman Zawahiri has recently issued a threat to Spain because of these two enclaves. See "Al-Zawahiri calls for the liberation of Ceuta and Melilla", *Middle East in 24*; URL: https://middleeast.in-24.com/world/470987.html.

[50] The latest branding of this interesting political-theological concept is the documentary *mamlakat al-ʾawliyāʾ* that Medi TV has produced; cf. URL: https://youtu.be/5CKNQvXIyiY; see also Cédric Baylocq and Aziz Hlaoua, 2016, op. cit., pp. 113–128.

[51] Abdelkarim al-Shadili, *Fasl al-maqāl fī ʾanna man tahkama ʾilā al-tāġūt mina al-hukkām kāfir min ghayr juhūd wa ʾistilāl*. Manbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. 2001, p. 2; URL: https://ketabpedia.com/تحميل/فصل-المقال-في-أن-من-تحاكم-إلى-الطاغوت-من/. Genre-wise this treatise belongs to a juridical-theological (or rather: a polemical response) category called preventing all ambiguities regarding the creed of the Salaf. It is well known that the Wahhabi school inspired by Ibn A. Wahhab (d. 1792), still constitutes the authoritative reference in almost all variants of Salafism—both the quietist and Jihadist. Inspired by Wahhabi teachings, Salafis reject human reason as a source of validation and accept only the doctrines and beliefs inherited from the Prophet's companions and their pious followers. They do not adhere to the jurisprudential school of *maqāsid* and its ethical philosophy.

[52] Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, 2010, op. cit., 3. In this video, Abu Hafs—together with the other former sheikhs of Moroccan Jihadism—explains the reasons and nature of his revisions after his release: cf. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZVkMkc-YuI. Our focus in this article on Abu Hafs' revisions is due to the fame that these have gained in both Moroccan Jihadi circles and with the public at large. Moroccan media considers Abu Hafs as one of the so-called (in the Moroccan media) "four sheikhs", namely: Mohammed El-Fezazi, Omar El-Haddoushi, Hassan El-Kettani, and Mohammed Abdul Wahab Rafiqi. Abu Hafs mentions the other three sheikhs as co-signatories of these and previous revisions. Regarding these four sheikhs' fame, the moral authority they still have over a number of "followers", and their influence through the social media—and presence in the public media, see URL: المراجعات داخل السجون: تقييم ومراجعة الحلقة الثانية—أنتلجنسيا المغرب—intelligentcia maroc. Abu Hafs affirms that all these contexts made him a Salafi "sheikh"—he sees that the only transformation he made in his life was freeing himself from all the molds that had crept in, and his journey toward a free thought that is not bound by any particular ideology. Abu Hafs states that he has not yet written a book reviewing all these transformations and laying the foundations of the intellectual construction that he is promoting today, especially as he works on dismantling the categories of the Salafi Jihadist discourse. He

critically makes the point vis-à-vis his 2010 revisions that it is possible to trace the path and development of his ideas by comparing what is presented today with the entire Salafi edifice, and by following his articles, radio and television programs, and his interventions in conferences and seminars.

[53] On pages 13–15, Abu Hafs gives a list of ten clauses, and for each clause—a subject of revisions—he provides ten arguments. The clause number eight that interests us here explores the reason why believers should not oppose the monarchical system.

[54] Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, 2010, op, cit., p. 14.

[55] For a more realistic evaluation of how successful the Moroccan deradicalization programs of more than 3000 jihadists were, one could see the testimonies of some of them in the latest documentary of May 2021; URL: https://youtu.be/Rfogi2N6CnA. It needs to be said that even the state's "reconciliation" program, launched in 2017, was directed at individual cases and was not a negotiation with an organized movement, especially after the divisions in prisons in the absence of a unified Salafi Jihadist leadership. Among the most successful individual stories one finds the story of Abu Hafs, the author and initiator of the first revisionist experience in Morocco. To be sure, not all those who went through deradicalization programs proved to be successfully deradicalized. An earlier documentary about *al-muālaah* (reconciliation), which dates back to 2017, gives examples of such failed cases: cf. URL: https://youtu.be/Rfogi2N6CnA. Two well-known examples are two former Salafi Jihadists: Sheikh Omar El-Heddoushi and sheikh Hasan El-Kettani. Since their release from prison by the king's pardon, they have both said that they have no intention of reviewing any of their positions and that they will not change their convictions. El-Kattani still describes democracy as a "secular system that is not suitable for Muslims." He also called on former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi to use deterrence and punishment against his opponents. He does not stop describing his old friend, Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab Rafiqi, as "relapsed" in reference to his reviews. He further accuses him of being a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) and ignorant (*jāhil*), employing the entire Salafi dictionary of slander and defamation: cf. URL: https://youtu.be/dviJPddJ3g0. Omar El-Haddouchi continues to declare since leaving prison that he has not changed any of his ideas, and that he has not revised anything he believed in: "I like to be imprisoned and die for my ideas. I have nothing to back down from." He repeatedly refused to talk about any reviews. It appears from Omar El-Haddoushi's declared positions, that he has not actually revised any of his ideas. He is still calling for the application of the shariʿa with the same Jihadist vision, and he still uses terms such as "tyrants" and "affliction" in sermons directed at young people. In fact, El- Haddoushi does not hide his sympathy with the Syrian-based group Jabhat al-Nusra and denounces those who describe the "Mujahideen" as terrorists. Also, his stances on democracy have not changed, and he still describes it as a form of idol worship, and he does not stop launching campaigns against what he calls "secularists" and "fools".

[56] Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, 2010, op. cit., 34. On this point, see Ahmed al-Raysuni, 2005, op. cit.

[57] Regarding the terrorist attacks of Casablanca on May 16, 2003, the timing of the explosions and the high number of the perpetrators initially led the authorities to believe that it was an act hatched and carried out by an international network because of the astonishing similarities between the Casablanca attacks and those that took place in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia three days before.

[58] Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, 2010, op. cit., p. 3.

[59] Mohamed Misbah, *Moroccan Jihadis*. (Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2021, p. 90).

[60] Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, 2010, op. cit., 31.

[61] Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Shāibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī ʾuūl al-sharīʿah*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al ilmiyah, 2004, p. 451).

[62] Abu Hafs Mohamed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, 2010, op. cit., 13.

[63] Kate Barrelle, "Pro-Integration: Disengagement from and Life after Extremism," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 7 (2), 2015, pp. 129–142; Adrian Cherney & Emma Belton (2021) "The Evaluation of Case-managed Programs Targeting Individuals at Risk of Radicalisation", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2021, pp. 1–20. Lorne L. Dawson offers a convincing analysis of "the explanatory value of religious motivational claims" (…) and "their constructive role" (…) in advancing our grasp of the exact nature of the actions of religious terrorists (pp. 2–3) in: "Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflections on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism (Part 1)." *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Vol. 15, Issue 1), February 2021, pp. 2–16.

[64] Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*. (New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 46).

[65] Disley, Emma, Kristin Weed, Anais Reding, Lindsay Clutterbuck, and Richard Warnes, *Individual disengagement from al-Qaeda-influenced terrorist groups: A Rapid Evidence Assessment to inform policy and practice in preventing terrorism*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012. URL: https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR785.html.

Countering Violent Extremism or Resolving Conflicts? Bridging Micro- and Macro Perspectives on Countering Jihad

by Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Isak Svensson

Abstract

This article brings together two divided fields that suggest different solutions on how to counter violent jihad, namely Conflict Resolution (CR) research and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approaches. Common for the CVE approaches to jihadism is that their main level of analysis is the individual, seeking to understand what/who attracts the individual recruit to embrace extremist views, in order to devise strategies for preventing the individual radicalization process. In contrast, the CR framework has paid less attention to violent jihadism as individual radicalization but focuses more on group behavior. In this article, we explore whether synergy can be created by combining insights from these two fields. Three areas appear to be potentially fruitful for a future research agenda: creating interaction between research on disengagement and conflict transformation, creating synergy between research on conflict extension and the globalization of jihad, and searching for solutions using institutional forms of religious autonomy. The article ends by exemplifying how jihadi conflicts can be analyzed, both from a worldview perspective but also as a reflection of a macro-securitization process.

Keywords: jihadist conflicts, Islamist, conflict resolution, countering violent extremism, religion

Introduction

This article aims at examining the field of Conflict Resolution (CR) and its nascent thinking on jihadi conflicts and asking how it can utilize relevant insights from radicalization literature and the derived Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approach to violent jihad. It is puzzling that two fields that have so much in common, not least their ambitions to find practical solutions to a shared challenge, rarely interact.[1] We conceptualize violent jihad broadly as violence committed by actors with self-proclaimed jihadist claims i.e. they frame their struggle as a religious obligation. While both CR and CVE are broad fields, and we cannot hope to capture all of the variances within these fields, our scope here is to explore the ways these two approaches have been used to study violent jihad. We do not suggest that the fields need to be merged, but rather that in the study of violent jihad, insights and approaches that have dominated in one field may be useful to be considered in the other.

The CVE framework covers literature and a range of policy initiatives that apply socioeconomic, psychological, or sociological frameworks for understanding the reasons for radicalization and analyzing options for countering-strategies.[2] Common for the CVE approaches to jihadism is that their main level of analysis is the vulnerable individual, asking what/who attracts the individual recruit to extremist views or extremist networks, in order to inform strategies for preventing the individual radicalization process.[3]

By contrast, the CR framework has paid less attention to violent jihadism as an individual form of radicalization process and focused either on the groups and movements as the relevant level of analysis, or on the conflict constellation as the main analytical category. Our review of the CR literature leads us to identify some areas of synergy. In particular, we point at how the question of individual disengagement and collective conflict transformation need to be better understood by drawing on insights from both literatures/approaches.

The article will proceed as follows. First, we review the field of CR, its merits and blind spots when it comes to understanding jihadist conflict. This leads to an examination of focal areas from CVE approaches on how to deal with violent jihad that can be useful for CR research. The final sections briefly introduce examples of theoretical approaches—macro-securitization and worldview-analysis—that represent ways to merge insights from both perspectives.

How CR Approaches Are Seeking to Counter Jihad

The insight that conflicts can be resolved—not only won, lost or avoided—is ancient, but the idea that it can be worthwhile exploring through scholarly study is little more than half a century old.[4] The *Journal of Conflict*

Resolution was founded in 1957, and this can be regarded a growing acknowledgment of the value of studying how conflicts, at various levels of analysis, can be dealt with in a peaceful manner. Conflict resolution has been a central theme of interest for peace research since its inception.[5]

A primary, although not exclusive, interest has been in actors who are armed (governments and rebel groups). This interest in armed actors has led to the field being dominated by group-level analyses. Studying conflict resolution on the group level can thus be seen as a reflection of the capacity to use force of various actors. Whereas individuals may cause havoc, the destructive capacity of individuals pales compared to the one of armed groups and state actors. Governments and organized non-state actors (rebel groups) have access to material, military, economic, social, and cultural resources which they can mobilize when engaging in conflicts, making conflicts where they are involved particularly destructive and dangerous.[6]

The group-level analysis has traditionally led to an interest in collective outcomes, rather than focusing primarily on individual decisions. For instance, CR has been particularly interested in studying how peace agreements, as a collective outcome in social, and particularly armed conflicts, can be reached. The process of reaching, as well as the content of, peace settlements that meet the aspirations of the engaged actors, be they state, non-state or inter-governmental, actors, have therefore been key focal points of study in the field of CR. Group-level analysis has been the focus in conflict resolution, but also one of its weaknesses. Increasingly, CR as a field has started to explore micro-dynamics of conflict resolution processes by, for example, paying more attention to the role of attitudes of populations in post-conflict peacemaking,[7] as well as processes which drive individual level rebel-recruitment.[8] However, this has so far not been extended to the analysis of violent jihad.

Thus, there is a widespread recognition that parties in armed conflicts are not unitary actors, and that there is a need to study intra-party dynamics. Group-level decisions are formed through dynamics between forces that may have very different positions and interests in terms of reaching conciliatory relationships with the other side. In particular, there can be tensions between hardliners ('hawks') and softliners ('doves') within one side in conflict, tensions that may not necessarily be visible from the outside and that may lead to contradictory behaviors and statements. Actors are not unitary and different (sub-)actors and (sub-)factions have different incentives in terms of seeking a resolution of conflicts—an insight that has generated considerable research on spoilers in conflict resolution processes.[9]

Insights from the Conflict Resolution Approach

There are a set of fundamental insights and perspectives that have guided and permeated the study of conflict resolution, which are important in the study of violent jihad. The first is to study the armed *conflicts* and insurgences in which jihadi actors are involved, rather than extremism or radicalism more broadly. Most jihadi violence occurs within the context of armed insurrections, and only a fraction occurs outside of zones of active armed conflicts, as manifested in sporadic attacks in Western countries. Focusing on conflicts therefore enables CR to deal with the thrust of the problem and enables CR to compare and contrast jihadist conflicts in relation to other types of armed insurgencies.

The second focus of the CR approach is its *relational* perspective: conflict is not primarily studied through the perspective of one side, but as an interlocked system. Conflicts are seen as social systems of antagonistic relationships between actors, and the resolution of conflict requires attention to all the actors included in that social system, paying attention to their behavior, positions, attitudes, and interests. Conceptually, conflict resolution has analyzed conflicts as incompatible claims to the same set (or, at least, perceived set) of limited resources between at least a pair of conflict actors (so-called *dyads),* or several conflict actors *(multi-party conflicts).* If we want to understand why a conflict is resolved or not, we thus need to pay attention to all actors involved in a conflict, and their respective relationships.

The second insight of the field of conflict resolution is the need to pay attention to the incompatibility from the perspectives of the belligerents themselves. This has led CR to explore the dynamic relationship between conflict parties' *stated positions and the underlying interests or needs*. Structural perspectives of social inequality, including class-, gender- or nationalist perspectives, rest on an assumption of what conflicts are about (e.g. eco-

nomic inequalities, gender inequalities, and ethnic differences), even though the parties in conflict themselves may not necessarily be (fully) aware of this. Conflict resolution, by contrast, takes the parties' own perspectives and self-definition as a starting point for the analysis. This means that the stated positions of parties in conflict need to be taken seriously—which helps to categorize conflicts by dimensions of incompatibility—but also that the resolution of conflict requires the parties to search for potentially common underlying interests. An analysis of conflict must pay attention to what the parties themselves say about *why* they are fighting, but at the same time, not take the stated reason as the final answer: the diagnosis of conflict resolution requires that questions are asked about the underlying interests and, even more so, needs that parties in conflict have—the deeper reasons why they pursue a particular aspiration in a conflict.

By digging deeper in an analytical sense, conflict resolution can help to shed light on the reasons that lie behind suggested solutions. If these reasons can be disentangled and made explicit, a basis for other types of solutions can be created, which meet the interests or at least the needs of the parties, but not necessarily in a way that was originally desired by the parties themselves.

A third insight from CR is that, since conflict escalatory dynamics will kick in to further escalate conflicts once they have started, the resolution of conflict will not occur until the parties exhaust themselves, at least in some respect. Processes of conflicts tend to reinforce themselves, up to the point when further escalation is not possible, given the available resources and limited interests of the parties in achieving their originally stated aspirations. Serious negotiation between antagonists will not be initiated until the situation is ripe for resolution: when the parties have reached a stalemate from which they cannot escalate the conflict, while simultaneously being disincentivized to move away from this stalemate due to the perceived costs being too high. In short, conflict actors will generally not be willing to come to the negotiation table unless there is a so-called 'mutually hurting stalemate'.[10] Still, hurting stalemates are not enough. Conflict resolution requires opportunities and space for finding a mutually acceptable outcome. There has to be a formula on how to settle the conflict in the broadest way. Moreover, conflict resolution requires the presence of valid spokespersons.

CR has, like other fields, been theorized on the basis of a certain empirical scope, primarily on the series of successful conflict resolution attempts in the early 1990s, most of which were not by actors involved in violent jihad. Whether the insights of conflict resolution are applicable therefore remains an open empirical question, but the specificity of jihadist conflicts pushes us toward some considerations that are new to the field.

Firstly, while conflicts are, from a CR perspective, pursued to advance underlying interests and/or needs, what about situations where waging conflict is itself the aspiration? What if religious actors are in fact fighting for religion, or in defense of religion, so that religious claims are not just a rhetorical cover over some more earthly issues that are assumed by some to be the 'true' cause of conflict? Some jihadist actors may engage in conflict because they value the fight itself, as a religious obligation, or the expected reward—a place in paradise. This would represent a fundamental challenge to the CR perspective. It would affect, for instance, the perceptions of costs in conflicts. Can belligerents be incentivized to move from the battlefield toward the negotiation table, if death (sacrifice) and destruction (fighting for God) is valued as a price rather than perceived as costs?

Secondly, the CR framework requires that, ultimately, there must be possible solutions in which both parties' aspirations, or at least their interests and needs, are met simultaneously. There has to be a 'zone-of-agreement' in order for a process of conflict resolution to make sense. But do such zones of agreements exist in jihadist conflicts where the claims relate to the protection of the sovereignty of God?

Thirdly, CR approaches apply a schematic conflict structure, where the government is often on one side of the conflict dyad and the rebels on the other. Transnational jihadist groups like the Islamic State or al-Qaeda are, however, not opposed to only one government. This has implications for bargaining, as transnational jihadist movements can retreat to other countries. It has also implications for theories of 'conflict ripeness' and 'mutually hurting stalemates'—assumptions that are foundational for much CR thinking.[11]

How CVE Approaches Are Seeking to Counter Jihad

The bulk of the literature on jihadism that arose in the wake of 9/11 was inclined to focus on the radicalization process of the individual, although some of the literature also focused on group or organizational levels of analysis. Part of the literature is interdisciplinary and attempts to combine factors of explanation such as moral outrage about a perceived war against Islam, the resonance of jihad with personal experiences, and mobilization of networks.[12] Focus has primarily been on the individual, sources of discontent, or influence from a "radicalizer", who is often seen as the instigator of the radicalization process, disconnected from macro-level conflict structures. CVE practice is part of this trend, which developed from policy demands to think tanks and academic research centers which were expected to explain the phenomena of either jihadist violence or the individual embracement of jihadist ideas through their respective disciplinary lenses. Psychologists became preoccupied with searching for cognitive patterns,[13] sociologists and area specialists (and much of the public policy community) with social networks,[14] and political scientists with questions related to counterinsurgency and foreign fighters.[15] Another overall trait of the CVE practices is that, like radicalization research, they are based on psychological and sociological explanations, sometimes in a fruitful interplay, and sometimes as isolated frameworks for explanation.

CVE practices offer insights into the practices of engagement in, and disengagement from, terrorism,[16] focusing on building resilience and reducing the structural causes to terrorism (discrimination, corruption, lack of democracy, etc.). In addition, there are proposals made in programs for bringing back to society members of violent extremist groups, usually referred to as 'disengagement strategies'.[17] Incentives can include amnesties, job training and education for reintegration, economic subsidies to participants and their families, as well as introducing them to new social networks.[18]

A second insight that particularly radicalization studies bring to the table is a focus on the *centrality of legitimacy* in efforts to address the attractiveness of jihad.[19] One analysis of terrorism in Europe has, for instance, shown that "legitimacy-challenges" can explain the rise of terrorism in selected European countries. Engene, for example, found in 2007 that the countries that faced the biggest challenges from homegrown terrorism were characterized by three types of legitimacy problems: ethnic fragmentation leading to separatist movements, integration problems marginalizing some groups of society, and problems with transforming from one type of governance to another (e.g., from democracy to dictatorship, or reverse).[20]

Finally, CVE and radicalization approaches to jihadism have, due to their focus on ideology and religion, led to multiple understandings of the role of religion in mobilization. Whereas most of this literature is preoccupied with causalities (between religion and violence), and is also often criticized for drawing too-simplistic chains of causation, they have nevertheless opened up spaces for multidisciplinary debates on what the role of religion is and whether it is a minor or a major driver of jihadist violence.[21] This has ultimately led to a multidimensional approach to religion, thinking of it not only as ideology, but also identity, emotions, culture, etc. This has opened a venue for the study of the significance of religious emotions in conflict escalation,[22] and thrown new light on the significance of jihadi culture.[23]

It is often hard to strictly separate literature that deals with radicalization (and its causes) and assumptions behind "countering" extremism approaches, since the latter is based on assumptions or theories generated by the former. Rather than entering here into a discussion about weaknesses of the radicalization concept or offering a description of its main theories,[24] we instead want to discuss in the following the specificity of the CVE focus in terms of its thinking on countering radicalization and extremism. Taken as a whole, existing countering strategies deal with almost everything—ranging from border security to community policing, from intelligence gathering from social media to the development of counter-narratives that are focused on prevention of radicalization, while also covering so-called exit-programs in which individuals are assisted in leaving extremist environments.

Three countering paradigms run through the literature: one of the most dominant is to conduct interventions aimed at "at-risk individuals".[25] These approaches are, however, sometimes criticized for being counterproductive as they can contribute to strengthening vulnerable individuals' feelings of marginalization. A second

countering paradigm is to counter extremist ideas, for example by building resilience against extremist ideas among vulnerable communities. Concretely, in US policies, this has meant countering violent extremist propaganda while promoting US ideals.[26] Finally, a third countering paradigm entails disrupting potential social triggers to extremism (e.g., job loss, discrimination). This also includes focusing on social networks and leaders. The physical presence of radical charismatic persons leading extremist networks are in some instances described as a major reason why terrorist acts take place in some environments but not in others, in spite of similar socioeconomic characteristics.[27]

Disengagement and Conflict Transformation

Based on our brief review of the two fields and the different discussions that flourished within them, we shall in the following try to identify some areas of synergies: how the CVE and CR perspectives can be fruitfully combined in the study of violent jihad.

A question that arises is whether CR can gain from insights into disengagement processes and the transformation of violent to nonviolent activities. The core question of this research field continues to be: what makes individuals leave jihadi movements? Part of the CR literature on armed-rebel-to-political-party transformation (as a CR mechanism) already deals with this aspect.[28] How can the insights from the study of individual disengagement and collective conflict transformation be integrated? If both approaches are used simultaneously, they can ideally serve to strengthen each other. When rebel groups and governments sit down at the table and jointly discuss programs of demobilization, space is opened for conflict resolution. Alternatively, when disengagement campaigns deplete an insurgent group's manpower, it can push its leaders to seek accommodation. Ultimately, a successful transformation from a violent to a civil actor requires that both cadres and supporters are ready to disengage from violence.[29] We have seen such transformations occurring in Egypt (Egyptian Islamic Group), the Philippines (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) and Tajikistan (Islamic Renaissance Party). Yet, there are also tensions between the different counterstrategies in terms of their emphasis on the group or the individual: measures aimed at individual deradicalization aim to weaken and undermine the group, whereas the facilitation of rebel-to-party transformations may strengthen or solidify a group transforming its means of influence from violent coercion of the opponent to nonviolent persuasion of the electorate. Following both strategies at the same time can be counterproductive. For example, in the context of Pakistan, both counter-terrorism measures and negotiation attempts with the Pakistani Taliban were initiated at the same time, leading to a breakdown of negotiations.[30] Attempts to break away individuals from a violent jihadi insurgency will, from the rebels' perspective, be seen as hostile acts aimed at weakening the group. Deradicalization programs (e.g., in the form of conditional amnesties) have, however, been part and parcel of military counterinsurgency campaigns against rebels in the past.

It should be recognized that the macro- and the micro approach may be most fruitful in different phases of conflicts. As conflicts emerge, relying too heavily on the micro-perspective may risk external actors to lose sight of the macro-level changes on the political level that may be needed in order to manage public grievances. Once conflicts have been framed in jihadist terms, the micro perspective on, for example, how to prevent foreign individuals from joining a jihad, is particularly applicable. Once an acute phase of a conflict is over, the post-conflict society requires attention to both the micro- and macro-level approaches in order to be able to reach a sustainable and stable peace. Moreover, the macro- and micro approaches may also be more or less applicable depending on the different types of conflict actors. The more radical a group is perceived to be, the less emphasis can be put on group-level changes, and in such case more emphasis has to be placed on counterstrategies targeting individuals on individual counterstrategies.

Global Jihad and Conflict Extension

CVE approaches have in general applied a more network-based conceptualization of jihadist actors than can be found in the field of CR. Jihadist insurgencies correspond poorly with traditional rebel-group structures and the unitary actor assumption that prevails in the CR field is inappropriate.

Jihadist conflicts are globalized, making it difficult to disentangle one particular conflict from the web of other

related conflicts. Regional conflict-complexes have existed before, but the jihadist conflict complex is both global and disaggregated in a way that has not existed before. CVE has tended to focus more on the globalization of violent jihad, particularly due to a concern for the role of returned foreign fighters, and how different geographical areas of conflict interact in various and complicated ways. This has only partially been paid attention to in CR- and conflict management literature.[31] This circumstance forces us to think about conflict resolution in transnational terms. Global conflict resolution may entail the evaluation of the usefulness of conflict extension theories as prism to understanding transnationalization, where conflicts expand across borders branching out from a locally defined internal armed conflict. In the broader CR literature, transnationalization is conceptualized as the involvement of external actors in domestic conflicts (conflict extension theories); as an effect of a disjuncture between the state-system and multi-ethnic communities (particularly the literature on the internationalization of ethnic conflicts has this approach embodied in the interaction theories), or as an instrumental tool for leaders who aim at increasing internal coherence in their own country by entering into disputes with other states (conflict transformation theories).[32] These theories are limited by their focus on external intervention in civil wars, by their more descriptive than explanatory contribution, or by their focus on the instrumental gain of power holders, when conflicts are transformed from the national to the international level. The dynamics of globalization, as conceptualized in CVE frameworks, seem to be more complicated and allow for causal arrows to point in more directions than just local → global.

Recent research has also suggested that these types of conflicts have a unique tendency to transnationalize and expand more easily due to the existence of transnational jihadi movements such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and the existence of multiple foreign diasporas that can be targeted for radicalization.[33] This dimension has led scholars to look at both conflicts as they affect the worldview of jihadists,[34] but also the noncognitive dimensions of conflicts, such as the ability of some conflicts to attract foreign fighters from faraway places.[35] Scholarly attention has also increased regarding collaboration and conflict between local jihadist movements and transnational jihadist movements (IS/AQ), and the regionalization of conflicts in terms of spillover of violence to neighboring countries.[36]

Searching for Solutions

Curbing the dynamics on the macro-level may affect the motivations and perspectives of individuals in relation to jihadist conflicts. One example is the demand for establishing and implementing sharia law, which appears in many conflict-contexts where Islamists are involved. A CR perspective may take the sharia-demand as a starting point in a search for solutions that may satisfy local demands regarding the role of religion in politics. Examples of autonomy solutions in the realm of religious affairs have been tried, with varying degrees of success, in Pakistan, Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria and Mali. A CVE-perspective can help to alert of the potential negative implications of providing legitimacy to non-secular ideas. Combining CR and CVE may thereby help to shed light on the repercussions of applying "religious autonomy" as a conflict resolution mechanism in the face of violent conflicts with Islamists.[37]

The ongoing conflict in Mali shows the potential value of combining micro-macro perspectives of CVE and CR. For most of the conflict's recent history, the CVE perspective has been dominating, which has shaped the Western approach to the conflict. Increasingly, there is now a recognition that the armed conflict cannot be brought to a sustainable end without dialogue and negotiations that must also include armed actors fighting under jihadist banners. Peace feelers between the governments and radical Islamist groups such as Katiba Machina are signs of a willingness on the sides of both the government in Bamako and among some of the actors in the jihadist insurgency that political accommodation is necessary. While at the time of writing this, it is too early to evaluate the outcome of these feelers, they are still noteworthy, implicating the potential usefulness of conflict resolution perspectives in managing violent jihad. Still, the CVE perspective will remain important, especially in terms of thinking about how to decrease the pool of recruits to the jihadist insurgency. Afghanistan is another example where initiatives on the micro-level, such as reintegration of insurgent actors, were later supplemented with attempts to start political negotiations with representatives from the Taliban leadership. However, it raises the question of what would have happened if there was better coordination of the policies aimed at reintegration at the foot soldier level, and the relatively unsuccessful attempts of national

reconciliation-based dialogue between the different militant and political factions of Afghan society.

Combining the Micro-Macro Scales—Two Approaches

There are many ways in which the micro-macro perspectives can be meaningfully integrated. As we have mentioned above, the literature on rebel recruitment as well as the emerging literature on popular attitudes toward peace processes are examples of this type of integration, although none of the existing literature has been applied to the study of jihadist conflicts in the framework outlined above. When it comes to the study of violent jihad in particular, the following two examples might be instructive.

One way in which the CVE and CR perspectives can be integrated is in the study of *de-securitization as a conflict-resolution approach*. The theory of securitization formulated by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies offers another way of understanding conflict resolution than the traditional approaches of CR.[38] Macro-securitization, a term coined by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, departs from the idea that international security can sometimes be structured by one dominant conflict, as happened during the Cold War.[39]

Jihadist conflicts can be understood through this lens, as it contains an overarching narrative in which the West and Islam represent opposing sets of values and ideas of governance.[40] The securitization of jihadism is driven by complicated transnational dynamics that ultimately are difficult to relate to a single securitizing move or a single securitizing actor. An analysis of the processes of macro-securitization requires the exact combination of looking into the mobilization of an audience on a micro-level scale (which the radicalization literature has typically done) and the meta-level narratives and speech acts that transform an issue from being a local-level concern to becoming a global/transnational concern, attracting new/broader audiences.

Thus, thinking of jihadist conflicts as cases of macro-securitization can lead to a new way of thinking about conflict containment, one which is more about de-linking local conflicts from ideological macro-level conflict structures and less about thinking of resolution within a civil war context, in which conflict-resolution mechanisms, such as granting autonomy to rebel groups/power sharing,[41] or negotiating the conditions for peace on a national level stand at the center of peace-making efforts.[42] This is a different approach than the countering-discourses, which stem from the individual-level analysis and are different from the containment thinking which stems from a civil war approach to jihadist conflicts.

Johan Galtung (1969) has spearheaded the view that conflict must be understood as a dynamic phenomenon, meaning that it is often of limited value to search for the root causes of a conflict.[43] Rather, it is more important to understand conflict as it is currently running in order to find ways to derail the self-propelling mechanisms.[44] This is partly what underlies in the concept of de-securitization,[45] though it remains underdeveloped as an operational conflict-containment mechanism.

Another way in which the CVE and CR perspectives can be integrated is through the study of *religious worldviews*. Mark Juergensmeyer's work on what he termed 'cosmic warfare' connects the significance of individual imagery with its relation to conflicts. According to Juergensmeyers elaboration, religion—when conceptualized as a worldview—can have explanatory power when it comes to situations of escalation. At the same time, one of the most important agenda items for future research on the intersection between religion and war will be to understand those aspects of religious worldviews that can have a de-escalation potential. Thinking about how cosmic wars have ended in history, also seems to be a fruitful path for future peace and conflict studies.[46]

CR has, as with International Relations (IR) studies more generally, tended to de-emphasize the role of religious dynamics as an explanatory framework, with a smaller subfield as a possible exception.[47] If jihadist violence has been included in the analysis, it has been conceptualized as part of a continuum of armed conflicts. CVE, on the other hand, has emphasized religious aspects, and while one will find simple causality models linking religion to violence, it has also triggered a broader and more nuanced conceptualization of religious dimensions of violence. Particularly the concept of 'ideological attraction' appears to have some utility for CR thinking. Literature on religious experience, religious emotions, and religious culture is still nascent in CR but might have relevance for theorizing about resolution, since these factors could offer potential explanations for why resolution is potentially harder to obtain when religious actors are involved.

Analyses based on the elaboration of a worldview and its components can hence say something about whether conflicts are prone to escalation, because it can reveal how individual actors perceive, interpret, and individually align themselves to the conflict. Hence—as the theory of securitization also prescribes—the cultivation of war imagery and the acceptance of the imagery from a convinced audience can increase the probability of mobilization and conflict escalation.[48]

Conclusion

In this article, we have sought to examine some relevant insights from two practice-oriented fields—CR and CVE—with different sets of assumptions about what matters most, in order to examine if there are any lessons to be learned concerning the containment of jihadist conflicts and individual mobilization for participation in jihad.

The merits of a CR approach to managing jihad are that they look at jihadi conflicts as systems of relationships, including the actions on the government's side. Hence the government is not automatically seen as the "countering" actor, but as a more active part of the (origin of the) conflict. Yet, despite an often-uncritical understanding of the role of the state/government in CVE approaches, CVE thinking can help bring other factors to the attention of CR: first, that transnational jihadi actors and movements are the premier examples of conflict constellations that currently escape standard CR schemes of conflict analysis. Second, it can potentially bring to the fore the centrality of "contested" paradigms of legitimacy, which seem to be particularly important for resolution thinking in the face of claims about religious autonomy. Finally, it brings in an attention to the significance of religion and ideology in spite of the fact that both the CVE and radicalization literature are often criticized for the way religion is often accounted for: as a root cause, or as a motivation on the actor level.

Compared to CVE, the group-level analysis in CR literature has led to an interest in collective outcomes rather than individual decisions and motivations. A clear merit of the CR approach is the relational perspective: conflict is not primarily studied through the perspective of one side, but as an interactive system. CR also works on the background of more global data, rather than being Western-biased, and CR literature also shows a recognition of the importance of conflict dynamics. However, the phenomenon of transnational jihad challenges central CR ideas like those about 'mutually hurting stalemates' and 'finding zones of agreement'.

This article has sought to identify some areas of synergy and future research. In particular, the combination of analyzing processes (individual and group-level) with structural conditions and more macro-level securitization seems to be fruitful to understand the dynamics of interplay at different levels.

Additionally, there are lessons to be learned by exchanging dynamics on individual disengagement practices and conflict transformation. CR has nascent literature on rebel-to-party transformation that could gain from the lessons from the individual level processes prompted by CVE initiatives. It can of course be questioned to what degree lessons from the West can be useful for non-Western conflict zones (where the context is remarkably different). However, studying the emotional, ideological and psychological aspects of disengagement and transformation is a potentially fruitful pathway for both, CR and CVE studies.

Conflicts with jihadi actors force us to bridge the gap between different units of analysis, rethink our conflict schemes, the role and significance of the state/government, and interaction dynamics between individual imagery and mobilization and macro-scale narratives and conflict drivers. Radicalization research and CVE thinking points us in the direction of thinking about conflict resolution detached from a civil-war context where conflicts "grow" from the local to the transnational. The dynamics of globalization seem to be more complicated and allow for causal arrows to point in many directions rather than just from the local to the global. As we have suggested in this article, macro securitization theory and the concept of cosmic war can lead us toward an increased alignment between the individual and the collective, the local and the global.

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Research Note

Camera-Recorded Extrajudicial Executions by the Islamic State (2015-2020): Analysis – Statistics – Data Set

by Judith Tinnes

Abstract

This Research Note provides findings from a systematic monitoring effort of visually documented extrajudicial executions perpetrated by the Islamic State terrorist group. Based on a data set covering 2,414 individuals killed between January 2015 and December 2020 (1,224 incidents) – which was compiled for 'Perspectives on Terrorism' in the monitoring project 'Counting Lives Lost' (CLL) – it presents results from long-term measures of roughly 20 incident- and victim level variables, including citizenship, gender, geographic location, execution method, and IS' justifying arguments for the killings. Accompanied by a supplementary statistics file featuring tabular and graphical representations of the data and the full data set, it highlights temporal trends, changing dynamics, and characteristic qualitative and quantitative patterns, providing unprecedented insights into the execution activities and victimization behavior of the terrorist organization. In contrast to earlier long-term studies, it includes local victims and is not geographically limited. The findings reveal a marked downward trend in incident and casualty numbers over time yet also make clear that IS executions have not come to a halt but continue to remain a persistent phenomenon. The data suggests that the group's territorial breakdown impacted its publicized execution activities. Patterns for conflict-related hostage killings and governance-linked Sharia executions differed significantly. More than 95% of the victims were local citizens from conflict nations (most of them Muslims), while foreigner killings were rare. Less than 1% of the victims were females. The IS' heartlands of Iraq and Syria constituted the main execution theater. Over time, execution activities relocated on a micro-level from urban to more rural areas (especially, within Syria and Iraq) and, on a macro-level, increasingly shifted to different regions (particularly West Africa). The IS named purported 'charges' of the captives as the reason for its violence. The bulk of these charges were related to the conflict between the group and its enemies, while accusations that were closely tied to its implementation of territorial governance had a much lower share. While the IS is often associated with transgressive execution methods, the majority of victims were killed by shooting, yet the group accounted for an unprecedented number of beheadings. Particular types of charges and execution techniques appeared to be associated with each other. Public executions before a physical audience varied for different killing styles and charges, and significantly decreased over time. In 52 execution incidents, the IS instrumentalized minors as executioners. While over 90% of the foreign hostages garnered coverage in Western news media, less than 10% of the locals were reported.

Keywords: Islamic State, IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh, extrajudicial executions, hostages, captives, beheadings, statistics, data

Introduction

The so-called Islamic State terrorist organization (henceforth: IS) has been conducting systematic human rights violations against its captives. To date, an unknown number of individuals has been kidnapped by the group, held, and often tortured, at its detention facilities or safe houses. The fate of numerous victims remains unclear at the time of writing.[1] Many of the captives ended up being executed, a fraction of these killings were visually documented by the group and publicized online. A small number of these media-transmitted atrocities (particularly those perpetrated against Westerners) and the visuals of them received tremendous attention by international mass media,[2] were actively sought by a significant number of internet users,[3] became "instant icons"[4] of the war on terrorism, and impacted politics of war in the victims' home states.[5]

Despite this significant public interest in the topic and its political implications, quantitative empirical research on publicized IS executions is rare. The dearth of analysis inhibits a holistic and nuanced understanding of the scale, dynamics, and characteristics of the issue, reflects the "lack of scholarly focus on the victims of terrorism,"[6] and reconfirms Yun's 2007 statement that the study of hostage takings "has suffered a shortage of quantitative data and corresponding analyses."[7] Few representative quantitative contributions on hostage

takings[8] in the 21st century center on incident or victimization patterns. Kim, George, and Sandler[9] analyzed 1,900+ kidnapping incidents to determine trends, features, and changes in hostage-takings over four decades and to identify determinants of logistical and negotiation successes in hostage missions. In two long-term studies (n = 1,400+ individuals, 657 incidents), Loertscher and Milton[10] examined trends of jihadist kidnappings from January 2001 to mid of July 2015, contrasted them to those of other non-state actors, and investigated how a hostage's individual characteristics influence the outcome of a kidnapping incident. Mellon, Bergen, and Sterman[11] explored how the ransom policies of Western nations have affected efforts to safely recover hostages taken captive by terrorist, militant, and pirate groups between 2001 and 2016 (n = 1,100+ individuals). Based on two overlapping data sets of roughly 4,000 kidnapping and hostage taking incidents over a fifty-year period (1968-2018), Schmid[12] analyzed what can be done to prevent kidnappings and acts of hostage taking. All these representative, large-n, multi-year assessments have in common that they focus on foreign victims (mainly Westerners) or transnational incidents and exclude locals.

Recent quantitative or mixed-methods studies that include local victims focus on particular groups of captives, geographical regions, or media types employed to communicate the violence, and often do not use a long-term approach. In two analyses of 6,000+ IS executions in Iraq between June 2014 and October 2015, Burke[13] examined victim characteristics and contrasted publicized and "hidden" (i.e., off-camera) hostage killings. Barr and Herfroy-Mischler[14] investigated in two studies quantitative and qualitative facets of 62 IS execution videos (including displayed hostage type and execution style) published between August 2014 and June 2015 to gain insights into the IS' media strategy (particularly its audience segmentation). Mottet[15] studied cinematographic techniques (including themes) of selected retributive justice videos (44 of them by IS) and other jihadist groups. Pearson and Zenn[16] analyzed trends in kidnappings of females by Boko Haram and the IS' West Africa Province (ISWAP) from July 2017 to April 2020 (n = 108 incidents) through a gendered lens. A growing corpus of studies from different academic disciplines examines aspects of the Yazidi genocide or the refugee crisis, such as the mortality and kidnapping rate[17] and mental health effects to victims.[18]

Several other relevant studies had a different main focus than hostage takings but included data on local kidnapping victims or incidents. Nanninga[19] examined in a systematic analysis the complete IS' video output from mid 2015 to mid 2018 in the context of the group's territorial setback and reported data on 343 execution victims – such as gender, execution method, and whether the captives were alleged enemy fighters or spies. Likewise, Milton[20] contrasted executions of alleged enemy fighters and spies displayed in official IS visual media products between January 2015 and August 2016. Winkler et al.[21] assessed in two studies the IS' use of about-to-die images in its periodicals. Several analyses from different academic fields that focused on the IS' law enforcement activities and institutions quantified executions and other punishments meted out against captives.[22]

The Counting Lives Lost Project – Aims, Scope, and Method

The previous discussion makes clear that, although the "kidnapping of local nationals [...] is a significant phenomenon in its own right,"[23] a long-term analysis of hostage takings that includes local captives and is not confined to particular victim or incident characteristics is still missing to date. To address this desideratum for research in the context of IS hostage killings, the author initiated the execution monitoring project 'Counting Lives Lost' (CLL) for 'Perspectives on Terrorism' in January 2015. The main objectives of the CLL project – which is ongoing at the time of writing – are:

1. To provide a representative individual- and incident-level census of publicized IS hostage killings based on a systematic long-term data collection effort in order to contribute empirical quantitative and qualitative facts on the scale, dynamics, and characteristic patterns of IS' execution activities and victimization behavior;

2. To counterbalance the Western media's reporting bias against executions of non-Western hostages by offering data irrespective of victims' citizenship.

Findings of the CLL project are being communicated on the project web page[24] through a periodical statistics-only publication which was initially released in February 2016.[25] Via a Twitter account (@CountingLivesPT), the author informs readers on statistics updates and publishes additional charts and information. While the statistics summarize mainly aggregated findings, the present Research Note adds an additional component to the project by presenting results from long-term measures to illustrate temporal trends, changing dynamics, and other characteristic patterns that were previously not covered. This analysis is based on a unique data set covering the first six years of the monitoring period (January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2020).[26] The data set[27] records 2,414 individuals killed by the IS in publicized executions (1,224 incidents) and measures roughly 20 variables (including citizenship, gender, incident location, execution method, and IS' justifying arguments for the killings). It is not restricted to particular groups of captives and includes individuals irrespective of their citizenship, combatant status, geographic location of death, or other features.

To build up the data corpus (aimed to be exhaustive), the author systematically collected IS execution visuals by regularly tracking official[28] IS social media accounts on Telegram.[29] To create a data collection as completely as possible, not only videos were considered but also image publications, such as photo reports or separately posted pictures – which have often been neglected by previous research on IS publications. The collection included all videos related to executions, including those released by the A'maq News Agency as well as mixed-content compilations which were not thematically focused on executions but contained scenes of hostage killings. The registered reference date for counting an execution was the release date[30] of the visual material displaying the killing. When several visuals were released documenting the same incident, the release date of the first-published visual was recorded.

All relevant visuals were thoroughly examined, cross-checked with secondary sources[31] (if there were any retrievable), and coded for roughly 20 variables in a condensed data sheet. It should be pointed out that despite the author's effort to identify as many details as possible on each execution, information provided by the IS was often the only information available for some or all parameters of a killing – hence it could not be independently verified. This is particularly true for executions of non-Westerners.

Finally, the data was analyzed by using basic descriptives and cross-tabulations. When interpreting the results, it is important to keep in mind that these methods did not allow for statistical inferences such as correlations or even causation. Therefore, while suggesting possible explanations for developments, dynamics, or patterns and indicating potential associations between variables (which are encouraged to be used as starting points for future research endeavors by other researchers), this study cannot give any definite answers to 'Why' questions but is limited to answering 'What' questions.

Results and Discussion

The following sections will present and discuss findings from the data analysis for the different variables focusing on long-term developments and patterns. The Research Note's main text is accompanied by a supplementary statistics file featuring tabular and graphical representations of the data.[32] To distinguish objects of the present Research Note from those of the statistics file when referring to them, the latter were preceded by the capital letter 'S' (e.g., Table S1 vs. Table 1). Also published alongside the manuscript is an anonymized version of the full data set on which the analysis is based for allowing interested readers to conduct their own research or to replicate the results. Both supplementary items can be freely downloaded from the CLL project page (for access, see Supplementary Materials section at the end).

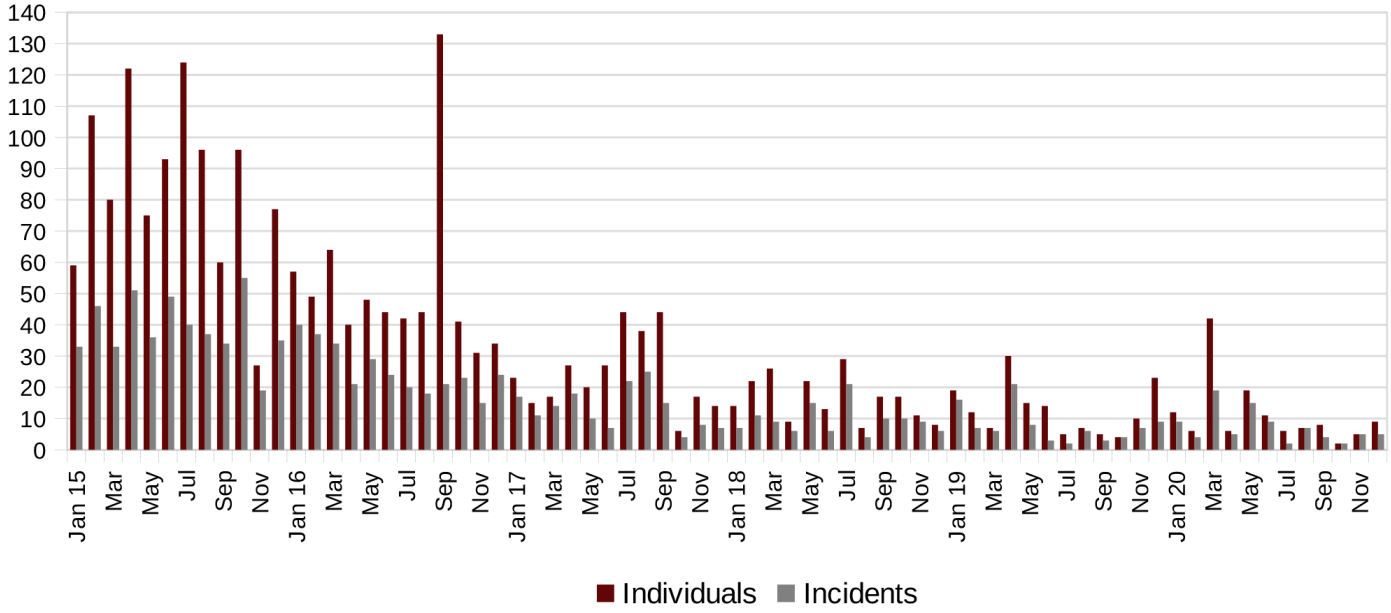
Victim and Incident Numbers

Between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2020, the IS has extrajudicially executed 2,414 individuals in front of a camera in 1,224 execution incidents.[33] Over three-fourths of the incidents (n = 932, 76.14%) and individual killings (n = 1,935, 80.16%) took place in the first three years of the monitoring period (see Figures 1, S2 and Tables S1–S3).

The data reveals a marked downward trend in incident and casualty numbers over time (particularly during the first three years of the monitoring period while approaching a plateau afterwards), yet also makes clear that IS executions have not come to a halt but continue to remain a persistent phenomenon. The incident and fatalities rate temporarily diverged from its general patterns, with several peaks observable on both levels. On the incident level, tying these short-term spikes to a specific cause is problematic as they can usually be attributed to a combination of different factors. Some peaks were triggered by propaganda events, such as thematic media campaigns with increased publication volume or the release of longer compilation videos covering numerous (often undated) execution activities. On the individual level, spikes were often connected to mass executions – the largest one with around 60 victims occurred in September 2016 (see Figure 1).

Table S4 shows that two thirds of the execution incidents (n = 812, 66.34%) were single murders. An additional quarter (n = 320, 26.14%) led to 2–4 fatalities, while mass executions – defined as incidents with five or more victims – were comparatively rare (n = 92, 7.52%); their annual share never exceeded the 10% mark throughout the whole monitoring period (see Table S5).

Figure 1. Individuals Executed and Execution Incidents by Month



Note. Total *N* individuals = 2,414. Total *N* incidents = 1,224.

Gender of Execution Victims

A striking key finding of the analysis is the marginal share of women in the data set. Of the 2,414 execution victims, only seven (0.29%) were female (see Table S6). The women were killed in five execution incidents; two of these cases were related. The extreme rareness of women is in line with the IS' "strongly codified gender ideology"[34] that delegitimizes both violence against women and violence conducted by women and reflects a long-standing trend in jihadists' and insurgents' reluctance to target women.[35] Also remarkable is the fact that all female execution victims were either veiled, blurred, or not displayed at all in the visuals documenting the killings. This is consistent with previous findings on IS propaganda at large: According to Crone, "[i]t is an overarching characteristic of ISIS videos that they convey a masculine world from which women are by and large absent or at least blurred and veiled."[36] In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the IS employs a distinct "pattern of disclosure and non-disclosure of executions"[37] that makes a generalization of targeting patterns observed in publicized executions problematic. While violence against women is largely absent in the IS' officially distributed visuals, there are numerous reports on unpublicized atrocities perpetrated

by the group against women (including executions).[38] Sometimes, the lines blur between the group's hidden and visible victimization of females. For example, the IS has openly claimed and legitimized the captivity and enslavement of Yazidi women in textual publications (e.g., *Dabiq* magazine or other periodicals), yet has never shown any of these females in a visual. In other cases, unofficial videos featuring female captives were passed to negotiators or leaked to social media but were not publicly distributed by the IS.[39]

Of the seven executed females in the data set, four were French and three were Iraqi citizens (see Table S7). The four French victims were kidnapped together in Niger and killed by gunshots in two separate incidents (one summary execution, one single killing) that took place in 2020. Although termed "Crusaders", the women were not charged with a particular crime. The three Iraqi women were killed in their home country in three separate publicly administered stoning executions on charges of adultery. Two of the killings occurred in 2015 in the IS province of Nineveh, the third one took place in 2016 in the group's Kirkuk province. Remarkably, the executions of females were mainly documented in image format – only one incident was shown both on image and video (yet for only seconds without providing any close-up footage), which stands in strong contrast to the IS' preference to record hostage killings on video. Five of the victims received coverage in Western news media. As four of them were citizens from a Western nation, this is not surprising because foreigners tend to receive disproportionate media attention.

When analyzing the gender of the perpetrators, the absence of women becomes even more striking: Not a single executioner displayed in IS visuals was female. In one instance, it was stated that the executioner was the widow of a deceased IS fighter who was allowed to shoot to death a Syrian soldier in retaliation for her husband's killing; but no visual proof of her involvement was provided. However, the reluctance to show women as violent perpetrators must not distract from the fact that women "were very much a part of these crimes."[40]

Citizenship of Execution Victims

Between January 2015 and December 2020, citizens from 35 different states lost their lives in publicized IS executions (see Table S8). Over 95% of the victims were locals from conflict nations. More than three-fourths of the executed captives (n = 1,891, 78.33%) originated from the IS heartlands of Iraq and Syria, most of them were Iraqis (n = 1,123, 46.52%).[41] Five more nations – all having a significant IS presence – lost more than 50 citizens each (Egypt: n = 142, 5.88%; Afghanistan: n = 84, 3.48%; Libya: n = 71, 2.94%; Yemen: n = 65, 2.69%; Nigeria: n = 56, 2.32%). The disproportionate victimization of domestic citizens can most probably be attributed to a number of different factors: Locals constitute the main population group of countries with substantial IS activity and often lack adequate protection measures, which makes them easier targets than foreigners. Moreover, their frequent targeting reflects the IS' ruthless efforts to eliminate all 'near enemies' who endanger its state-building project through directly engaging the group militarily, collaborating with local or foreign opponents, or politically or ideologically opposing the organization. Additionally, numerous locals became victims of the IS' self-styled Sharia courts which ordered draconian punishments for secular, religious, moral, or social 'crimes'.

Of the remaining 28 states in the data set, 27 had between one and 15 of their nationals victimized in IS executions (16 of these nations lost a single citizen). One state (Ethiopia) sustained 34 casualties (1.41%). However, this number did not result from a frequent targeting of Ethiopian citizens but from two related mass execution incidents.

Eighty-seven execution victims (3.60%) were foreigners coming from 20 different nations (see Tables S9–S10). Eighty-three foreign victims were males, four were females (all of them French nationals). Only ten abductees (0.41%) originated from Western states (France: 6, Sweden: 2,[42] Croatia: 1, Norway: 1). The low share of foreign victims was likely influenced by a growing unavailability of foreigners in areas with IS activity. According to Revkin, the terrorist group grew increasingly suspicious of media outlets, humanitarian organizations, and other entities with ties to foreign governments over concerns of espionage in the later years of its territorial phase. It expelled individuals and organizations and refused to issue so-called amān documents that purported to guarantee the safe passage to visitors seeking access to its controlled areas.[43] These measures likely

deterred foreigners from entering the group's territories. Loertscher and Milton attribute the low number of foreigner kidnappings to

> "the large amount of publicity given to very gruesome beheadings in recent years. Such publicity may have impacted the number of individuals traveling to high-risk areas, or, at the very least, increased their awareness of the threat and the importance of taking extra precautions."[44]

Winter points to a deliberate media-strategic shift by the IS from Western- to local targets, concluding that

> "since April 2015, Islamic State's propagandists have been decidedly more inward-looking, … focusing on intimidating and provoking those forces militarily engaging the group on the ground."[45]

Between 2004 and 2008, a similar shift from the 'far enemy' to the 'near enemy' could be observed in the media-strategic behavior of the IS predecessor organizations and other insurgent groups in Iraq and the Afghanistan / Pakistan region.[46]

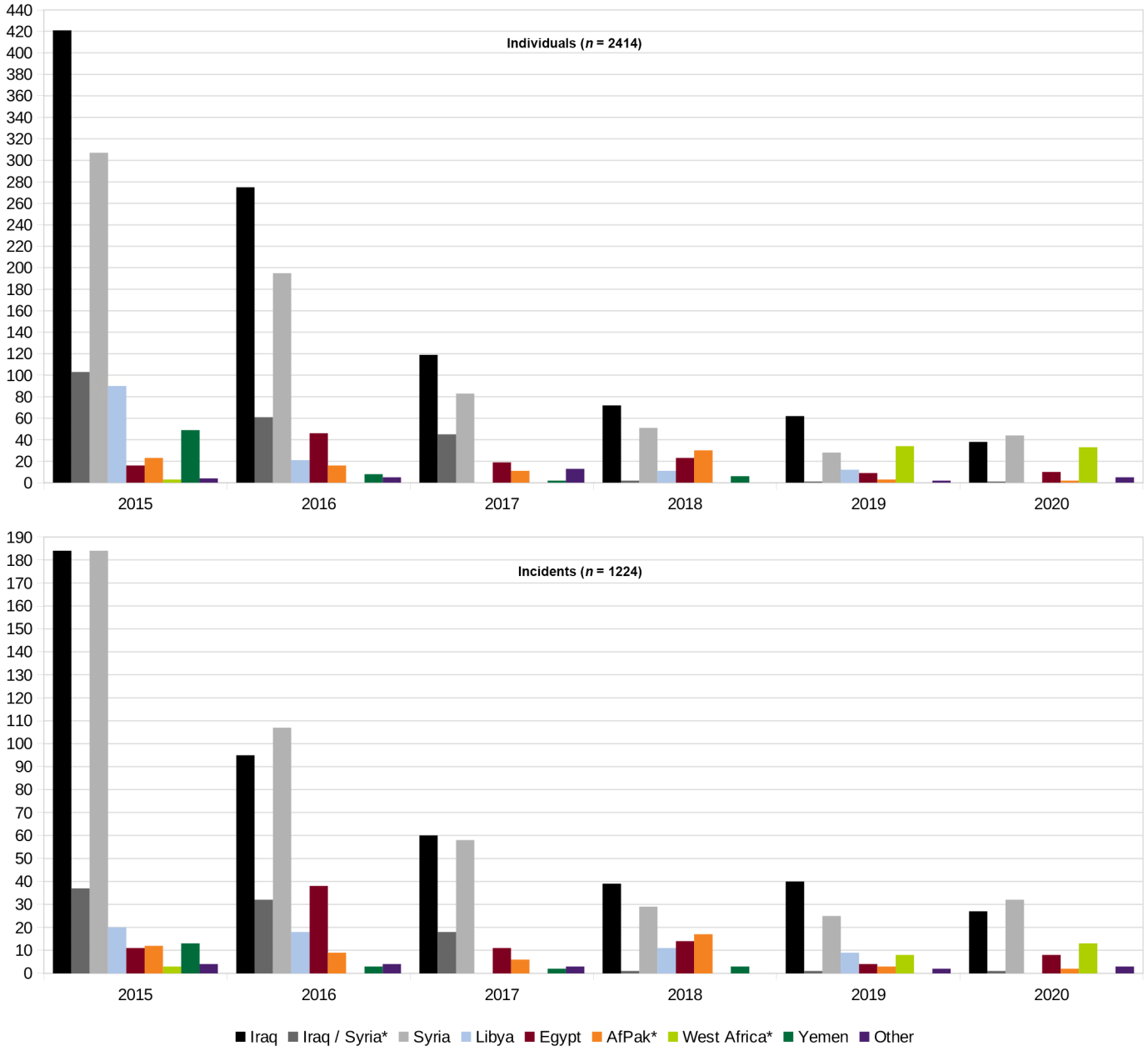
Table S11 shows that the majority of foreigners (n = 74, 85.06%) were executed in 2015. Libya was the main site for foreigner killings (n = 63, 72.41%) (see Table S12). However, when interpreting these numbers, it is important to consider that they were influenced by outliers as 58 of the foreign abductees were victimized in three mass execution incidents that took place in February and April 2015 in Libya.

Geographical Location of Executions

The main theater for publicized IS executions between January 2015 and December 2020 were the group's heartlands of Iraq and Syria (see Figures 2, S3, and Tables S13–S14). More than three-fourths of the execution victims (n = 1,908, 79.04%) lost their lives in these two states, most of them in Iraq (n = 987, 40.89%; vs Syria: n = 708, 29.33%; Iraqi-Syrian pan-border region[47]: n = 213, 8.82%). However, the difference in percentage share for both nations nearly dissolves, if one examines the data on incident level: while Iraq sustained more casualties, the number of execution incidents were almost identical in both countries (Iraq: n = 445, 36.36%; Syria: n = 435, 35.54%; Iraqi-Syrian pan-border provinces: n = 90, 7.35%), which implies that the level of IS execution activity in the two states was roughly comparable. Iraqi militants were more prone to mass killings, accounting for the higher body count (see Table S15): Forty of the 92 mass executions in the data set occurred in Iraq, almost twice as many as in Syria (n = 21).

A temporal breakdown of the geographical data by year reveals that the volume of execution incidents in Iraq and Syria continuously exceeded other nations throughout the whole monitoring period. Over 60% of the incidents (n = 775, 63.32%) and casualties (n = 1,609, 66.65%) occurred in the Iraqi-Syrian region during the territorial phase of the so-called caliphate, which ended in December 2017. Figure 2 shows that the decrease of execution activities in Iraq and Syria that coincided with the territorial breakdown of the 'caliphate' was the decisive factor for the sharp general decline in executions over time. Although it is empirically not possible to draw a causal relationship between the territorial losses of the terrorist organization and its publicized execution activities,[48] the observed pattern suggests that the territorial breakdown did have an impact.

Figure 2. Individuals Executed and Execution Incidents by State / Region: Development Over Time



Note. Asterisks mark IS territories stretching over parts of more than one state due to the group's abolishment of borders. The decline of incidents in the Iraqi-Syrian pan-border region was influenced by the formal restructuring of the IS provincial system in 2018. After the reorganization, the IS usually attributed activities to either its Iraqi or Syrian provinces, while references to the former pan-border provinces of Al-Furat and Al-Jazirah fell largely out of use.

An examination of the IS' execution activities in states beyond the group's Iraqi-Syrian core area reveals several discernible patterns. To begin with, the data shows that all states or regions with significant execution activity (henceforth defined as more than 50 casualties, or 20 execution incidents, respectively) were conflict nations / regions (as were Iraq and Syria) with a substantial IS presence: Libya (individuals: n = 134, 5.55%; incidents: n = 58, 4.74%), Egypt (individuals: n = 123, 5.10%; incidents: n = 86, 7.03%), the Afghanistan-Pakistan region (individuals: n = 85, 3.52%; incidents: n = 49, 4.00%), the West African region (individuals: n = 70, 2.90%; incidents: n = 24, 1.96%), and Yemen (individuals: n = 65, 2.69%, incidents: n = 21, 1.72%). This finding parallels previous research on Jihadist kidnappings[49] and is not surprising as, according to Schmid,

> "[c]ivil war, foreign intervention, absence of good governance, widespread corruption, economic misery, huge black markets, unpunished crime and lack of rule of law and human rights are some of the up- and mid-stream factors that are likely to contribute to down-stream kidnappings and acts of hostage taking."[50]

The execution activities in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, the Afghanistan-Pakistan-, and the West African region varied with regard to incident regularity and casualty numbers. Execution activities in Libya – where the IS controlled larger parts of territory and maintained governance structures in 2015 and 2016 – appear to be declining after territorial losses. Activities flared up for short time intervals in the years of 2018 and 2019, between years of complete inactivity (2017, 2020), yet were not enduring. The bulk of execution activities in Yemen occurred in 2015, decreased afterwards, and eventually came to a halt in 2018.[51] By contrast, executions in Egypt and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region – while fluctuating in frequency – occurred at a regular pace throughout the whole monitoring period and appear to remain persistent.[52] Both areas had strikingly low numbers of mass executions (Egypt: $n = 3$; Afghanistan-Pakistan region: $n = 2$; see Table S15). In the West-African region, patterns of hostage killings show a marked upward trend since 2019. Starting its execution activities in 2015 with sporadic engagement (three incidents), followed by a long span of complete inactivity between 2016 and 2018, the West African IS branch not only significantly increased the pace of its executions (to eight incidents in 2019 and 13 in 2020) but was also responsible for the highest per-location share of mass executions in the data set (29.17%; $n = 7$).[53]

The six remaining states with execution activities (i.e., Philippines, Somalia, Tunisia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh) had only a marginal share in the overall events (combined: incidents: $n = 16$, 1.31%; individuals: $n = 29$, 1.20%). In sum, the seven geographical areas of Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan / Pakistan, and West Africa accounted for nearly 99% of all execution incidents and casualties – indicating that publicized IS executions are mainly a region-bound, rather than widespread international phenomenon and appear to be tied to a significant physical IS presence in a conflict zone.

A breakdown of the data to the provincial level provides further insights. In most of its operational areas, the IS has established administrative divisions (so-called Wilayat) that are analogous to provinces.[54] At the peak of the group's territorial expansion, the majority of these were located in its heartlands in Iraq and Syria.[55] Over the course of the monitoring period, the IS publicized hostage killings in 36 individual provinces – in addition to a few other areas – where either no officially declared provinces existed or where the group did not provide any provincial information. The most active provinces on incident level were Nineveh ($n = 105$), Al-Khair ($n = 91$), and Raqqah ($n = 87$).

Table S16 and Figure S6 illustrate several interesting trends: Wilayat in the IS' core territories that harbored densely populated urban strongholds of high symbolic value during the heydays of the 'caliphate' (such as Nineveh, Raqqah, and Halab [Aleppo]) and used to be some of the most active provinces – not only for executions but for IS activity in general[56] – significantly lost relevance during the territorial breakdown phase and turned to low-level activity after 2017. Other Wilayat in Iraq and Syria were engaging in execution activities in a more consistent manner throughout the monitoring period, albeit sometimes showing patterns of peaks and troughs. These included provinces where the IS has long-standing historical roots (such as Kirkuk, Diyala, Al-Anbar, Dijla, and Shamal Baghdad)[57] and / or provinces with large ungoverned rural and desert areas (such as Al-Khair and Homs) where militants were able to shift their activities from urban centers to sparsely populated, hardly accessible regions, that offered safe havens and allowed them to blend into civilian communities.[58]

Beyond the IS' core operational realm of Iraq and Syria, a number of provinces showed patterns of regular activity as well. Remarkably, Sinai Wilayat (Egypt) turned out to be the fourth most active province on an incident level ($n = 85$). Wilayat Khorasan (Afghanistan-Pakistan region) ranked tenth ($n = 49$). Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyya (West African region) ranked comparatively low on aggregate level (rank: 20, $n = 24$), yet has shown a clear pattern of emergent activity since 2019. In 2020, it turned into the most active province (alongside Homs).

As already observed on the macro level with states / regions, the incident and fatalities rate varied for different provinces. Some of these variations were triggered by mass execution incidents. The largest of these summary killings (60 victims) occurred in Wilayat Shamal Baghdad, which ranked second on casualty level, yet only 14th on an incident level. These metrics indicate that high casualty numbers are not necessarily a strong indicator for a high regular IS activity in a province.

Finally, while beyond the scope of this Research Note, there is a factor worth mentioning which should be taken into account when assessing variations tied to geographical attributes: several IS affiliate groups originated as independent terrorist organizations (or franchises of established groups) with a longer history before joining the IS. Some of the variations reported in this and the next sections might therefore be rooted in the fact that these pre-existing organizations followed their local organizational cultures, norms, and behaviors which were not always in line with the core groups' policies.[59]

Arguments Stated by IS to Justify Execution Victims' Killings

The long-term data collected for the CLL project make clear that the IS invests significant effort for its justification[60] of camera-recorded extrajudicial executions. The terrorist organization tries to portray itself as a rationally acting force that does not engage in arbitrary violence. According to the group, 1,979 (81.98%) of the 2,414 execution victims in the data set were involved in adversarial behavior against it – either by warfare, enemy collaboration, or political / ideological opposition – and were therefore treated as conflict participants who constituted a threat to its state project and to Islam in general (see Table S17). Usually, the IS tries to legitimize hostage killings by referring to purported 'charges' of the victims (or the collective they symbolically represent). Over the course of the monitoring period, the charges variable was registered 4,263 times.[61] In 4,042 of these times (94.82%), the terrorist organization brought forward specific accusations against its victims; in additional 160 times (3.75%), the killed captives – though not specifically charged – were described as enemy fighters (such as soldiers or militia members), implying their conflict involvement. In only 61 times (1.43%), no justifying arguments were given at all.

Throughout the monitoring period, the IS specified a total of 34 distinct charges. It is important to point out that these charges were raised in terrorist propaganda and could often not be verified independently.[62] Table S18 provides a detailed breakdown of the specified charges which offers a number of interesting insights. First of all, the majority of victims killed in publicized IS executions were Muslims. This key finding is implied by the fact that 1,506 captives (62.39%) were charged with apostasy. This charge was the most often used justification in the data set, making up more than one third (35.33%) of the total volume of accusations. While this result might not be intuitive, it is consistent with earlier studies on Jihadist violence.[63] Notably, except for a few singular cases, the IS did not declare fellow Muslims to be apostates because they had deliberately abandoned Islam by converting to another religion or becoming atheists. Instead, following its extreme, self-styled form of Sunni Islam, the terrorist group excommunicated the victims (takfir) due to purportedly sinful acts or beliefs that 'nullified' their religious affiliation (such as working for or collaborating with hostile governments) and made them eligible for capital punishment.

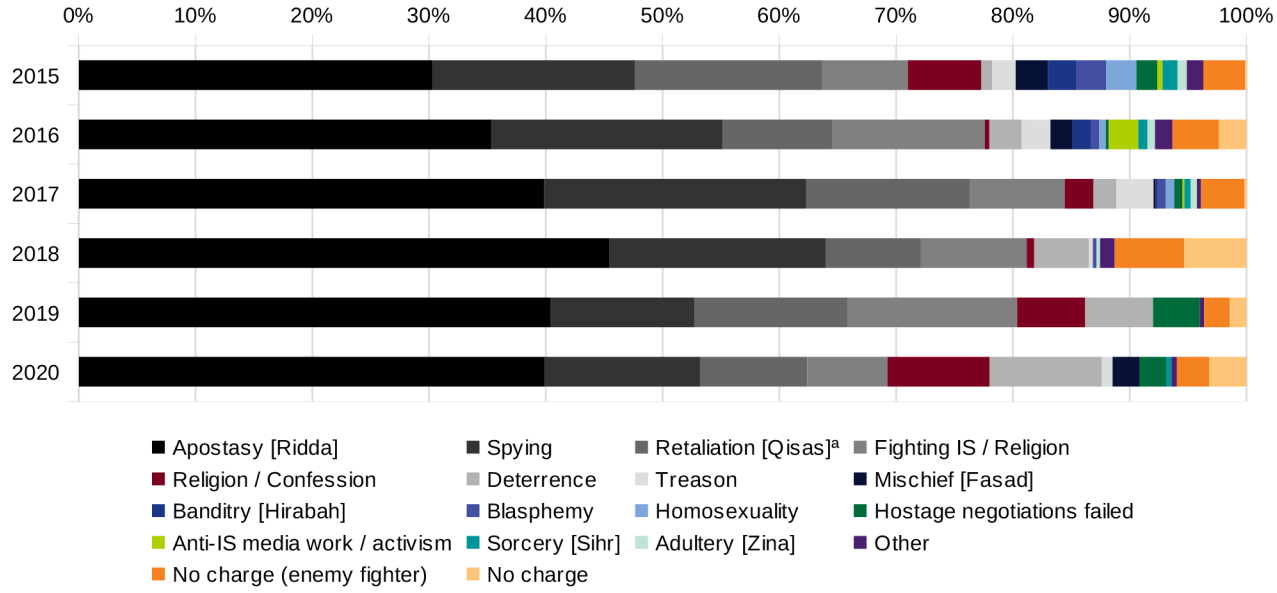
The majority of specific charges was related to the conflict between the IS and its numerous enemies. Combined, the charges of apostasy, spying, retaliation, fighting IS (or its self-styled form of Islam), deterrence, treason, and anti-IS media work / activism made up 81.59% (n = 3,478) of the total sum of charges. Throughout the whole monitoring period, they constituted between 74% and 90% of the annual volume (see Figures 3, S7, S9, and Tables S19–S20). In areas with significant execution activity, the predominance of conflict-related charges was particularly pronounced in Egypt, Yemen, and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, where this accusation category occupied more than 90% of the respective per-location share.

The comparatively high percentage for the spying [64] charge (18.32%) – which was the second most often named charge in the data set (n = 781) – indicates that the terrorist group

> "has a spy problem. […] Though the executions are designed to terrify the local population, they also demonstrate that the group is shaken by that same population's ability to provide accurate intelligence to the various militaries targeting it."[65]

Interestingly, the spying charge was never used in the West African region throughout the whole monitoring period.

Figure 3. Execution Victims' 'Charges' (as Stated by IS to Justify Killings): Annual Percentage



Note. Total *N* charges = 4,263. In the figure, terms used by the IS' illegitimate Sharia courts for Hudud or other Islamic punishments are added in brackets. It is worth recalling that the group derives these terms from traditional Islamic penal law yet uses its own interpretation of Sharia law when implementing 'justice'. [a] i.e., *lex talionis*; includes the crime of deliberate murder.

The charges of mischief, banditry, blasphemy, homosexuality, sorcery, and adultery – that usually related to civilian 'offenses' in the so-called caliphate – were featured far less often in IS execution visuals than conflict-related accusations. Combined, they made up 7.13% (n = 304) of the total volume of charges. Notably, they were largely confined temporarily to the first three years of the monitoring period (in sum: 97.37% of their use) and geographically to the states of Iraq, Syria, and – to a much lesser extent – Libya (in sum: 97.04% of their use), which strongly suggests that they were closely tied to the IS' implementation of territorial governance and mostly fell out of use after the group lost control of its former territory.

During its territorial reign, the IS engaged in "applied theology"[66] striving to establish a "caliphate upon the prophetic methodology."[67] One of the instruments to reach this goal was the introduction of a penal code that resembled traditional Sharia (Islamic law), yet actually was a "very own, rigorous, interpretation […] indicat[ing] that ISIS never felt obliged to comply with the legal framework set out by Qur'ān and Ahadīth."[68] The penal code served several strategic purposes at once – such as building a new, divinely-sanctioned order (and deterring transgressions against it), providing security and stability, "purif[ying] space, society and the Muslim community,"[69] and delivering ideological legitimacy before its constituency and rivals. The implementation of the code resulted in numerous executions of locals for secular, religious, moral, or social 'crimes'. Many of these punishments were meted out publicly in front of large civilian crowds (including children). When losing command of its territory and re-transforming from a pseudo-state with an administrative structure to a clandestine organization that relies on terrorist- and insurgent tactics, the IS' strategic imperatives appear to have shifted accordingly, rendering governance-related charges less important. Moreover, the loss of territory mostly deprived the group of the safe havens required to implement punishments before a physical audience.

Interestingly, the IS openly claimed to execute captives due to their religious or confessional affiliation. 158 individuals were killed for this charge, making it the fifth most common accusation in the data set (3.71% of the total volume of charges). For 80 victims it was even the only cited justification. While these numbers were inflated by several mass execution incidents, they are nevertheless remarkable because they document a communicative behavior which used to be untypical for jihadist organizations before, even for the IS' predecessor groups,[70] which – though systematically engaging in religious or sectarian violence – refrained from overtly claiming it (either by issuing no claims at all, or by offering justifications unrelated to faith, such as purported

personal 'crimes' of the victims, e. g., working for hostile security forces). In contrast, the IS openly propagates religious and sectarian cleansing – including civilian victimization. Libya, the IS' core area of Iraq and Syria, the West African region, and the Philippines were most affected by the group's demonstrative faith-based violence against captives. In Yemen and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, the charge was never used, while in Egypt it was named only once. Notably, the large-scale sexual violence against women of the Yazidi religious minority in Iraq and Syria was openly claimed and legitimized by the IS in textual publications, yet none of the female hostages has been ever shown in propaganda visuals – most likely due to the group's gender ideology.

Although all individuals in the data set were captives, failed hostage negotiations were named strikingly rarely as a killing reason – this justifying argument constituted only 1.22% (n = 52) of the total volume of charges. While there were several high-profile cases in the past where the IS publicly engaged in negotiations with different foreign governments, it is also known that the group conducted behind-the-scenes negotiations[71] – something that might possibly explain why it was comparatively reluctant to refer to negotiation activities in public statements. Notably, the West African region had the highest per-location share for this charge (13.01%).

Execution Methods

While the IS is often associated with particularly cruel and spectacular killing methods, the majority of victims in the CLL data set (n = 1,454, 60.23%) were killed by shooting (see Table S21 and Figure S10). Yet the high number of beheadings (n = 694, 28.75%), stands out, as it is unprecedented – even for jihadist organizations – and turns the strategic guiding principles voiced by Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2005 upside down.[72] While the then-Al-Qaeda deputy – in an explicit referral to publicized decapitations – instructed the IS predecessor organization to avoid excessive violence that the Muslim masses do not understand or approve for the reason of not losing their support, the IS made beheadings a central element of their violent brand. Beheading executions became emblematic for the group and inspired other extremist and criminal actors around the world to copycat this technique.[73]

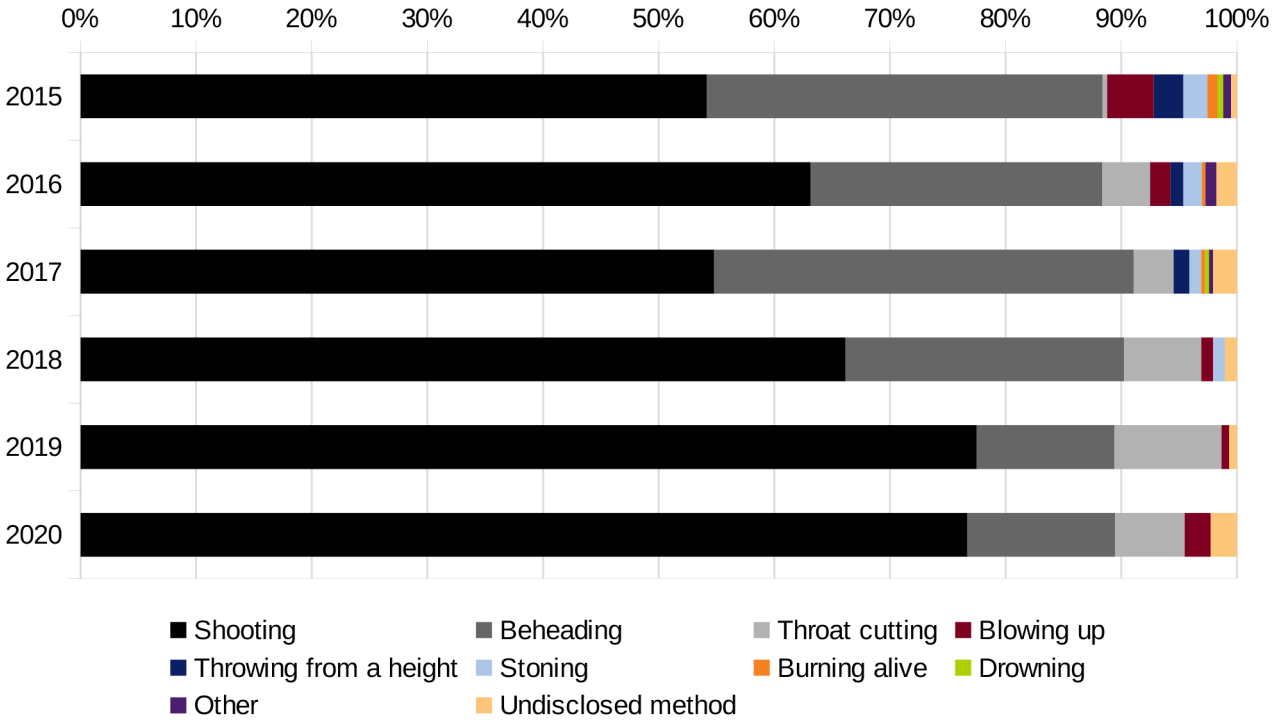
That IS militants still preferred gunshot executions over decapitations is likely owed to pragmatic considerations: Shooting is quicker and easier to implement and "facilitates psychological and emotional detachment,"[74] while beheading requires strength, know-how, and physical proximity to the victim. "In this respect, beheading as a terrorist strategy is effective only in terms of theatricality, rather than an effective way of killing the enemy."[75] Notably, most decapitation victims in the data set were killed by knife (n = 503, 20.84%) – a pejorative allusion to the halal slaughter of animals aimed at dehumanizing the victim – while the quicker and less painful technique of beheading by sword that has traditionally been used in Islamic punishment (in Saudi Arabia until today), was implemented to a much lesser extent (n = 164, 6.79%). Throat cutting, a method very similar to beheading in implementation and symbolism,[76] was the third most often used execution style (n = 75, 3.11%). In sum, 2,223 individuals (92.09%), were killed by either shooting, beheading, or throat cutting. Compared to that, other execution techniques constituted a marginal share (n = 163, 6.75%). For 28 victims (1.16%), the killing method could not be determined.

If one breaks down the use of execution techniques to foreign and local victims (see Table S22), the order of the two most common killing methods reverses: Beheading becomes the prevalent execution style, making up more than half of all foreigner killings (n = 44, 50.57%), and shooting ranks second (n = 39, 44.83%). However, when interpreting these numbers, it should be considered that they were to some extent influenced by mass executions. As foreign captives tend to receive a much greater amount of media attention, the higher share of decapitations for this victim group has likely strengthened the role of beheading as a signature element of the IS brand. Combined, beheading, shooting, and throat cutting made up 96.55% (n = 84) of all foreigner killings. The only other method used to execute foreigners was immolation (n = 3, 3.45%).

The spectrum of the applied execution techniques was broadest during the first three years of the monitoring period and most predominant in Iraq and Syria (where militants used more than ten different killing styles), indicating that the variance was to some degree tied to the territorial phase of the 'caliphate' (see Figures 4, S12, Tables S23–S24). The annual percentage for execution methods other than beheading, shooting, and throat

cutting dropped from 10.73% in 2015 to 3.42% in 2017. From 2018 onward, it constituted less than 2.50%. Since 2019, the killing of captives by explosives has been the only execution method used beyond the three most common techniques. It is likely, that the less common killing styles tended to require a territorial safe haven for their implementation – either due to their complexity and time-consuming preparation and employment (including their visual documentation) or because they were connected to public punishments which necessitated the presence (and sometimes even the involvement) of a physical audience.

Figure 4. Execution Method: Annual Percentage



Note. Total *N* individuals = 2,414. When several killing methods were employed to execute a victim, the primary method was counted.

The role of shooting as the prevalent execution method became even more pronounced during the last two years of the monitoring period when it increased to over three-fourths of the annual percentage. By contrast, the number of decapitations significantly decreased, dropping to roughly 12%. One of the reasons for these dynamics was the growing number of executions in the West African region, where IS militants had the highest preference for shooting and the lowest for beheading compared to other geographic regions with significant execution activity.

A breakdown of execution methods by the alleged charges the IS brought forward against its victims reveals an association between particular types of justifying arguments and execution techniques (see Table S25 and Figure S13). Predominantly conflict-related accusations (i.e., apostasy, spying, retaliation, fighting IS / religion, deterrence, and anti-IS media work / activism) were tied to a broader spectrum of execution methods (with the exception of treason) than charges that usually related to civilian 'offenses' in the so-called caliphate (i.e., mischief, banditry, blasphemy, homosexuality, sorcery, and adultery). In public discourse, the variance in applying punishments for conflict-related charges is often misinterpreted as mere arbitrariness or barbarism. However, this strips the phenomenon of its complexity and precludes a nuanced assessment. In the heydays of its 'caliphate', the IS followed a logic of climax and outbidding[77] in its execution visuals that aimed at deterring and humiliating its enemies in a rational-strategic "management of savagery".[78] Moreover, many of the malevolent-'innovative' execution methods used to kill individuals (or the collective they belonged to) constituted not only psychological warfare but retaliatory acts that served "to show that the group is the defender of (Sunni) Muslims and punishes the crimes of its enemies against the Muslim community (umma) in

kind."[79] The neglect of this retaliatory component leads to the messaging of IS execution visuals being either missed or misunderstood.[80]

Compared to other justifying arguments in the CLL data set, the charge of retaliation, or "qisas, a term in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) for revenge/retaliation/retributive justice,"[81] was punished with the broadest spectrum of execution methods. This is unsurprising, as the concept of qisas represents an equal form of retaliation (analogous to the biblical 'an eye for an eye'). Consequently, the nature of a particular penalty is connected to the nature of a particular crime, implicating an intrinsic variation on a case-by-case basis.[82] In this context, it is important to note that the IS often meted out qisas punishments in a manner that exceeded victims' alleged crimes.[83] This excessive application of the qisas principle can be considered as a deliberate behavior, as it was openly propagated by the group. For example, the former IS-leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi stated in a speech published on July 1, 2014: "we will take revenge, and every amount of harm against the ummah will be responded to with multitudes more against the perpetrator." Notably, the IS did not follow the qisas concept consistently but often used common execution methods to kill victims when avenging their alleged crimes. One of the reasons for this behavior might be found in pragmatic considerations: Standard execution styles were more efficient, not only in their preparation and application, but also because they did not require specific ideological justifications for unprecedented forms of violence to prevent unwanted criticism and backfire effects.

Compared to conflict-related charges, governance-linked accusations showed more homogeneous patterns: Some of them were strongly or even exclusively tied to particular killing styles or -sub-styles (e.g., of the 53 victims who were killed for homosexuality, 67.92% were executed by throwing them from a high place; 100% of the 25 captives charged with adultery were stoned to death; 91.43% of the 35 individuals executed for sorcery were decapitated by sword). The more consistent application of punishments in the context of governance indicates that the IS tried to communicate to the 'citizens' of its so-called caliphate that its penalties "are mandated by Shari'a law and are meted out not in an arbitrary fashion but as part of the group's established system of Shari'a courts and judges."[84]

In 106 of the publicized individual killings (4.39%), IS members desecrated the victims' bodies after their executions (see Table S26). While this behavior was comparatively rare – or at least not shown – for visually documented executions, it was actually a widespread practice in territories under the IS' control according to reports by human rights organizations based on accounts of locals.[85] The most often used practice of post-mortem desecration (n = 73, 68.87%) was crucifixion, whereby victims' bodies were placed on public display on crosses or scaffolds in a crucifixion position for up to three days. Posthumous crucifixion, which is historically rooted in traditional Sharia law and is still in use in Saudi Arabia, not only serves as a deterrent but also intends to humiliate the victims and prevents their relatives from burying their loved ones on the day of death (as it would be required by Islamic tradition). Throughout the monitoring period, post-mortem desecration was geographically confined to states where the IS held significant territory (97.17% occurred in Iraq and Syria, 2.83% in Libya). Temporarily, it mainly coincided with the heydays of the 'caliphate': 2015–2016: 97.17%; 2017–2018: 2.83%; 2019–2020: 0.00%). The post-mortem desecration of 68 execution victims (64.15%) was tied to executions in front of a physical audience. Together, these findings suggest a strong association between post-mortem desecration and the IS' territorial phase.

Public Nature of Executions

In places where it had access to governed territory or local safe havens, the IS meted out public punishments of opponents or civilians who transgressed against the group's self-styled, rigorous form of Sharia law. From the organization's perspective, public executions, which were often carried out at squares, roundabouts, or other central places, served to

> "provide a sense of law and order. The punishments signal the end of arbitrariness, demonstrate the power of the authorities, and express the idea that law is being applied now—not mere law, but God's law, rooted in scriptures and the practices of authoritative predecessors."[86]

Of the 2,414 execution victims in the CLL data set, 650 (26.93%) were killed publicly in front of a civilian crowd witnessing the event. For 32 individuals (1.33%) it could not be determined whether their executions were administered before a physical audience or not. The vast majority of captives (n = 1,732, 71.75%) were executed with no spectators present at the execution site – except the executioners, other involved IS militants, and the camera crew documenting the killings (see Table S27). On an incident level, public executions made up roughly a third of the total share (n = 392; 32.03%; vs non-public: n = 815, 66.58%; public nature undisclosed: n = 17, 1.39%). These numbers illustrate that the IS had a preference for carrying out visually documented executions in private.

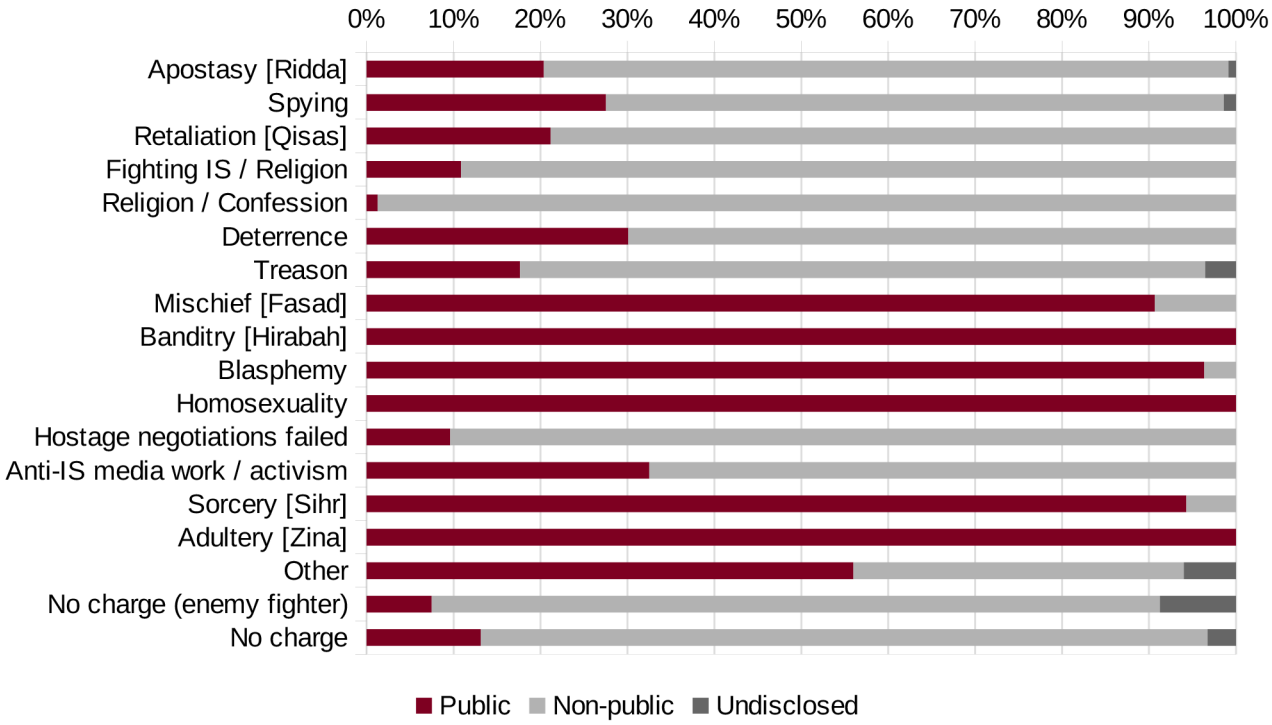
Most of the victims killed in front of spectators were locals, only three were foreigners.[87] The local victims encompassed three women. The audience of public executions often comprised children of all ages, usually boys.[88] Civilians were routinely urged by the IS to attend public executions whereby the group's pressure tactics included the use of force.[89] Moreover, the terrorist organization often involved civilians (including minors) directly in the implementation of executions (e.g., stonings), using its 'citizens' as tools to communicate its rules – as well as the costs of violating them.[90]

Over the course of the monitoring period, the number of public executions significantly decreased (see Table S27, Figures S14–S15), dropping from 248 incidents in 2015 (when the volume of public executions exceeded that of private executions) to zero in 2020. The vast majority (n = 378, 96.43%) of public executions occurred between 2015 and 2017. Geographically, public execution incidents were largely confined to Iraq, Syria, and, to a much lesser extent, Libya (n = 379, 96.68%; see Table S28, Figures S16–S17). 368 public executions (93.88%) were administered in these areas during the territorial phase of the so-called caliphate, indicating an association with the group's implementation of governance. Since public punishments were an essential method for the IS to realize its state-building project, they apparently lost significance when the organization was deprived of its territory and forced to resort to insurgent-level activity.

Interestingly, the public nature of individual killings strongly varied for different execution methods (see Table S29 and Figure S18). While some execution techniques were exclusively (e.g., killing by explosives, burning, drowning) or predominantly (e.g., throat cutting: 93.33%) employed in private killings, others were usually performed before – or even with the direct involvement – of an audience (e.g., throwing victims from a high place: 97.30%, stoning: 97.22%). There are most likely several different reasons for these variations – possible explanations could be, for example: a risk that spectators might get injured (killing by explosives), a time-consuming preparation, application, and documentation of killings that required a controlled environment without interference (all executions by burning and drowning were carefully choreographed and filmed with high-quality equipment), or the use of killing methods connected to governance-related punishments which necessitated a local audience to achieve the deserved effect (throwing victims from a high place, stoning).

A breakdown of the public nature of executions by the alleged charges the IS brought forward against its victims discloses that punishments for governance-linked accusations (i.e., mischief, banditry, blasphemy, homosexuality, sorcery, and adultery) were largely or even exclusively administered before a physical audience (percentages ranged from 91% to 100%) (see Figure 5 and Table S30). By contrast, executions for conflict-related charges (i.e., apostasy, spying, retaliation, fighting IS / religion, deterrence, treason, and anti-IS media work / activism) were mainly carried out in private (percentages ranged from 68% to 89%). Killings for failed hostage negotiations were predominantly implemented beyond public view as well (90%).

Figure 5. Public Nature of Execution Victims' Killings: Percentages for Alleged Charges



Note. Total *N* charges = 4,263. Public = captive was executed publicly in front of an unarmed civilian crowd. Non-public = captive was executed with no spectators present at the execution site (except from camera crew / attending militants).

Interestingly, public executions of captives for their religious or confessional affiliation were strikingly rare. Only 1.27% of the killings connected to this charge (2 victims) were applied in front of spectators. As mentioned previously, jihadist organizations have traditionally been reluctant to openly claim the killing of individuals merely for their faith. While the IS shows a distinct communication behavior in this matter and does not shy away from using the controversial charge when executing captives at locations hidden from public view (as it did with 156 victims), it appears to be cautious to name it when administering the death penalty in front of a physical audience – maybe to preclude local unrest. It is highly likely that the IS was aware of the (non-)permissiveness of its local environment to its violent activities. That in turn could explain its inclination to execute individuals for particular charges (e.g., homosexuality) exclusively in front of civilian spectators. As the IS' core region's legal and religious climate is largely inhospitable towards the LGBT-community – whose members were persecuted well before the IS conquered its territory[91] – punishments for homosexuality have a high social acceptance in the local population. Therefore, the IS did not have to anticipate significant backfire effects when killing homosexuals in public.

Recording Site of Executions

The vast majority of captives killed in visually documented IS executions (n = 2,286, 94.70%)[92] were executed outside of buildings. Only 4.72% of the hostages (n = 114) were killed indoors. For 14 victims (0.58%), it could not be determined whether the execution site was located in- or outside (see Tables S31–S32). When performing outdoor executions, perpetrators can demonstrate that they are in full control of the geographic area and do not have to hide at a clandestine location. By contrast, indoor killings bear a lower risk for executioners to be detected by security forces. With that in mind, it is surprising to see that, with only one exception,[93] all victims executed within buildings were killed in Iraq and Syria where the IS held its core territory. Furthermore, 67 indoor executions (58.77%) occurred between 2015 and 2017 (most of them in 2016) when the group had not yet been expelled from its dominion. While the annual percentage for indoor executions constantly increased between 2015 and 2019 (from 1.18% to 19.21%), it dropped to 2.26% in 2020 (the second-lowest

share of the monitoring period).

Executions carried out at historical sites attracted a disproportionate amount of media coverage, yet made up only a marginal share (n = 11, 0.90%) of the total number of execution incidents in the CLL data set (see Table S33). The conquest of historical sites and their exploitation for publicized killings constitute an act of provocation towards the international community, connote a military triumph over important political and historical symbols, and contribute to the theatricalization of executions.[94] All 11 incidents occurred 2015 in Syria (seven in the IS Wilayat of Al-Khair, four in Homs). The affected historical sites in Homs were all located in Palmyra: the Roman Theater, the Arabic Citadel, the Great Colonnade, and the Old City. In Al-Khair, the sole location was the Citadel of al-Rahba (which is located in the outskirts of al-Mayadin). Notably, eight of the 11 incidents involved minors as executioners. Two of the 11 executions were performed in front of spectators. A total of 39 individuals (all of them male locals) were killed at historical sites, 25 of them in a public mass execution carried out by child executioners at the Roman Theater in Palmyra. 36 captives were killed by shooting, three by beheading.

Involvement of Minors in Execution Incidents

One of the most distressing aspects of IS executions is the instrumentalization of children and youths in publicized hostage killings. Turning minors (including pre-school age children) into executioners provokes global outrage as it transgressively breaches international norms regarding the protection of childhood. The IS terrorist organization demonstratively propagates its employment of children and youths in violent acts. From the group's perspective, the use of child recruits is justified as it is rooted in prophetic traditions. In its own words, the "lion cubs" are "a new generation waiting in the wings" that is being prepared by its fighters "to face the crusaders and their allies in defense of Islam and to raise high the word of Allah in every land" and that will "stain [its] bullets with the blood" of its enemies.[95] Because a "key aim of its education system is to incentivize and emotionally justify violence by children",[96] the IS mentally and physically desensitized its child recruits to extreme violence. In training camps, minors were indoctrinated to the group's radical ideology, made to watch execution videos on large screens, urged to attend public executions as witnesses, and had to practice executions with dolls before some of the boys were eventually tasked to carry out executions themselves in military drills, public punishments, or for propaganda purposes.[97] A number of children who were instrumentalized to commit hostage killings had been forcibly recruited from persecuted communities, such as the Yazidi minority.

Of the 1,224 camera-recorded execution incidents documented in the CLL data set, 52 (4.25%) involved minors[98] as executioners (see Table S34). Four of these incidents were mass executions. Ten killings by child executioners were carried out in public. In 18 additional cases (1.47%), minors were not instrumentalized as direct perpetrators of the killings but had to perform other tasks in the execution procedure (e.g., guarding the execution site, leading the victims to the execution spot, distributing knives to the perpetrators, or operating the media equipment for the visual documentation of the killings). In the remaining incidents – which constituted the vast majority (n = 1,154, 94.28%) – the executioners were either adults or were not displayed in the execution visuals. While any passive involvement of minors in executions (such as spectatorship) was not considered in the data collection, it is important to point out that children of all ages routinely witnessed public executions[99] in IS territories.

Although the IS instrumentalized very young children as executioners several times, none of the execution victims in the data set was a pre-pubescent child. However, a few victims (usually members of rival militant groups) were youths. As the IS does not hesitate to kill children in secrecy,[100] the group's restraint to victimize young kids in publicized executions is likely rooted in a media directive aimed at preventing counterproductive effects of its propaganda campaign.

The bulk of incidents with minor executioners (n = 47, 90.38%) took place between 2015 and 2017, when 12–19 cases occurred annually. Since 2018, the number has significantly decreased to 0–4 incidents per year (see Table S35).

Geographically, incidents with child executioners were confined to the IS' Iraqi-Syrian heartlands, concentrating in Syria, where 31 of the 52 incidents occurred (59.62%; vs. Iraqi-Syrian pan-border region: *n* = 10, 19.23%; Iraq: *n* = 5, 9.62%), and the regions of Afghanistan-Pakistan (*n* = 5, 9.62%) and West-Africa (*n* = 1, 1.92%) (see Table S36). Of the five incidents that took place during the last three years of the monitoring period, two occurred in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, and one in West Africa, indicating a geographical shift. Interestingly, in Libya, Yemen, and Egypt – all areas with significant IS presence, execution activities, and territorial safe havens – the terrorist organization did not employ any child executioners throughout the whole monitoring period. These geographical variations might be rooted in local organizational cultures and norms that resulted in differing behaviors. As mentioned previously, several IS Wilayat historically emerged as independent militant organizations before joining the IS and therefore brought in their own distinct policies.

A breakdown of the killing methods used by minor executioners reveals a preference for shooting: 32 of the 52 incidents (61.54%) involved this killing technique (see Table S37). Beheading was the second most common execution style (*n* = 10, 19.23%), followed by stoning (*n* = 6, 11.54%). In two additional incidents, the victims were first thrown from a high place by IS militants and then stoned to death by a civilian crowd which included children (*n* = 2, 3.85%). In one case (1.92%), an armed boy executioner forced a captive to jump from a high building and shot him while dying afterwards. The remaining incident involved a four-year-old child who was made to detonate a car bomb by remote control. Except for the decapitations (which were all conducted by knife), the applied execution methods did not require much physical strength, which might be one of the reasons why the IS employed them in incidents with minor recruits.

Use of Symbol-Colored Jumpsuits

In media reports and public discourse, symbol-colored prisoner clothing – particularly the orange jumpsuit – is commonly regarded as a key feature of IS execution visuals and is strongly associated with the group's violence against captives. The iconic status of jumpsuit imagery illustrates that the terrorist organization has been successful in drawing the public's attention to its purposefully directed symbolism. Doubtlessly, the IS regards the infamous symbolic feature as an important element of its hostage media campaign: The CLL data shows that a significant number of captives (*n* = 990, 41.01%) were forced to wear symbol-colored overalls before and / or during their killings, the majority of them (*n* = 709, 71.62%) had to don orange jumpsuits (see Tables S38–S39). Notably, the relative percentage for foreigners displayed in symbolic garments (82.76%, *n* = 72) was more than twice as high as for locals (39.45%, *n* = 918).

First introduced in May 2004 by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (the founder and leader of the IS' predecessor organization), the symbolic dress often conveys a retaliation narrative, alluding to the abuse of Muslim prisoners in Western or local detention centers such as Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, or Camp Bucca. As "a symbol and an icon of injustice"[101] it aims at justifying the IS' violence against hostages as a punishment in kind. At the same time, it signals a reversal of the political balance of power by turning the captured enemies into subjugated humiliated creatures without any rights[102] and emphasizes the IS' status as a sovereign 'state' whose security forces exercise power over life and death. The role of the symbol-colored garments in communicating the IS' statehood becomes evident from the fact that the colored overalls are also used in non-retaliatory, governance-related punishments. In a broader sense,

> "[t]he jumpsuit's combined association with the West and its symbolic signification of guilt in ISIS areas serves as a reminder to all who see it of the low status of the jumpsuit's wearer, as well as a warning to those who would try to fight or challenge ISIS's authority or interpretation of Islam."[103]

To date, the IS has not yet released an official explanation for its employment of particular color codes. While in some cases the symbolic meaning of a color is more or less obvious (e.g., orange as a reference to prisoner uniforms at the U.S. Guantanamo prison or yellow to prisoner garments in the Camp Bucca detention facility in Iraq), in others, the intention to use a color remains unclear.[104] Notably, in at least one incident, the IS altered the jumpsuit color with image editing software (see note in Table S38), indicating that colors, even if their meaning is not always intuitive and their use not always consistent, are likely not randomly chosen.

Over time, the use of the jumpsuit symbol significantly declined. The number of hostages forced to don symbol-colored garments dropped from 470 in 2015 to 19 in 2020. The mean annual percentage of captives displayed in symbolic clothing decreased from 46% in the first three years to 17% in the last three years of the monitoring period (see Table S40 and Figure S20).

Geographically, the symbolic dress code was most frequently used in the IS' Iraqi-Syrian heartlands, with a concentration in Iraq where it historically originated (n = 347, 35.05%; vs. Syria: n = 253, 25.56%; Iraqi-Syrian pan-border area: n = 124, 12.53%). The per-location percentage of areas with significant IS execution activity was highest for the Afghanistan-Pakistan region (67.06%), followed by Libya (66.42%), and the Iraqi-Syrian pan-border zone (58.22%) (see Table S41 and Figure S21). Interestingly, in Iraq – the state where symbolic clothing used to be most common – the employment of the dress code has stopped after autumn 2017. The reasons for this development are unclear, as are the reasons for the general decline in the use of the jumpsuit symbol.

Media Type Used for the Documentation of Executions

Although videos represent a minority of the IS' official media content,[105] the terrorist organization has a preference for visually documenting hostage killings on video. Generally, the group uses three different formats to visualize its activities: Videos, still-images, and a combination of both media types. Videos are highly influential (particularly when they involve Western victims or perpetrators) and have thus been the driving factor of the IS' branding efforts, yet can be considered the costliest release format for the group in terms of resource investment.[106] By contrast, still images can be produced more quickly and easily, yet are usually less prestigious and have smaller impact. The IS publishes images either as pictures which are embedded in social media postings or releases them as so-called photo reports, i.e., collections of related images on a particular event or topic that are usually arranged in a chronologically ordered series. Jihadist groups tend to propagate their activities through redundant cross-media publications, a practice that dates back to at least 2004,[107] so it is not surprising that the IS' propagandists have adopted this modus operandi and often visually communicate the same event in both still-image and video form.

Of the 2,414 individual killings in the CLL data set, the majority were exclusively documented on video (n = 1,292, 53.52%). Notably, the relative percentage for video-transmitted killings of foreigners was higher than for locals (85.06% vs 52.34%). Also, incidents involving minor executioners had a higher ratio of video documentation than those with adult or unseen perpetrators (69.23% vs 43.85%). The deaths of 703 execution victims (29.12%) were solely mediatized in the form of still images. The killings of the remaining 419 captives (17.36%) were publicized hybridly in both image and video format (see Tables S42–S44 and Figure S22). With very few exceptions, the propagandists hereby followed a standardized publication order, whereby image publications preceded video releases. The time lag between the different releases ranged from a few hours to 713 days (M = 109, SD = 140, Mdn = 53).

In the first three years of the monitoring period, videos represented the most common media type for the communication of hostage killings (mean annual percentage: 57%), followed by images and hybrid releases. In the years 2018 and 2019, this pattern temporally changed: In 2018, images became the predominant format, succeeded by videos (which dropped to a 32%-low), and hybrid releases; in 2019, the video share climbed back to the 50% mark, hybrid releases rose to the second rank, while images declined to the least common format. Interestingly, in 2020, the pattern returned to its initial structure from 2015–2017. These trends might reflect to some extent the IS' territorial losses and the re-adjustment of its media apparatus to the changed environmental circumstances.

Geographical shifts combined with regional specifics may have played into the temporal dynamics as well. Table S45 and Figure S23 show that the preference for particular media types varied for different geographical areas. In zones with significant execution activity, Yemen had the highest per-location share for video documentation[108] (90.77%), followed by Libya (73.88%), and the West African region (72.86%). The Afghanistan / Pakistan area accounted for the lowest video ratio (41.18%) and constituted the only region where images

were the most-preferred media type (45.88%). Execution activities in the region peaked in 2018 – a factor that contributed to the predominant role of image publications in that year. Similarly, the increase of execution activities in the West African region in 2019 / 2020 influenced the re-establishment of videos as the most common media type.

Analyzing the use of different media types by execution method (see Table S46 and Figure S24) reveals that spectacular, non-traditional execution styles tended to have disproportionately high ratios of video documentation (e.g., killing by explosives: 94.83%; burning: 100%; drowning: 100%), while more traditional killing techniques which were employed in governance-related Sharia punishments were predominantly mediatized in image form (throwing victims from a high place: 56.76%; stoning: 72.22%). Interestingly, shooting executions were more frequently video-transmitted than beheadings (54.95% vs 50.43%) – a finding that departs from earlier data on jihadist hostage media (which showed a reversed pattern[109]) and indicates that "beheadings have gone mainstream."[110]

A breakdown of the specific media types by the alleged charges the IS brought forward against its victims brings to light that the group communicated killings for conflict-related accusations (i.e., apostasy, spying, retaliation, fighting IS / religion, deterrence, treason, and anti-IS media work / activism) visually in a different form than those for governance-linked charges (i.e., mischief, banditry, blasphemy, homosexuality, sorcery, and adultery): while the majority of killings in conflict-connected punishments were video-transmitted (the relative percentages ranged from 48% to 95%), executions for governance-based reasons were predominantly publicized via still images (range: 49%–91%) (see Table S47 and Figure S25). Public executions in front of local spectators were mainly image-transmitted as well (56.46% vs. non-public killings: 17.84%, see Table S48). These findings seem to indicate that the IS' propagandists invested less effort in the mediatization of execution activities tied to local governance implementation within its state project. By contrast, executions resulting from failed hostage negotiations (which often had an international impact) were predominantly video-transmitted (80.77%). Interestingly, killings connected to the religious or confessional affiliation of the victims (that were rarely administered before a physical audience, as discussed previously) were largely mediatized through video footage (83.54%), suggesting that the IS – while apparently being reluctant to kill for this reason in front of its local 'citizens' – invested significant effort in the propagation of faith-based executions that were carried out without a local audience present.

Coverage of Execution Victims' Killings in Western News Media

A few visually documented IS executions of Western hostages received tremendous attention by international mass media[111] and had significant political impact.[112] However, this should not belie the fact that the vast majority of camera-recorded hostage killings – though being similar in nature – were either underreported or even remained entirely beyond the scope of the news value system that determines coverage by the Western mainstream media. When collecting data for the CLL project, media coverage was indexed as a binary variable, which was tagged 'yes' if a Google News search for the queries 'ISIS execution' respectively 'Daesh execution' returned ≥ 50 news articles from different Western news outlets within the first 48 hours after the release of the visual that documented a captive's killing, and 'no' if this criterion was not fulfilled. The results show that of the 2,414 victims in the data set, only 291 (12.05%) received this level of media coverage, while the remaining 2,123 captives (87.95%) were either underreported or entirely overlooked. The most significant factor for the (non-)reporting of individual killings was the victims' foreigner status: Table S49 and Figure S26 reveal a striking bias between the levels of coverage for foreigners and locals, manifesting in patterns that are almost exactly reversed: While 79 (90.80%) of the 87 foreigners garnered coverage and only eight victims (9.20%) were underreported or ignored, only 212 (9.11%) of the 2,327 locals received coverage while all remaining captives (n = 2,115, 90.89%) were only marginally reported or overlooked. The observed bias is not only problematic in terms of ethical aspects – such as the valuing or "grievability"[113] of victims – but also because the extent to which an execution

> "is made visible is profoundly implicated in shaping what meaning and significance will be ascribed

> to the act, including what consequences the act will have for the victims and perpetrators. In short, visibility has political implications.[114]

The disproportionately heavy coverage of a small selective subset of publicized executions also obscures empirical patterns of victimization which are required to correctly understand the full scope of IS execution activities and to craft an adequate response to them (as mentioned before, the bulk of victims were not foreigners but citizens from non-Western conflict nations – many of them Muslims). Moreover, the ignorance regarding local victims plays into the hands of the perpetrators (who are aware of the bias[115]) because it perfectly fits into their 'Western arrogance' narrative. Interestingly, the IS seems to capitalize on the very same bias it is openly criticizing by appropriating it for its own purposes: In its *Dabiq* magazine,

> "quite similar to Western media's emphasis on the executions of foreigners, ISIS visually emphasizes the executions of foreign hostages, despite their relatively rare occurrence compared to executions of locals."[116]

2015, the year when most victims of publicized IS executions received media coverage (n = 207, 71.13%), was also the year when the majority (n = 74) of the 87 foreigners in the data set were executed. While a fifth of the hostage killings in 2015 garnered coverage, the annual percentage share significantly dropped the year after. Since then, the mean per-year ratio for coverage has been 5% (with a 9% high in 2016 and a nadir of zero coverage in 2018) (see Table S50). The geographic area with the highest per-location share for media coverage (47.01%) was Libya, which is unsurprising as it was the state with most foreigner casualties (n = 63) – not a single victim who received coverage there was a local (see Table S51).

Although the data suggests that the foreigner status was the most significant factor for (non-)coverage in Western news media, it was not a stable predictor, implying that a number of other factors influenced the newsworthiness of hostage killings as well. One of these appeared to be the execution method, as several ultra-violent, non-traditional killing styles (executing by explosives, burning, drowning) had disproportionately high ratios for coverage (ranging from 41% to 92%; see Table S52), most likely due to their spectacular nature which particularly grabbed the attention of sensationalist news outlets, such as tabloids.

Failed hostage negotiations appeared to be a catalyst for media coverage as well. 65.38% of the individual killings for this reason received coverage, although only seven of the 52 victims were foreigners (see Table S53). In all of these cases, the hostage takings were already known to the media before the execution visuals were released and most incidents involved earlier proof-of-life images or videos of the captives. The open-ended life-and-death situations at the beginning of the reporting combined with the availability of pre-execution visuals might explain the greater newsworthiness of these cases. Compared to that, victims killed for their religious or confessional affiliation – the charge connected to most foreigner casualties (59 of 158 victims) – had a lower coverage ratio (54.43%), yet still the second highest in the data set. Killings of anti-IS media workers or activists accounted for the third largest coverage share (30.00%; only two of the 40 deceased were foreigners), most likely because members from this victim group operated own media outlets and maintained professional relationships with international news networks, which might explain why their deaths were comparatively often reported by the media community.

The instrumentalization of minors as executioners appeared to be another driver for newsworthiness (see Table S54). With 34.62%, the relative percentage for coverage of incidents involving child executioners was more than five times higher than the one for killings by adult or undisclosed perpetrators (6.07%). Also, video-transmitted executions received more media attention than killings that were visually communicated via still images (18.65% vs 3.98%); however, here it is important to take into account that most foreigner killings (74 of 87) were mediatized through video footage (see Table S55). Eventually, one factor that was not considered in the data set but is noteworthy and deserves examination in future research is the involvement of foreign executioners, as the reporting bias most likely not only applies to victims but to perpetrators as well.

Summary of Key Findings

This Research Note provided findings from a systematic monitoring effort of visually documented extrajudicial executions perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State terrorist group. Based on an extensive data set covering 2,414 individuals killed between January 2015 and December 2020 (1,224 incidents) – which was compiled for *Perspectives on Terrorism* in the monitoring project 'Counting Lives Lost' (CLL) – it presented results from long-term measures of roughly 20 incident- and victim level variables, including citizenship, gender, geographic location, execution method, and IS' justifying arguments for the killings. Accompanied by a supplementary statistics file featuring tabular and graphical representations of the data and the full anonymized data set, it highlighted temporal trends, changing dynamics, and characteristic qualitative and quantitative patterns, providing unprecedented insights into the execution activities and victimization behavior of the terrorist organization. In contrast to other long-term studies of this kind, it included local victims and was not limited to a single geographical area.

The findings reveal a marked downward trend in incident and casualty numbers over time (particularly during the first three years of the monitoring period while approaching a plateau afterwards), yet also make clear that IS executions have not come to a halt but continue to remain a persistent phenomenon. Although it is empirically not possible to draw a causal relationship between the territorial losses of the terrorist organization and its publicized execution activities, many patterns observed in the data analysis suggest that the territorial breakdown did have an impact. Cross-tabulations between several variables in the data set revealed differing patterns for conflict-related hostage killings and governance-linked Sharia executions that served the group to implement its state-building project – the latter ones appear to have lost significance when the group re-transformed from a pseudo-state with an administrative structure to a clandestine organization that relies on terrorist- and insurgent tactics. While outside the scope of this Research Note, it is highly likely that several other factors beyond territorial realities (such as political events, geographic conditions, organizational cultures and norms, counter-terrorism measures, and even personal characteristics[117] of militants) influenced the observed trends, dynamics, and patterns as well.

Over 99% of the victims in the data set were males – the marginal share of women is in line with the group's gender ideology that delegitimizes both violence against women and violence conducted by women. Small children were never displayed as being executed. Since the terrorist organization does not hesitate to kill children and women in secrecy, the group's reluctance to victimize young kids and females in publicized executions can thus most likely be ascribed to a media directive aimed at preventing counterproductive effects of its propaganda campaign.

More than 95% of the victims were local citizens from conflict nations, most of them Iraqis and Syrians, while foreigners made up less than 4% of the total share; only few individuals originated from Western states. At least 62% of the victims were Muslims. The IS' heartlands of Iraq and Syria constituted the main theater for publicized executions – 79% of the incidents and casualties in the data set occurred in this region, the volume continuously exceeded other nations. Over 60% of all recorded executions took place in the IS core area during the group's territory-holding phase, which ended in December 2017. The decrease of execution activities in Iraq and Syria that coincided with the territorial breakdown of the 'caliphate' was the decisive factor for the sharp general decline in executions over time. The seven geographical areas of Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan / Pakistan, and West Africa accounted for nearly 99% of all execution incidents and casualties – indicating that publicized IS executions are mainly a region-bound, rather than widespread international phenomenon and appear to be tied to a significant physical IS presence in a conflict zone. Over the course of the monitoring period, execution activities relocated on a micro-level from urban to more rural areas (especially within Syria and Iraq) and, on a macro-level, increasingly shifted to different regions (particularly West Africa).

The IS invested significant efforts in its justification of camera-recorded extrajudicial executions, naming alleged 'charges' of the captives (or the collective they symbolically represented) as the reason for its use of violence. Over 80% of the accusations against the victims were related to the conflict between the terrorist organization and its numerous enemies, whom it saw to be a threat to its state project and to Islam in general.

By contrast, charges that were closely tied to the IS' implementation of territorial governance made up less than 8% of the total share of accusations. Punishments for governance-linked charges were almost exclusively meted out in Iraq, Syria, and – to a much lesser extent – Libya, and declined sharply after the group's territorial breakdown. Interestingly, the IS openly claimed to kill captives for their religious or confessional affiliation which constitutes a break with the traditional media-strategic behavior of jihadists.

While the IS is often associated with particularly cruel and spectacular execution methods, the majority of victims (60%) were killed by shooting. However, the group accounted for a high number of beheadings (29%) – which is unprecedented, even for jihadist organizations, who usually shun to publicize excessive violence for reasons of not losing support and explains why decapitations became a signature element of the IS' brand. Throat cutting, a method very similar to beheading in implementation and symbolism, was the third most often used execution style (3%). Other execution techniques, although often receiving considerable media attention, had in sum only a marginal share (< 10%) and became even more insignificant in the last three years of the monitoring period. The number of beheadings dropped to roughly 12% in 2019 and 2020, while the prevalence of shootings increased (> 75%). Particular types of justifying arguments and execution techniques appeared to be associated with each other. Conflict-related accusations were tied to a broader spectrum of execution methods than governance-linked charges which showed more homogeneous patterns – some of them were strongly or even exclusively tied to particular killing styles or sub-styles (such as stoning for adultery, throwing individuals from a high place for homosexuality, or decapitation by sword for sorcery).

More than a quarter of the victims were executed publicly in front of a civilian crowd witnessing the event. The number of public executions significantly decreased over the course of the monitoring period, dropping from 248 incidents in 2015 (when the volume of public executions exceeded that of private executions) to zero in 2020. 94% of the incidents occurred during the territorial phase of the so-called caliphate in Iraq, Syria, and, to a much lesser extent, Libya. The public nature of individual killings strongly varied for different execution methods and alleged charges. Punishments for governance-linked accusations were mainly or even exclusively administered before a physical audience (sometimes even involving spectators in the killing), while the majority of executions for conflict-related reasons were carried out away from the public eye. Public executions of captives for their religious or confessional affiliation were strikingly rare (< 2%).

The vast majority of execution victims was killed outdoors, less than 5% were executed within buildings. Executions carried out at historical sites (such as the Roman Theater in Palmyra) attracted a disproportionate amount of media coverage, yet had only a marginal share (< 1%) in the total number of incidents.

In 52 execution incidents, the IS instrumentalized minors as executioners, 90% of these cases occurred between 2015 and 2017. In 18 additional incidents, minors were not involved as direct perpetrators of the killings but had to perform other tasks in the execution procedure (e.g., guarding the execution site or leading the victims to the execution spot). Almost 90% of the incidents with child executioners took place in the IS' Iraqi-Syrian heartlands, concentrating in Syria. Of the five incidents that occurred between 2018 and 2020, two happened in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, and one in West Africa, indicating a geographical shift.

Over 40% of the captives were forced to wear symbol-colored overalls (most often orange jumpsuits) before and / or during their killings. The relative percentage for foreigners displayed in symbolic garments was more than twice as high as for locals. The use of the jumpsuit symbol significantly declined over the course of the monitoring period.

Although videos represent a minority of the IS' official media content, the terrorist organization has a preference for visually documenting hostage killings on video. The deaths of more than 70% of the victims were either solely communicated through video footage or transmitted via both still images and videos. The preference for particular media types varied for different geographical areas. Executions for conflict-related charges were predominantly video-transmitted while governance-linked Sharia killings were mainly publicized via still images. Executions of foreigners, incidents involving minor executioners, and killings by spectacular, non-traditional execution methods were particularly often recorded on video.

Only 12% of the hostages in the data set received coverage in Western news media, while the remaining captives were either underreported or entirely overlooked. A striking bias exists between the levels of coverage for foreigners and locals: While over 90% of the foreigners garnered coverage, less than 10% of the locals were reported. Although the foreigner status was the most significant driver for coverage, other factors influenced the newsworthiness of hostage killings as well. Especially, executions involving ultra-violent, non-traditional killing styles, failed hostage negotiations, and child executioners tended to attract above-average levels of media attention.

Limitations of the Data

While the data set on which this analysis is grounded is the result of a long-term systematic monitoring effort, it is not without limitations which need to be kept in mind before drawing any further inferences from it. The main restrictions are:

1. The CLL data collection is confined to executions perpetrated by the IS and therefore excluded similar atrocities committed by other terrorist organizations.
2. The data set is restricted to executions of captives. On-the-spot killings, such as battlefield killings, drive-by-shootings, or assassinations were not considered. Deceased individuals displayed in aftermath-only visuals (i.e., videos or pictures that exhibited captives' remains, but neither showed them alive nor their executions) were only included if it became clear from them that a person was killed in captivity[118] or if a sufficient amount of clarifying information on the related incident could be found in secondary sources.
3. The data set only includes publicized executions, i.e., killings that were visually communicated by the IS through videos or still images. Executions claimed in text- or audio-only statements without providing any visual proof of an incident were excluded. Country-based execution statistics released by human rights organizations, activists, researchers, and other sources provide casualty numbers much higher than those of the corresponding geographic subsets of the CLL data set, which means that the IS publicizes only a fraction of its extrajudicial executions.[119] Camera-recorded executions are part of a carefully designed propaganda strategy which is not necessarily meant to create an authentic representation of reality and might even include deliberate deception efforts by the group. Therefore, patterns derived from the data set cannot be generalized to the entirety of the IS' execution activities.
4. As the data collection was started in January 2015, the data set does not cover the IS' execution activities in the first year of the 'caliphate', which was declared on June 29, 2014, and therefore does not represent a full account of the IS' visually documented executions.

Despite these limitations, the data set provides unprecedented quantitative and qualitative insights into the IS' publicized execution activities and victimization behaviors. The author encourages everyone interested to use the data set (see Supplementary Materials) as an auxiliary instrument for their own research.

Supplementary Materials

The Supplementary Materials contain the following items (for access, see Index of Supplementary Materials below):

- The research data on which the study is based (including coding information);
- A statistics file featuring additional tabular and graphical representations of the data.

Index of Supplementary Materials

Tinnes, Judith (2022, February): *Counting Lives Lost – Statistics of Camera-Recorded Extrajudicial Executions by the "Islamic State" (January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2020).* [Research data and codebook]. Archive.org. https://archive.org/download/cllstatistics/CLL_Data_Set_2015-2020.zip

Tinnes, Judith (2022, February): *Counting Lives Lost – Statistics of Camera-Recorded Extrajudicial Executions by the "Islamic State" (January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2020).* [Statistics file with tabular and graphical representations]. Archive.org. https://archive.org/download/cllstatistics/CLL_Statistics_2015-2020.pdf

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Notes

[1] See, for example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2020, February): *Kidnapped by ISIS: Failure to Uncover the Fate of Syria's Missing.* (Report). URL: https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/02/11/kidnapped-isis/failure-uncover-fate-syrias-missing , Houry, Nadim; with Sara Kayyali and Josh Lyons (2020, May): *Into the Abyss: The al-Hota Mass Grave in Northern Syria.* (HRW Report). URL: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/04/abyss , and Almohammad, Asaad; Speckhard, Anne; Yayla, Ahmet S. (2017, August): *The ISIS Prison System: Its Structure, Departmental Affiliations, Processes, Conditions, and Practices of Psychological and Physical Torture.* (ICSVE Research Reports). URL: https://www.icsve.org/the-isis-prison-system-its-structure-departmental-affiliations-processes-conditions-and-practices-of-psychological-and-physical-torture

[2] See, for example, NBC News; The Wall Street Journal (2014, September): *NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey.* (Study #14901). URL: https://newscms.nbcnews.com/sites/newscms/files/14901_september_nbc-wsj_poll.pdf , p. 30.

[3] See, for example, Frissen, Thomas (2021, January): Internet, the Great Radicalizer? Exploring Relationships Between Seeking for Online Extremist Materials and Cognitive Radicalization in Young Adults. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *11*(4), Article 106549, p. 6. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106549

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[5] See Friis (2015, July), op. cit., pp. 725–746.

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[8] For a bibliography of qualitative and quantitative academic or professional publications see Tinnes, Judith (2021, December): Bibliography: Hostage Takings and Extrajudicial Executions (Part 1). *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *15*(6), pp. 104–159. URL: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2021/issue-6/tinnes.pdf

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[23] Loertscher & Milton (2015, December), op. cit., p. 9.

[24] Currently: https://archive.org/details/cllstatistics

[25] See Tinnes, Judith (2016, February): Counting Lives Lost – Monitoring Camera-Recorded Extrajudicial Executions by the "Islamic State". *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *10*(1), pp. 78–82. URL: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/custom-sites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2016/008-counting-lives-lost-monitoring-camera-recorded-extrajudicial-executions-by-the-islamic-state.pdf

[26] Incidents from 2014 documented in previously unseen footage that was published only in 2015 or later were also included; however, one video displaying the large-scale massacre at the Camp Speicher military base in Iraq in June 2014 was excluded due to its outlier status. For a short description of the incident, see Table S56.

[27] Last update: February 6, 2022.

[28] A small number of unofficial releases (i.e., unbranded visuals published by non-official sources) were included in the data set as well, preconditioned that they had been distributed or re-posted by several pro-IS social media accounts, and that the displayed execution incidents could be verified by alternative sources.

[29] Initially: Twitter (until the group's expulsion from there).

[30] It is important to keep in mind that this was often not the date when the execution had been carried out. Due to the underre-

porting of local victims, the actual execution date could often not be determined; therefore, the release date of the visual was used to have a consistent reference date.

[31] Such as websites or social media accounts of news outlets, journalists, activists, think tanks, and researchers.

[32] The statistics were separately released as they would have otherwise exceeded the limits of a journal publication.

[33] Summary executions of two or more persons at the same time and place were counted as single incidents.

[34] Pearson, Elizabeth (2018, May): Wilayat Shahidat: Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber. In: Jacob Zenn (Ed.): *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency.* (Report). West Point: Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), p. 34. URL: https://ctc.usma.edu/boko-haram-beyond-headlines-analyses-africas-enduring-insurgency

[35] For statistics on the gender of abductees targeted in publicized hostage takings between 2004 and 2008, see Tinnes, Judith (2010, November): Counting Lives in a Theater of Terror – An Analysis of Media-Oriented Hostage Takings in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *4*(5), p. 9. URL: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2010/issue-5/counting-lives-in-a-theater-of-terror---an-analysis-of-media-oriented-hostage-takings-in-iraq-afghanistan-pakistan-and-saudi-arabia-judith-tinnes.pdf

[36] Crone, Manni (2020, May): It's a Man's World: Carnal Spectatorship and Dissonant Masculinities in Islamic State Videos. *International Affairs*, *96*(3), pp. 573–591. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa047 , see also Salih, Mohammed A.; Kraidy, Marwan M. (2020): Islamic State and Women: A Biopolitical Analysis. *International Journal of Communication*, *14*, p. 1937. URL: https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/9866

[37] Burke (2016, September), op. cit.

[38] See, for example, relevant publications by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). URL: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/Pages/Publications.aspx , Burke (2016, September), op. cit., and Cetorelli et al. (2017, May), op. cit.

[39] See, for example, al-Lami, Mina (2018, October 24): Analysis: Has IS Changed its Strategy on Hostages After Territorial Losses? *BBC Monitoring.* URL: https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200c8sh and Pearson & Zenn (2021, February), op. cit., p. 16.

[40] Duffy, Liam (2021, March): *Western Foreign Fighters and the Yazidi Genocide.* (CEP Report), p. 3. URL: https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/Western%20Foreign%20Fighters%20and%20the%20Yazidi%20Genocide%20Report%2016%20March%202021.pdf ; see also Almohammad et al. (2017), op. cit. and Pearson (2018, May), op. cit.

[41] The number is most likely higher as 27 additional victims (1.12%), whose citizenship could not exactly be determined, were either Iraqi or Syrian citizens.

[42] Both victims had an Iraqi background.

[43] Cf. Revkin (2016, July), op. cit., pp. 22–23.

[44] Loertscher & Milton (2015, December), op. cit., p. 17.

[45] Winter, Charlie (2015, October): *Documenting the Virtual "Caliphate".* (Report). London: Quilliam, p. 22.

[46] See Tinnes (2010, November), op. cit., pp. 9–10.

[47] The geographical information in the data set is based on the IS' self-styled provincial system. Due to the group's abolishment of internationally recognized borders, some of its provinces spanned over more than one state. For these territories, information is provided on regional- instead of state level.

[48] There is no general consensus in the research literature on whether there is a correlational relationship between the IS' territorial control and its propaganda production capacities – see, for example, Nanninga (2019a, April), op. cit., Frampton, Martyn; Fisher, Ali; Prucha, Nico (2017, September): *The New Netwar: Countering Extremism Online.* (Policy Exchange Report). URL: https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/the-new-netwar-countering-extremism-online , and Kaczkowski, Wojciech et al. (2021, June): Intersections of the Real and the Virtual Caliphates: The Islamic State's Territory and Media Campaign. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *6*(2), Article ogaa020. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa020

[49] See, for example, Loertscher & Milton (2015, December), op. cit., p. 32.

[50] Schmid (2020), op. cit., p. 746.

[51] The trend for Libya and Yemen continued in 2021, when IS militants in both countries did not account for any publicized execution incidents.

[52] The trend for Egypt and the Afghanistan-Pakistan area continued in 2021.

[53] The findings on the West African region, Egypt, and Libya mostly parallel general IS attack statistics in Africa in 2019 and 2020; see Rolbiecki, Tomasz; Van Ostaeyen, Pieter; Winter, Charlie (2020, August): The Islamic State's Strategic Trajectory in Africa: Key Takeaways from its Attack Claims. *CTC Sentinel*, *13*(8), pp. 31–40. URL: https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CTC-SENTINEL-082020.pdf

[54] Cf. Revkin (2016, July), op. cit., p. 39.

[55] The geographical information in the data set is based on the IS' self-styled Wilayat system. It is important to note that in 2018, the group reorganized the structure of its administrative system – amongst other things, by condensing the Iraqi, Syrian, and Iraqi-Syrian pan border provinces into just two Wilayat (Iraq and Sham). However, as the IS continued to use the names of the former Wilayat in form of sub-regional information, the location of the execution incidents could still be mapped to the former Wilayat system. An exception were the pan-border provinces of Al-Furat and Al-Jazirah that largely fell out of use after the restructuring.

[56] See, for example, Frampton et al. (2017, September), op. cit., Milton (2016, October), op. cit., and Nanninga (2019a, April), op. cit.

[57] For an analysis of general attack metrics for Iraqi provinces see Knights, Michael; Almeida, Alex (2020, May): Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020. *CTC Sentinel*, *13*(5), pp. 12–27. URL: https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CTC-SENTINEL-052020.pdf

[58] For accounts on IS activities in the Syrian desert see Waters, Gregory; Winter, Charlie (2021, September): *Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?* (MEI Report). URL: https://www.mei.edu/publications/islamic-state-under-reporting-central-syria-misdirection-misinformation-or and Lister, Charles (2020, April): *The Growing Threat of ISIS in Syria's Badia.* (MEI Policy Analysis). URL: https://www.mei.edu/publications/growing-threat-isis-syrias-badia

[59] Cf. Revkin, Mara Redlich; Wood, Elisabeth Jean (2021, June): The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *6*(2), Article ogaa038, p. 16. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa038

[60] For nuanced background information on the IS' ideological justification and reasoning for its violence, see the following in-depths accounts: Prucha, Nico (2013): Kangaroo Trials: Justice in the Name of God. In: Rüdiger Lohlker (Ed.): *Jihadism: Online Discourses and Representations.* (Studying Jihadism, Vol. 2). Göttingen: V&R unipress, pp. 141–206. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737000680.141; Lohlker, Rüdiger (2016): *Theologie der Gewalt: Das Beispiel IS.* (Islamica, Vol. 4648). Wien: Facultas, and Van Ostaeyen, Pieter (2021, February 18): The Islamic State and the Application of Islamic Penal Law. *The ISIS Blog.* URL: http://theisisreader.com/the-islamic-state-and-the-application-of-islamic-penal-law

[61] The total number of charges (N = 4,263) is higher than the total number of victims (N = 2,414) as the IS often used several arguments for justifying the killing of a captive. Up to four major charges per individual killing were documented (M = 1.77, SD = 0.92, Mdn = 2.00). Therefore, percentages referring to execution victims in relation to charges do not add up to 100%.

[62] In several cases of violence against captives, the veracity of the IS' accusations has been credibly doubted. Furthermore, the implementation of the group's penalties has been described as subjective and unsystematic in nature. See, for example, the following studies (all based on accounts of locals): Al Aqeedi, Rasha (2016, February): *Hisba in Mosul: Systematic Oppression in the Name of Virtue.* (GW Program on Extremism Occasional Paper). URL: https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Al%20Aqeedi.pdf , Revkin (2016, July), op. cit., and Justice for Life Organization (JFL) (2018, June): *They Killed Them to Make Them an Example: ISIS Crimes Against the Villages of Al Shuaitat Tribe in Deir Ezzor.* (Report). URL: https://jfl.ngo/they-killed-them-to-make-them-an-example

[63] See, for example, Helfstein, Scott; Abdullah, Nassir; al-Obaidi, Muhammad (2009, December): *Deadly Vanguards: A Study of al-Qa'ida's Violence Against Muslims.* (CTC Occasional Paper Series). URL: https://ctc.usma.edu/deadly-vanguards-a-study-of-al-qaidas-violence-against-muslims and Reynié, Dominique (Ed.) (2021, September): *Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the World 1979-2021.* (New ed. – Data collected through 31 May 2021). (Research Report). Paris: Fondation pour l'innovation politique (Fondapol). URL: https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/islamist-terrorist-attacks-in-the-world-1979-2021

[64] For an in-depth account of the role of agent networks in counterterrorism and -insurgency (and deadly implications for them), see Stime, Britta (2017): Counterinsurgency Agent Networks and Noncombatant-Targeted Violence. *Intelligence and National Security*, *32*(1), pp. 107–125. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2016.1210770 ; see also Sherko, Pasar (2021, February 2): Islamic State Messaging on Counter-Espionage Operations. *Fikra Forum.* URL: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/islamic-state-messaging-counter-espionage-operations

[65] Soufan Center, The (TSC) (2016, February): *The Islamic State's Spy Problem.* (TSG IntelBrief). URL: https://thesoufancenter.org/tsg-intelbrief-the-islamic-states-spy-problem , see also Milton (2016, October), op. cit., pp. 33–34 and Nanninga (2019a, April), op. cit., p. 17 who both contrasted the numbers of alleged enemy fighters and spies displayed in IS execution media, concluding that the proportion of spy executions was increasing over the course of their monitoring periods.

[66] Frampton et al. (2017, September), op. cit., p. 23.

[67] An IS key slogan; for a context analysis see: Prucha, Nico (2017, August 1): "Islamic State" Briefing: Part 2. "Upon the Prophetic Methodology" and the Media Universe. *Online Jihad: Monitoring Jihadist Online Communities.* URL: https://onlinejihad.net/2017/08/01/part-2-upon-the-prophetic-methodology-and-the-media-universe

[68] Van Ostaeyen (2021, February), op. cit.

[69] Nanninga, Pieter (2019b): "Cleansing the Earth of the Stench of Shirk": The Islamic State's Violence as Acts of Purification. *Journal of Religion and Violence*, *7*(2), p. 130. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5840/jrv2019112266 URL: https://www.academia.edu/43939241/2019_Cleansing_the_Earth_of_the_Stench_of_Shirk_The_Islamic_State_s_Violence_as_Acts_of_Purification_Journal_of_Religion_and_Violence_7_2_p_128_157

[70] See, for example, Tinnes, Judith (2010, May): *Internetnutzung islamistischer Terror- und Insurgentengruppen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von medialen Geiselnahmen im Irak, Afghanistan, Pakistan und Saudi-Arabien.* (Doctoral Thesis, Universität des Saarlandes, Saarbrücken, Germany), p. 635. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22028/D291-25626

[71] See, for example, Loertscher, Cynthia (2019-): *Bringing Americans Home: A Nongovernmental Assessment of U.S. Hostage Policy and Family Engagement.* [Report series published by New America and the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation]. URLs:
https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/bringing-americans-home
https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/bringing-americans-home-2020
https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/bringing-americans-home-2021

[72] Cf. Tinnes, Judith (2015, February): Although the (Dis-)Believers Dislike it: A Backgrounder on IS Hostage Videos – August - December 2014. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *9*(1), p. 85. URL: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2015/volume-1/6-although-the-dis-believers-dislike-it.-a-backgrounder-on-is-hostage-videos-%E2%80%93-august---december-2014-by-judith-tinnes.pdf

[73] See Koch, Ariel (2018, June): Jihadi Beheading Videos and their Non-Jihadi Echoes. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *12*(3), pp. 24–34. URL: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-3/02---jihadi-beheading-videos-and-their-non-jihadi-echoes-by-ariel-koch.pdf

[74] Phillips, Everard M. (2015, May): How Do Kidnappers Kill Hostages? A Comparison of Terrorist and Criminal Groups. *Homicide Studies*, *19*(2), p. 139. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767914522466

[75] Impara, Elisa (2018, June): A Social Semiotics Analysis of Islamic State's Use of Beheadings: Images of Power, Masculinity, Spectacle and Propaganda. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, *53*, p. 34. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2018.02.002 URL: https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/40779/6/Impara-E-40779-AAM.pdf

[76] Some of the throat cuttings in the data set might have actually been decapitations that were not displayed until their completion.

[77] Cf. Zywietz, Bernd (2018, April 20): Zur Ästhetisierung in und von IS-Video-Propaganda (I). *Online-Propagandaforschung.* URL: https://www.online-propagandaforschung.de/index.php/texte/aesthetisierung-is-video-propaganda-i

[78] Book by jihadist ideologue Abu Bakr Naji published in 2004 that serves as a strategic reference for IS.

[79] Nanninga (2019a, April), op. cit., p. 17.

[80] Cf. Van Ostaeyen, Pieter (2016, June 30): The Messaging and Concepts Behind Islamic State Execution Propaganda. *Jane's Militant Propaganda Analysis.* Available from https://www.ihs.com/products/janes-militant-propaganda-analysis.html , see also Alex P. Schmid (2021): *Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Prevention.* Contribution for the Plenary Session "Academic Challenges in Researching Modern Terrorism", 20th World Summit on Counter-Terrorism, Herzliya, Israel, 12 September 2021, who concludes that "[r]evenge is a greatly underestimated cause of acts of terrorism."

[81] Van Ostaeyen (2016, June 30), op. cit.

[82] Some examples from the data set: A fighter pilot was burned alive in a cage before being buried under debris to imitate the impact of an airstrike, a tank driver was run over and crushed by a tank, a mine engineer was killed with the same type of mines he was planting to target IS fighters.

[83] E.g., a Mosul resident and anti-IS collaborator, who openly expressed support for the military intervention against the group and metaphorically advocated in a public radio show to use the antiseptic "Dettol [.], to clean up all the areas of lice [i.e., IS fighters]", was waterboarded and drowned in a fish tank, in water mixed with Dettol.

[84] Paraszczuk, Joanna (2015, May 6): Heart of Darkness: The Core Beliefs Justifying IS Brutality. *RFE/RL.* URL: https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic-state-punishments-brutality/26998016.html

[85] See, for example: United Nations Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian

Arab Republic (2014, November): *Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria.* (Report A/HRC/27/CRP.3). URL: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/HRC_CRP_ISIS_14Nov2014.doc and Tayler, Letta et al. (2016, May): *"We Feel We Are Cursed": Life Under ISIS in Sirte, Libya.* (HRW Report). URL: https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/18/we-feel-we-are-cursed/life-under-isis-sirte-libya

[86] Nanninga (2019b), op. cit., p. 147.

[87] The men originated from Mauritania, Tunisia, and Palestine.

[88] See, for example, Kavanaugh, Shane Dixon; Weiss, Amit (2015, September 13): Caliphate Kids Are Growing Up Watching Public Executions. *Vocativ.* URL: https://www.vocativ.com/229853/child-spectators-isis-executions , who analyzed more than a thousand images of public punishments and executions carried out by IS militants.

[89] See, for example, United Nations Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014, November), op. cit., para. 34.

[90] Cf. Revkin (2016, July), op. cit., p. 26.

[91] Cf. Zelin, Aaron Y.; Olidort, Jacob (2016, June): *The Islamic State's Views on Homosexuality.* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch 2630). URL: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/islamic-states-views-homosexuality

[92] These include all 650 execution victims who were killed in front of a physical audience.

[93] The victim was executed in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

[94] Cf. Hoogkamer, Loes (2016, Spring): *Fatal Aesthetics: A Study on the Theatrical Representation of the Public Execution in the Islamic State's Palmyra Execution Video.* (Master's Thesis, Lund University, Lund, Sweden). URL: http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/8877346 , p. 36.

[95] Islamic State (2015, March): The Lions of Tomorrow. *Dabiq*, 8, pp. 20–21.

[96] Morris, James; Dunning, Tristan (2020): Rearing Cubs of the Caliphate: An Examination of Child Soldier Recruitment by Da'esh. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *32*(7), p. 1574. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1495628

[97] See, for example: Morris & Dunning (2020), op. cit., Almohammad, Asaad (2018, February): *ISIS Child Soldiers in Syria: The Structural and Predatory Recruitment, Enlistment, Pre-Training Indoctrination, Training, and Deployment.* (ICCT Research Paper). URL: https://icct.nl/publication/isis-child-soldiers-in-syria-the-structural-and-predatory-recruitment-enlistment-pre-training-indoctrination-training-and-deployment , and Horgan, John G. et al. (2017): From Cubs to Lions: A Six Stage Model of Child Socialization into the Islamic State. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *40*(7), pp. 645–664. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1221252

[98] In line with international definitions of childhood, everyone under the age of 18 was considered a minor.

[99] See, for example, Kavanaugh & Weiss (2015, September 13), op. cit.

[100] See, for example, Burke (2016, September), op. cit., and Cetorelli, Valeria; Ashraph, Sareta (2019, June): *A Demographic Documentation of ISIS's Attack on the Yazidi Village of Kocho.* (LSE Middle East Centre Report). URL: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/101098

[101] Prucha, Nico (2013), op. cit., p. 161.

[102] Cf. Ulrich, Anne (2017): "Hello, I'm John Cantlie": Dschihadistische Propaganda und die gespenstische Medialität von Bedrohung. *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, *39*(3-4), p. 117.

[103] Richey, Patrick G.; Edwards, Michaela (2019): It's More Than Orange: ISIS's Appropriation of Orange Prison Jumpsuits as Rhetorical Resistance. In: Michael Krona; Rosemary Pennington (Eds.): *The Media World of ISIS.* (Indiana Series in Middle East Studies). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 174.

[104] See also Hegghammer, Thomas (2015, September 14): IS Jumpsuit Colour Codes. *The Bored Jihadi.* URL: https://boredjihadi.net/2015/09/14/is-jumpsuit-colour-codes

[105] Cf. Milton (2016, October), op. cit., p. 22.

[106] Cf. Nanninga (2019a, April), op. cit., p. 2.

[107] See, for example, Tinnes (2010, May), op. cit., pp. 731–732.

[108] For analytic ease, the hybrid category was excluded from this and subsequent comparisons.

[109] See Tinnes (2010, November), op. cit., p. 16.

[110] Koch (2018, June), op. cit., p. 24.

[111] See, for example, NBC News & The Wall Street Journal (2014, September), op. cit.

[112] See, for example, Friis (2015, July), op. cit., pp. 725–746.

[113] For the concept of grievability, see Butler, Judith (2016): *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Radical Thinkers). London: Verso. (Original work published 2009)

[114] Friis (2015, July), op. cit., p. 744.

[115] For example, an article in Issue 252 of the IS' Arabic weekly *An-Naba* (September 17, 2020) covering the group's killing of French aid workers in Niger, pointed out that the attack "caused a media uproar, given the nationality of the dead" (cf. p. 9).

[116] El Damanhoury, Kareem (2019): Picturing Statehood During ISIS's Caliphal Days. In: Michael Krona; Rosemary Pennington (Eds.): *The Media World of ISIS.* (Indiana Series in Middle East Studies). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 83.

[117] For an analysis on how leadership changes have affected the operational dynamics (including kidnapping activities) of the IS and its predecessor organizations, see Regens, James L.; Mould, Nick (2017): Continuity and Change in the Operational Dynamics of the Islamic State. *Journal of Strategic Security, 10*(1), pp. 53–80. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.10.1.1526

[118] E.g., if a person was blindfolded or shackled.

[119] For example, Burke (2016, September 20, op. cit.) – who examined the pattern of disclosure and non-disclosure of IS executions between June 2014 and October 2015 in Iraq – found that people executed on social media made up only 29% of the 6,019 people executed by ISIL in his data set.

Resources

Counterterrorism Bookshelf: 7 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 seven recently published books.

Tahir Abbas, ***Countering Violent Extremism: The International Deradicalization Agenda*** (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 232 pp., US $ 81.00 [Hardcover], US $ 26.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-7883-1069-7.

This is an insightful assessment of the strengths and limitations of countering violent extremism (CVE) programs around the world. In the book's foreword, the author points out that while governments' CVE programs "aim to discourage, disengage and dis-incentivize vulnerable young people on the verge of radical political views that could lead to violence…. without alleviating political inequality or issues arising from problematic (re)integration policy, which are important considerations in motivating would-be extremism of various kinds, the results are likely to remain limited" (p. viii). He is also correct in noting that "The problems of extremism and radicalization are local area in nature and, therefore, the solutions are local in nature too" (p. 174). The author is Associate Professor at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University in The Hague, Netherlands.

Table of Contents: About the Book; Part One: Terrorism and states; Definitional challenges; State terrorism; The counter-terror state; genocide and ethnic cleansing; Part Two: Disentangling violent extremism; individual factors in terrorism; The social science of extremism; Reciprocal radicalization; The UK 'Prevent' agenda; Part Three: Deradicalization; Leaving terrorism behind; Disordered deradicalization; driven to hate; Terror politics.

Mel Ayton, ***Protecting the Presidential Candidates: From JFK to Biden*** (Philadelphia, PA: Frontline Books/ An Imprint of Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2021), 376 pp, US $34.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-3990-1408.

An often-overlooked aspect of counterterrorism academic studies is the tactical challenge of protecting public figures from terrorist attacks. This book fills the gap with its fascinating and detailed account of how U.S. Presidents and, during presidential election cycles, presidential candidates, are protected by their various types of protective security details, such as the U.S. Secret Service. The book's coverage begins with John F. Kennedy's administration and ends with President Joe Biden's, including the violent takeover by far-right-wing supporters of former President Donald Trump of the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. The book is filled with numerous protective detail insights that are useful to counterterrorism studies, such as the various security roles by the U.S. Secret Service, which the author describes as "physical protection which includes guarding the home, coverage of the office and examination of vehicles and aeroplanes. Agents take control of the candidate's schedules, travel arrangements and checking out the venues where a candidate is due to speak. The venue is checked for bombs and possible evacuation routes are identified should an incident occur" (p. 10). The author adds that the Secret Service agents "work in three different perimeters: an inner perimeter, a middle perimeter and an outer perimeter" (p. 11). Also of interest is the author's profiling of assassins of presidents as unemployed men who underwent a "period of downward spiral in their lives," who had little emotional contact with women, were "loveless; almost all had some form of personality disorder," and were motivated to carry out their assassination plot against a public figure "to achieve notoriety or fame," as well as, in some cases, "to avenge a perceived wrong…" (p. 19). The author, a former college lecturer, is a veteran author of several books and television documentaries in the United Kingdom and the U.S. on subjects such as assassins of U.S. Presi-

dents. He lives in Durham, England.

Table of Contents: Preface; The Torture Trail; Camelot's Sentinels; Lyndon Johnson's Secret Servants; The Hubert H. Humphrey Assassination Plots; The Stalking of Robert Kennedy; Guarding Governor Reagan; Searchlist and Pathfinder; Beating Nixon; The Populist; Jimmy Who? The Last Brother; Jess Jackson's Perilous Campaigns; The Front-Runners, 1984-2004; Father and Son; The Comeback Kid; Evergreen; Obama's Challengers; Protecting Trump and Biden.

Anthony Celso, ***Al-Qaeda's Post-9/11 Devolution: The Failed Jihadist Struggle Against the Near and Far Enemy*** (New York: Bloomsbury Academic/An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015), 256 pp., US $ 144.00 [Hardcover], US $ 43.15 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1—5013-1244-1.

This is an important account of al-Qaida's decline since the 9/11 attacks focuses on the terrorist organization's increasing fragmentation, which the author attributes to the weakness and eventual unraveling of its partnerships with local and regional jihadi networks around the world. The result, the author argues, ultimately led to the failure of jihadist struggles in their areas of operation, including the inability of al Qaida and its affiliates to capitalize on the uprisings by the 2011 Arab Spring for their advantage. In the conclusion, the author writes, "Al-Qaeda has failed to defeat its enemies since its 1988 formation. The movement is ideologically exhausted, financially depleted, and internally fractured. International and domestic counterterror policies have killed many of its leaders and degraded the network's capabilities" (p. 198). The author is an Associate Professor with the Center for Security Studies at Angelo State University, U.S.

Table of Contents: Introduction: Al-Qaeda's Post 9-11 Devolution and its Diffuse Network of Associates, Affiliates, Insurgents and "Homegrown" Terrorists; Al-Qaeda's Jihadist World View; Al-Qaeda's Formation and its *Far Enemy* Strategy; Al-Qaeda's Post 9-11 Strategy and Organizational Devolution; Al-Qaeda's Role in the Madrid and London Bombings; Zarqawi: Al-Qaeda's Tragic Anti-Hero and the Destructive Role of the Iraqi Jihad; Al-Qaeda's Affiliated and Insurgent Groups in Somalia, Yemen and the Maghreb; West Africa: The Latest Jihadist War; The Role of Al-Qaeda Affiliated and Homegrown Terrorists in Post 9-11 Plots and Attacks against the United States; An End to Al-Qaeda? : Bin Laden's Death and the Impact of the Arab Spring.

Adrian Hänni, Thomas Riegler, and Przemyslaw Gasztold (Eds), ***Terrorism in the Cold War – Volume II: State Support in the West, Middle East and Latin America*** (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 280 pp., US $ 108.00 [Hardcover], US $ 35.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-7556-0027-4.

The contributors to this valuable edited volume utilize recently uncovered research materials to examine the nature of state-sponsorship of terrorist groups during the Cold War era, with a focus on how this support played out in the West, the Middle East, and Latin America. Regarding the possibilities for utilizing archival resources for future research, the editors observe that Central and Eastern European archival material offer "rich, newly gained knowledge, as well as the large potential for empirical, primary-source-based terrorism research" (p. 243). Adrian Hänni is a Lecturer for Political History at Distance Learning University Switzerland and a Lecturer in History at the University of Zurich. Thomas Riegler is an Affiliate Researcher at the Austrian Centre for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies at the University of Graz. He is also a member of the Editorial Board of "Perspectives on Terrorism."

Table of Contents: Introduction – State Support for Terrorist Actors in the Cold War: Myths and Reality (Part 2); Gladio – Myth and Reality: The Origins and Function of Stay Behind in the Case of Post-war Austria; The British State and Loyalist Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland; The Secret 1970 Moratorium Agreement between Switzerland and the PLO; The Road Not Taken: Crisis Management, Dialogues and Deal-Making with Palestinian Fedayeen Groups in the Context of the Jordanian Triple-Hijacking Incident of September 1970; The Lodo Moro: Italy and the Palestine Liberation Organization; Pact with the (Un)wanted? The Wischnewski Protocol as a Spotlight for Austro-German "Agreements" with Transnational Terrorists in the Late 1970s; Hezbollah as an Iranian Proxy in the Age of the Cold War; The Propaganda Campaign for the PFLP in Switzerland

1969-1970; The United States and Nicaragua: State Terrorism during the Late Cold War; Outlook – Writing the History of Modern International Terrorism: Where Are the Puzzles?

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

In this important and dramatically written case study, the author focuses on one of the potentially most lethal terrorist plots by al Qaida operatives to blow up passenger aircraft en route from England to North America that fortunately was foiled in Summer 2006 by British security authorities (with the assistance by American and Pakistani intelligence services). In the conclusion, the author insightfully notes that while "older" terrorist groups such as al Qaida had attempted mega terrorist attacks, such as 9/11, "relatively newer organizations like the Islamic State…generally avoids the megaconspiracy" with their operatives "acting out in their own countries with the weapons they can source on their own" (p. 292). The author is coauthor of *Find, Fix, Finish: Inside the Counterterrorism Campaigns that Killed Bin Laden and Devastated Al Qaeda*. He is a commentator on national security issues for CNN, Fox, MSNBC, and NPR, and has published in the *Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Politico*.

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.

Roger Warren, ***Terrorist Movements and the Recruitment of Arab Foreign Fighters: A History From 1980s Afghanistan to ISIS*** (New York, I.B. Tauris, 2019), 272 pp., US $ 108.00 [Hardcover], US $ 35.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-7556-3650-1.

This is a valuable comprehensive account of the factors contributing to the recruitment of Arab foreign fighters in Islamist terrorism, particularly in the form of the Islamist State, in Iraq and Syria. The author's research is noteworthy for his personal dataset of 3,010 Arab foreign fighters, which is based on their biographies, martyrdom eulogies, and postings on 'jihadi' websites. Contributing factors to their initial indoctrination and recruitment, the author points out, include the "influence of charismatic leadership or authority" (p. 158) and the susceptibility of the recruits to "the influence of operating under a rigid code of obedience to authority" (p. 159). Regarding implications for future research, the author notes that there are two different phases in the trajectory of the foreign fighters, with the first taking place in their country of residence and the second taking place following their arrival in the conflict zone (p. 161). Such empirically-based insights make this book an indispensable guide for understanding the processes that foreign fighters undergo when they join Islamist groups such as the Islamic State in their various areas of operations. The author is Assistant Professor at Simon Fraser University, where he focuses on Islamist-inspired radicalization, terrorism and political Islam. He was formerly a British Army commando trained officer (1980-2006).

Table of Contents: List of Figures; Is One Man's Foreign Fighter Another Man's Terrorist?; Afghan Arabs in the Afghan Jihad: The Incubation of Modern Terrorism; Iraq: The Unintended Cultivation of a New Generation of Terrorists; Arab Foreign Fighters and Islamist Terrorists in Syria; Analysis and Reflection; Implications and Conclusion.

Colin Wight, ***Rethinking Terrorism: Terrorism, Violence and the State*** (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing [previously published by Palgrave Macmillan], 2015), 272 pp., US $ 135.00 [Hardcover]; US $ 44.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-2305-7377-2.

This is an interesting and well-written theoretical study of terrorism as a form of violent political protest communication and the need to understand it through its relation to the state and how the state responds to the terrorist violence against it. In this reviewer's opinion, the author's definition of terrorism is overly restrictive as it applies only to attacks against noncombatant civilians. This is the case when he argues that the killing in London, England, on May 22, 2013, of Lee Rigby, a member of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, by two Muslim extremists, was not a terrorist incident, since "military targets are legitimate in waging war…," while terrorism is not a legitimate tactic because it targets civilians (pp. 227-229). The author is Professor of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney, Australia.

Table of Contents: Foreword by Michael Cox; Introduction; Owning Violence: A History of the Modern Nation State; The Modern State; Political Dissent; Political Violence: Situating Terrorism; State Terrorism; Terrorism: Justifications and Explanations; Terrorism: Types, Effects and Organization; Contemporary Terrorism and the War on Terror; Conclusion: Rethinking Terrorism.

About the Reviewer: **Dr. Joshua Sinai** *is the Book Reviews Editor of 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. He can be reached at:* Joshua.sinai@comcast.net.

Bibliography: The Conflict in Libya

Compiled and selected by David Teiner

Abstract

This bibliography contains books, edited volumes, journal articles, book chapters, theses, grey literature, and other resources on the ongoing conflict in Libya. Most of the included literature was published since Mu'ammar al-Qa-āfi's removal in 2011. Many of the publications included focus on the Libyan revolution, protest movements, the emergence of militias, the Islamic State in Libya, and the successes and failures of international interventions in the country's conflicts. Earlier publications analyzing political, social, economic, or religious developments, that help to understand the dynamics of the present conflict, are also included. The literature has been retrieved manually and should thus not be considered exhaustive.

Keywords: Libya; Qaddafi; Haftar; Islamic State; Militias; Arab Revolution; NATO Intervention

NB: All websites were last visited on 28.01.2022 – See also Note for the Reader at the end of this bibliography.

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Note for the Reader

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 stages which publishers employ to ensure quality control (peer review, copy and layout editing). 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 January and February 2022. They are categorized under thirteen 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 Studie
13. Also Worth to Read/Watch/Listen

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/PoT

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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 PI-OOM. 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.*

Conference Monitor/Calendar of Events (February 2022 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 February and April 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.

February 2022

Foundations of the Foreign Fighter Problem: Investigating Blindspots Relating to Gender, Minors, and Families
George Washington Program on Extremism (GWPOE), Online
2 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @gwupoe

Projekt "RIRA – Radikaler Islam versus radikaler Anti-Islam" aus dem RADIS-Forschungsverbund
RADIS, Online
4 February, *Germany*
Website: visit | Twitter: @RADIS_Forschung

Antisemitism on Left-Wing Social Media
Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), Online
7-11 February, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ISDGlobal

Homeland Security at 20: A Strategy for the Next Twenty Years
Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Cambridge, Mass.
8 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @BelferCenter

The State of Far-Right Extremism in America
American University School of Public Affairs (AUSPA), Online
8 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @AU_SPA

Ideology: Picking up the Pieces?
Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), online
9 February, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @C4ARR

Normalization to the Right: Analyzing the Micro-Politics of the Far Right
Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), Online
10 February, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CrexUiO

Book Talk: "The Islamic State in Africa"
Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, Online
10 February, *Belgium*
Website: visit | Twitter: @EgmontInstitute

Conflict and Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), Online
11 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @START_umd

Conflict and Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia
United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Online
11 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @USIP

The New DHS National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin: A Conversation with John Cohen
George Washington Program on Extremism (GWPOE), Online
15 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @gwupoe

The US and Today's Foreign Policy Challenges
Center on National Security, Online
15 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CNSFordhamLaw

Influence, Authoritarianism, and Cults
The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE), Online
15 February, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ICSVE

What the Taliban and QANON Have in Common
The Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society (TSAS), Online
16 February, *Canada*
Website: visit | Twitter: @TSASNetwork

Sahel: Vulnerable States and Violent Entrepreneurs
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Online
17 February, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @Nupinytt

Offline Versus Online Radicalisation: Which is the Bigger Threat?
The Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET), Online
21 February
Website: visit | Twitter: @GNET_research

UN in South Sudan: Risks and Opportunities in an Uncertain Peace Process
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Online
22 February, *Norway*
Website: visit | Twitter: @Nupinytt

Political Ideology Today
Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), Online
23 February
Website: visit | Twitter: @C4ARR

The Territories of European Jihadism with Dr. Hugo Micheron
Counter Extremism Project (CEP), Online
23 February, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @CEPinEurope

CTF Online Symposium No. 9: State Funding, Malign Influence and Terrorism Financing: Challenges for Europe
Project CRAAFT, Online
24 February, *Belgium*
Website: visit | Twitter: @ProjectCRAAFT

Tech Against Terrorism E-learning Webinar Series
GIFCT, Online
24 February
Website: visit | Twitter: @GIFCT_official

March 2022

Soldiers of End-Times: Assessing the Military Effectiveness of the Islamic State
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), Online
3 March, *United States*
Website: visit | Twitter: @START_umd

Populism and the Future of Ideology Studies
Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), Online
9 March, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @C4ARR

Donald Trump and the Psychopathology of the Libertarian Right
Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), Online
23 March, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @C4ARR

April & Beyond 2022

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

Ideology
Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), Online
18 May, *United Kingdom*
Website: visit | Twitter: @C4ARR

Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Online
23 – 25 May, *Sweden*
Website: visit | Twitter: @sipriorg

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

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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.*

Words of Appreciation

from Alex Schmid and James Forest

Perspectives on Terrorism is entirely the product of volunteers – academics, professionals and practitioners – who for fifteen consecutive years have been giving their time and providing their expertise to keep this scholarly online journal alive and increasing in circulation to more than 9,500 subscriptions today. Unlike a commercially published journal, we reach a global audience of readers - academic scholars, policy-makers, counter-terrorism professionals and members of civil society - at no cost to them. And unlike some other open-source journals, authors - both seasoned scholars and promising newcomers to the field - never have to pay any fees for having their articles reviewed, edited and distributed.

The true costs for this freedom for authors and readers rests, however, on the shoulders of many volunteers - selfless individuals dedicated to serve the scholarly community and willing to give their time, energy and insights to a fully Open Access journal that is truly independent and impartial.

While the main burden of producing six issues per year rests on the shoulders of the Editorial Team and those of the Editorial Board members who do most of the reviewing, there are many others who assist us in reviewing and refining Articles and Research Notes. We could not function without the selfless help of our esteemed external reviewers who anonymously read and critique the articles submitted to us. Once a year we wish to thank these reviewers publicly by listing here their names.

For reviewing articles submitted to Perspectives on Terrorism in 2021, we sincerely thank the individuals listed here:

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In addition to their work on the production of each issue, they were also crucial in making our Resources Section what it is – a unique and indispensable resource in the field of (Counter-)Terrorism Studies.

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Alex Schmid & James Forest
(Principal Editors Perspectives on Terrorism)

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 16th 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 more than 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 members of the Editorial Board and 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.